

# **Purposeful Psychonarratological Cognitive Dissonance: Starship Troopers, novel vs film**

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## **Abstract**

This paper is part of a series of papers dealing with the concept of cognitive dissonance in Robert A. Heinlein's novel *Starship Troopers* (1959). Envisaged from the perspective of cognitive dissonance within narratology and reception, this work aims at understanding the scope of narrative dissonance in the deliberate act of text to film transformation. Heinlein's narrative was and continues to be a controversial account of the militarization of youth for the sake of protecting the Western democracies from alien invasion. In 1997, Paul Verhoeven (director) and Ed Neumeier (screenwriter) released their adaptation of the book. The result was another controversy: Verhoeven and co were accused of either ridiculing the patriotic values of the US army, or unapologetically promoting fascistic themes and iconography.

In the delicate exercise of film adaptation, the question of editorial choices (amplification, or downsizing, for instance) depend on subjective, esthetic and ideological standpoints. The case of *Starship Troopers* presents the double problematic of an ambiguous novel disambiguated by controversial authorial reception and rendition. Hence, this paper will question the adaptation process and the management of conflictive ideas between the original material and the film version. Subsequently, the findings will highlight the narratological artifacts, the semiotics of the film, and the underlying ideological discourse.

**Keywords:** Starship Troopers; Robert A. Heinlein; Paul Verhoeven; cognitive dissonance; film adaptation.

## **Introduction**

The advent of psychonarratology marked the evolution of readers' response and literary reception theories from post-structuralism to cognitive approaches. The study of recipients' perception of the narremes is a recurrent approach which coincided with the emergence of the Cognitive Dissonance Theory. The latter has deciphered the incidences of the oppositions between perceptions, beliefs, and judgments and is being gradually implemented as both heuristic and empirical approaches to the prospective studies of narratological reception/response.

In this respect, I intend to analyze narrative reception and rendition in the particular case of *Starship Troopers* (1959) written by the American SF writer Robert A. Heinlein and its film adaptation by Paul Verhoeven (1997). The choice of Heinlein's novel is motivated by the inconsistency of the writer's literary discourse which oscillates from authoritarianism to libertarianism which – correspondingly – addresses the issue of cognitive dissonance.

In this contribution, I will focus on the study of eponym film adaptation which comprises an ascertained cognitive dissonance in the process of reception and

rendition. In so doing, I will demonstrate that the filmmakers were aware of their cognitive bias, and that they have chosen psychonarratological devices to deflect their rendition from the original statement – by reworking the semiotics and discourse of the book.

## **1. Theoretical Framework**

### **1.1 Cognitive dissonance: a conceptual definition**

Coined by Leon Festinger in 1957, Cognitive Dissonance Theory is grounded on the study of the set of conflicts and paradoxes that coexist within individuals - notably at the level of the decision-making process. In other terms, cognitive dissonance occurs when there is a tension between beliefs and actions. For Festinger, this psychological condition creates an irrational behavior which is predicated on judgmental bias, corrupted decisions, and post-decision regrets:

It has frequently been implied, and sometimes even pointed out, that the individual strives toward consistency within himself. His opinions and attitudes, for example, tend to exist in clusters that are internally consistent. Certainly one may find exceptions. A person may think Negroes are just as good as whites but would not want any living in his neighborhood; or someone may think little children should be quiet and unobtrusive and yet may be quite proud when his child aggressively captures the attention of his adult guests. When such inconsistencies are found to exist, they may be quite dramatic, but they capture our interest primarily because they stand out in sharp contrast against a background of consistency (...) Study after study reports such consistency among one person's political attitudes, social attitudes, and many others. (1957:1)

For Festinger, this theory studies the cognitive mechanisms through which individuals bargain their inconstancies in the making of a decision or judgment. CDT has witnessed multiple theoretical and practical expansions. It is implemented in cognitive psychology, sociology, business studies, theatre, and cognitive literary reception. The works of Allan C Purves (*Literature and the Reader*, 1972), Richard Beach (*A Teacher's Introduction to Reader-Response Theories*, 1993), Wolfgang Iser (*The Range of Interpretation*, 2000)), and Dixon and Bortolussi (*Psychonarratology: Foundations for the Empirical Study of Literary Response*, 2003) have set fundamental approaches to the study of contrast, comparison, and inconsistencies both at the level of narration and reception/response. One observable declination of Cognitive Dissonance is in novel-to-film adaptation - where the screenwriter endeavors to reshape the meanings according to his appraisal and his intentions during the rendition.

## 1.2 Intertextuality and Film Reading

In cinematic writing, the complexity of adaptation is conditioned by the intention of screenplay writers. The extent of appraisal and reinterpretation is part of Intertextual standpoints. Intertextuality is the formation of meanings by linking a text to other texts. Notions of similarity can occur deliberately, or unintentionally. An author may have absorbed thematic or structural motifs. He can reproduce these schemes, which take full meaning, when they interact with the readers. The term “Intertextuality” has been created by Julia Kristeva to describe the text as a lieu of exchange between various readings: a crossroad of semantic and semiotic chemistry. This perspective has driven scholars to consider connections between materials that have nothing in common, apparently. Intertextuality had also opened the doors of interdisciplinarity and genre intersection. One of the most experimental manifestations of Intertextuality is literary adaption into cinematic versions. The reason is cinema’s need for original material; something that average screenwriters can translate and interpret.

Cognitive dissonance is systematically present in the intertextual adaptation processes. Factually, the narrative priorities in adaptation change, fluctuate, and intersect - out of the eight below-listed usual techniques:

**Variation:** exploring an alternative turn of events.

**Focalization:** a focus on one particular aspect.

**Hyperbolism:** the exaggeration of one specific trait in the novel.

**Allusion:** a distanced, but multi-referenced plot.

**Distortion:** maintaining the framework but changing the events.

**Fragmentation:** breaking the chronological order of narration.

**Perverting:** a biased alteration of significance of the novel.

**Idealization:** aestheticisation of the original text.

### Figure 1: Adaptation Perspectives

The idea of textual alteration is echoed in the cognitive reception theories. Culler (1989 for instance, alludes to the fact that reception (like criticism) stimulates all sorts of fallacies: “deformation, depersonalization, obscurity, dehumanization, incongruency, dissonance, and empty ideality are a few of his negative categories; nor are these simply the imposition of a critic finally unsympathetic to modern literature<sup>18</sup>” (189). Following this view, an assumption is made on the fact that paradoxes and inconsistencies are liable to accentuate cognitive dissonance within the reception-response process.

The encounter of Paul Verhoeven and Ed Neumeier with Robert A. Heinlein’s narrative offers an in-situ expression of cognitive dissonance: the collision of

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<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Culler. *On The Negativity of Modern Poetry: Friedrich, Baudelaire, and the Critical Tradition*. In Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser (Editors) *Languages of the Unsayable: The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory*, 1989.

creative instincts with an ideologically suspicious material. Evidence of the existence of cognitive dissonance in the adaptation process is found in the shift from the first narrative to the second narrative. These biases affect narratological rendition, semiotic design, and initial discourse modification.

## 2. Paul Verhoeven's *Starship Troopers*: a Purposeful Act of Dissonance

Hollywood is generally perceived as a very conservative institution, in which, only politically correct thought is accepted. This ascertainment stands, also, for Science Fiction blockbusters. The regular representation of SF is Manichaeism where the World is represented by brave, white, straight, Protestant, male Americans, going to war against hostile Aliens – aiming at dominating the human race. Rare were the filmmakers who could dare defy the industry and propose another postulate. However, Paul Verhoeven, the Dutch director, has circumstantially perverted the SF genre, and injected an awaited dose of subversion in the US flat and politically correct cinema: *Robocop* (1987) and *Total Recall* (1990) entailed a virulent criticism of the society of consumerism and corporatism. Nevertheless, his most engrossing work remains his controversial adaptation of the equally controversial novel of Robert A. Heinlein: *Starship Troopers*.

Kaye and Hunter<sup>19</sup> (1999) recount some of Paul Verhoeven's statement of intent in the making of this film:

As Paul Verhoeven, the director of *Starship Troopers*, noted: 'The US is desperate for a new enemy ... The communists were the enemy, and the Nazis before them, but now that onerful enemy everyone can fight has been lost. Alien sci-fi gives us a terrifying enemy that's politically correct. They're bad. They're evil. And they're not even human.' Nowadays only white Englishmen – or Arabs, as in *True Lies* (James Cameron, 1995) – can be safely demonised in action movies. But on closer inspection 1990s sci-fi films, with the Alien Identities ambiguous exceptions of *Starship Troopers* and *Mars Attacks*. (1999: 02)

The notion of otherness is another complex ethical problem. In their portrayal of the enemy, the Americans tend to dehumanize the other: aliens, freaks, humanoids or insects are the most commonly used narrative artifacts. The glorification of the supremacy of one species over others is subsidiary judgmental conflict.

Ed Neumeier and Paul Verhoeven declared overtly their aversion to the ideological overtone of Heinlein's novel; they declared that they were "fighting against the book<sup>20</sup>". The disturbing militaristic themes, the essentialist view of otherness and the dehumanization of the enemy are some of the conflictive ideas of the original fiction.

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<sup>19</sup> Heidi Kaye and I.Q. Hunter. *Introduction* - In Deborah Cartmell, I.Q. Hunter, Heidi Kaye and Imelda Whelehan (Editors). *Alien Identities. Exploring Difference in Film and Fiction*, 1999.

<sup>20</sup> See: Paul Verhoeven's Statements on Robert Heinlein's novel (01'-04'). Lincoln Center Film Society Retrospective. 'Starship Troopers' Q & A Paul Verhoeven & Casper Van Dien. Film Society of Lincoln Center. Posted on March, 7, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0QotxGy4CKk>

The film was produced in a period where the studio (Sony Pictures) was in confusion, and no decision-maker has really known what it contains. Upon its release, the movie unleashed a controversy, and has shaken the US and European critics. The Washington Post<sup>21</sup>, The New York Times<sup>22</sup> and the French journal Libération<sup>23</sup> accused Paul Verhoeven of propagating Fascism and Nazism. However, after 09/11, the movie's resonance changed<sup>24</sup>. The film became a prophetic demonstration of American imperialism and an anticipation of the 'War on Terror'.

## 2.1 The Screenplay: psychonarratological dissonance

The first act of cognitive dissonance is found in the script. It consists in deflecting the original statement of Heinlein from a coming of age story into a propagandist firebrand. The screenplay was written by Edward Neumeier, author of the two other segments of the SF trilogy of Paul Verhoeven: *Robocop* (1987) and *Total Recall* (1990). There is a significant divergence between the original book and the film. In the adapted version, little or no reference is made to Heinlein's mechanized Mobile Infantry; Troopers wore a gray eagle-pinned uniform, which makes a strong reference to the SS uniform. Some dialogues are excerpted from the book, or were variation of it. While much of the dialogue and many of the themes are from Heinlein's story, they were simply drafted according to Verhoeven's view. Additionally, the majority of the characters have been significantly altered. The literal adaptation of *Starship Troopers* would have made the film redundant and slow. The adaptation process used variation, perverting and distortion to enhance the film canons. The result is a hyperbolic-brilliantly structured screenplay where the magnificence of the text lies in its ambiguity. The first reading level proposes a heroic story that would appear as naïve and superficial. Knowing who are the filmmakers, and their antecedents, one cannot ignore the irony and sarcasm emanating from the text. Yet, the textual standpoint takes ambiguity too far and provokes skepticism on anti-fascism claims.

Reserves put apart, the screen is faithful to the book in terms of narrative construction. The novel was written in respect to the chronological account. It alternates low-action moments with spectacular battles' scenes. Edward Neumeier reshaped the dialogue into a fragmented narration: the present timeline tells the rites of passage of the young soldiers, their mission and their success. Alternatively, the flashbacks and the flash forwards amplify the plot with pertinent details: the propaganda of the Earth Federation and their incendiary TV network; previews of the judiciary system (capital punishment condemnations are accelerated and broadcasted); scientific debates (on the

<sup>21</sup> See: Stephen Hunter. *Goosestepping at the Movies*. The Washington Post, November 11, 1997. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1997/11/11/goosestepping-at-the-movies/83272787-18ae-4126-b8c4-3d46b1b31277/?noredirect=on>

<sup>22</sup> See: Janet Maslin. *Film Review; No Bugs Too Large For This Swat Team*. The New York Times Nov. 7, 1997. <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/11/07/movies/film-review-no-bugs-too-large-for-this-swat-team.html>

<sup>23</sup> See: Didier Péron. *Critique Starship Troopers*. Libération, 21 janvier 1998. [http://next.liberation.fr/culture/1998/01/21/avec-starship-troopers-paul-verhoeven-livre-une-science-fiction-violente-a-l-ideologie-desinvolve-st\\_225522](http://next.liberation.fr/culture/1998/01/21/avec-starship-troopers-paul-verhoeven-livre-une-science-fiction-violente-a-l-ideologie-desinvolve-st_225522)

<sup>24</sup> The reappraisal of the film is found in Calum Marsh's *Starship Troopers: One of the Most Misunderstood Movies Ever*. The Atlantic. Nov. 7, 2013 <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/11/-em-starship-troopers-em-one-of-the-most-misunderstood-movies-ever/281236/>

difference between human beings and bugs); the educational system (the ideological extremism of teachers), and the importance of federal service in earning full citizenship.

Another characteristic of the script is its sadistic conceptions of characters. They are lightweight, unself conscious and utterly shallow. Their Manichean vision of the world is typically a compilation of American clichés. They devote their existence to the federal and world service. The latter is an obligation to access the coveted status of citizen: Full citizenship cannot be achieved, unless one completes federal service. He or she, thus, could marry, raise a family, enter politics, and vote.

Large parts of the narrative refer to the college years of the characters. The school is not only a location in which they receive instruction. School is an annex of the federation recruitment staff. Two teachers, one of biology and one of history, incorporate their political thought in their class. They administer a politically-oriented knowledge- emphasizing the failures of democracy and the inferiority of libertarians. Ironically, the filmmakers emphasize the fact that Rico's parents belong to a libertarian trend of thought. As genuine examples of the Hippies' and Yuppies' intellectual evolution, they do not adhere to the go-to-war theory. They endeavor, in vain, to bring their son back to reason. Rico, as the rest of his mates, is more inclined to pay greater attention to the teachers' advice than to his parents'.

In fact, as we compare the original source to the film, we find out that one of the major narrative shifts is its focus on the viewer' position within the millennial audiovisual culture. The film foregrounds its own reality and explores the ways in which that culture conditions our sense of reality. The film *Starship Troopers* certainly is analogous to a comic-book exaggeration of reality. Obviously, Verhoeven's adaptation of the novel undeniably shows many traces of the juvenile tale's influence. For all of its changes, the film still follows the Heinlein pattern of youth education but with a sustained sense of irony and sarcasm. The so-called education is conditioned by the immersion of the characters in a constant flux of media propaganda and the exacerbation of their patriotism.

## **2.2 Changing the Semiotics of *Starship Troopers*: Propaganda and Media**

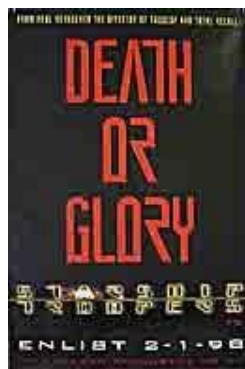
The second act of cognitive dissonance consists in the hyperbolization of right wing ideas to fascistic ones. Paul Verhoeven's movie is conceived as a propaganda film. Others see in this picture an anti-fascistic film using fascist tools at the top of which appears propaganda. Propaganda is often known as an institutionalized process, media phenomenon, or communication policy. Ideologically, propaganda is predicated on the dissemination of information (facts, arguments, rumors, half-truths, or lies) to alter and change public opinion. Propaganda is the more or less systematic effort to manipulate other people's beliefs, attitudes, or actions by means of symbols (words, gestures, banners, monuments, music, clothing, insignia, hairstyles, designs on coins and postage stamps, and so forth). In the script, propaganda is regularly inserted, in the form of media flashes from the federal network (a sort of TV and Internet – integrated news channel): a blend of CNN, Fox News and Sky News. The network is the color-bearer of the federation's combats. The Federal Network works on the basis of the Nazi propaganda schemes, and appeals to the feelings of xenophobia and conservation

instinct. The same techniques cause cognitive fallacies: appeal to authority, appeal to fear, appeal to prejudice...etc.

The media means are, also, close to the Soviet techniques of propagandist tools. They obliterate the critical thinking of the masses, and uses science and scientists to legitimate military actions. War is always presented as the sole solution. Never are diplomacy and negotiation thought of as a civilized option. Furthermore, the Network is instrumented to tame all forms of rebellion and marginalize the society's renegades. Capital punishment and body punishment are broadcasted almost in a theatrical staging.

A look at some propaganda posters - contrasted with the film's symbolism - is likely to reveal Paul Verhoeven's will to use the fascist and Nazi semiotics to denounce all forms of imperialism, and more precisely the American Imperialism the only one that prevails. He uses disinformation theory, knowing that the concept of reality is relative. Through the camera, any rendition of truth is systematically deformed, like a mirror; the reflection of an image is never a hundred percent faithful. *Starship Troopers* was genially marketed as a comic space-opera, but in a propagandist mode.

This would mean that in any propaganda project, truths must be constructed according to people's expectations and aspirations. Exploiting such basic feelings - as love, fear, denial, and xenophobia, in order to federate people around one common objective, and dismiss sensibility by magnifying intuitiveness. The starting point is the following: masses need sensational imagery and linear discourses to adhere to a project. The core of a project is subject to modification, as long as it continues to serve the political or philosophical project. As long as truths are relative, one can mold his own truth of the time, creates the Big Lie, attain his objectives. If he succeeds, his position would provide him immunity from attacks if he fails, he would have two options: repentance or fading. Below are exploitative posters using the basic historical instances of propaganda semiology?



**Picture 1: Film Poster<sup>25</sup>**

A flashy red slogan, written on a sober worrying-background; this poster suggests apocalyptic events and a call for the people to choose their option. The police

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<sup>25</sup> Source Ebay: <https://www.ebay.com/itm/MOVIE-POSTER-Starship-Troopers-1998-Death-or-Glory-Army-Propaganda-20x30-NOS-/273055714358>

chosen is inspired oriental graphs (Hebrew and Arabic), and the release date is suggested as an ultimatum. There are great religious connotations in this image.



**Pictures 2<sup>26</sup> & 3<sup>27</sup> : Film Posters**

The first image acts on the affect of the viewer; a valiant soldier is shown; a trooper prospecting vigilantly his surroundings. In the rear shot, the sky is literally torn by one bug's sharp leg. It is suggested that the soldier would be surprised by a disloyal enemy: one that does not attack face to face.

Science fiction has always shown the media (the fourth power), especially image-based media as a brainwashing tool capable of inculcating the most extreme ideologies to the masses. Paul Verhoeven's picture analyses the intertwinement of media and ideology; the ways media are used to create or sustain political and philosophical ideas.

### **2.3 Narrative Determinism: Reshaping the ideology of Starship Troopers.**

The third form of cognitive dissonance is the deliberate transformation of the original discourse. The script highlights the fact that the Federation inculcates right wing ideas. The nation's future is integrated in a deterministic conception; a thought in which chance has no role. Another form of determinism appears in the screenplay. This form maybe called weak determinism. Its definition can be observed in the systematic opposition between scientists and teachers. The Federation in *Starship Troopers*, unlike other dictatorships, allows a little inaudible political opposition. When democratic voices plead for man as part of an environment, emerges the idea of accepting obscure and omnipotent forces. Advocators of weak determinism persist in thinking that man is naturally endowed with adaptability and adjustment tools to enable him survive in hostile environments. Thus, the act of war loses the compulsory justification, and is transformed into a form of self- preservation. This does not imply banishing war, but rather delaying its happening; a sort of last resort.

Unlike Heinlein, Verhoeven allowed a timid opposition in the political spheres. He created a ridiculous masquerade, in which political antagonism is left to scientist and

<sup>26</sup>Source IMDB. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120201/mediaviewer/rm1940561664>

<sup>27</sup> Source IMDB. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120201/mediaviewer/rm27761920>



marginal intellectuals. Hence, the Federation sweeps all attacks of despotism, and maintains a façade of democracy. Indeed, the opposition representatives act as simple puppets, as their intervention does not alter the global lead of political decisions. When they try to valorize man as an intelligent creature, capable of solving problems pacifically (like Carmen's dialogue with the Teacher), they are systematically ridiculed. Besides, when they attempt to express their admiration of the Arachnids, as one intelligent ego-deprived species, they are morally convicted of betrayal.

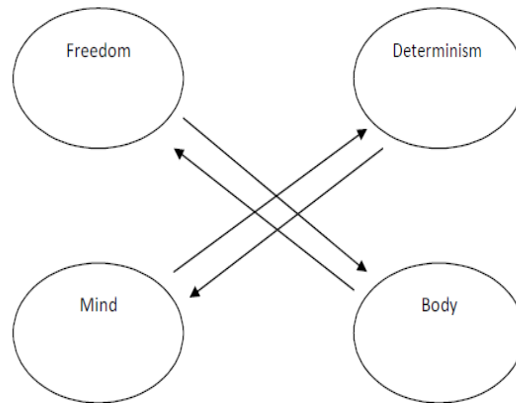
In fact, the question of freedom is presented as a civilian choice. The prevailing positions in *Starship Troopers* affirm so. Citizens are forced to take responsibility of their choices. Even if choices are restricted and limited; choosing to accept, or not, to go to war against the Arachnids; worshipping the cult of guns, arms, capital punishment, youth militarization, the civil service, as the only way to obtain procreation license...etc. Populations persuaded to support the Federation leaders. The persuasion is made through the media (propaganda). The latter exalts and manipulates their opinions. Note should be made that the act of war is not the choice of citizens, but the Federation's.

In *Starship Troopers*, the act of war is a behaviorist reflex which arises whenever Earth is attacked. Gradually, the federation moves from a defense mode to a preventive war mode. By anticipating the Bugs' attacks, the Federation has consciously adopted an imperialistic position which blurred the intentions into full confusion. In the adapted version, the authorities use propaganda to substitute their choices for national imperatives. People are told that they live under democracy, but this idealism is predicated upon the unspeakable. The repetitive affirmations on democracy end up convincing those who say it, more than those who hear it.

When one chooses not to subsume himself to the dominant the media discourse, he receives a moral reprobation and gets symbolically excommunicated. This consists in the society's infliction of a moral guilt: not supporting the Troopers would be seen as a failure to fulfill the ethical duty of approving war. Assuredly, people are invited to stem their personal positions, and empower the Troopers with moral, affective, and patriotic support, regardless of "human rights" (rules that could be applied to the enemy: unfair weaponry, the infliction of torture, and genocides). In all cases, it is the positioning of the state's interests above all other considerations. Some analogies may be derived from the above and the US administration's management of the "War against Terror": the wars of Iraq and Afghanistan. These cases are actual demonstrations of the situation of the US foreign policy described in *Starship Troopers* (The Film). What we have in here is a real democracy drifting towards anti-democratic practices.

In the movie, determinism is embodied within the notion of militarism and war. Philosophically, justifying war is mainly speaking about of controlling one's destiny. Traditionally, determinism has been given various, usually imprecise definitions. Determinism is rarely confused with fatalism, the latter being an irrational belief in man's impotency to change extraneous events – guided by untamable forces. These forces take different forms, according to cultures; gods, omens, spells, witchcrafts, volcanoes...etc. Determinism, on the other side, is ruled by awareness and consciousness into life-oriented acts, aiming at excluding chance and fatalism from the equation of life, struggle and death. Following this logic, *Starship Troopers*

emphasizes the role of determinism in the realization of freedom; arguing that freedom is fully compatible with physical determinism. Verhoeven went so far as to argue that determinism is a necessary condition for freedom - or at least, an interaction between freedoms, determinism, body and mind (see figure 1).



**Figure 2: Determinism in *Starship Troopers***

War is part of the deterministic view. It envisages freedom as a lost propriety it tries to recover, grant, or retrieve. Shades exist between two levels of determinism. Strong determinism denies man's capacity to control his life, and generally his whole destiny. It considers the act of war as one minor option to grasp areas of control in tumbling décor (life). The act of war is predicated on theoretical certitudes of freedom and determinism; a hybrid philosophical nebula, stipulating that citizens have to fulfill the unconditional readiness to fight all anti-human enemies. In Nazi thought, that meant fighting the inferior races. In *Starship Troopers*, the war opposes the superior race (humans) to hideous polymorphic insects (bugs). In both the novel and film, this is justified by the need of race preservation, and instinctive survival. In Verhoeven's (Darwinist) thought, war would be a natural process by which men preserve their race, and ensure the continuity of the species. *Starship Troopers* defends war as the unique means to conserve the human genre, and an occasion to prove the superiority of man over other species. The indexes of the Nazi theses on the Aryan myth of racial superiority are traceable here.

### **3. Discourse: the Alternative Appraisal**

The novel is characterized by an anti-Marxist ideology. In opposition, the film denatured the original intention. The world order in Verhoeven's version maintains the myths and connoted values of the culture only by responding to their use in communication. In other terms, history's mistakes teach mankind what should not be repeated. Though the early discourse in the film acknowledges the supremacy of the Bugs over mankind (the aliens are granted with qualities of abnegation and common sense; more than mankind's depiction), there is an underlying discourse of dehumanization of the enemy that is specific to the fascist doctrine.

The script speaks to the average American who can affirm his membership to the Western Culture. To point one of his numerous identification clues, he could put forward his understanding of science myths in a secular way: the progressive beliefs on women positions, same sex marriage, and euthanasia; and this connotation of high positive values. This view of ideology is an active political force in society rather than a doxa. For a while, ideology can be a way of making sense, the sense it makes always has a social and political dimension. Hence, ideology, in this view, is a social practice.

According to Terry Eagleton (*Ideology: An Introduction*. 1991), Marx and Engels' ideology of the bourgeoisie kept the workers, or proletariat, in a state of false consciousness; people consciousness of who they are, of how they relate to the rest of the society, and therefore of the sense they make of their social experience is produced by society, not by nature or biology (P 89). Furthermore, the scholar criticizes the condition of a society which constructs a false consciousness (predicated on the illusion of change) that blurs the boundaries between the real and the unreal:

If consciousness is grasped in this way as a transformative force at one with the reality it seeks to change, then there would seem to be no 'space' between it and that reality in which false consciousness might germinate. Ideas cannot be 'untrue' to their object if they are actually part of it (1991: 93).

The script exploits the ideological manipulation that is instated by the Federation. The characters' consciousness is determined by the society they were born into; not by their nature or individual psychologies. In *Starship Troopers*, we can trace an example of this theory in practice: members of the Federation's subordinated classes, whether black or white, who made sense of their lives by the 'ideas of the ruling classes' (that is by white, middle class myths with sporadic participation of visible minorities (Hispanic, Indian and Asian) would have a 'false consciousness' not only the war happenings depicted by the media, but also of themselves and their social relations. These 'ruling-class ideas' propose that the meaning of the militarism is to be found in the nature of Bugs they are 'naturally' aggressive, disorderly, and unlawful - and that the Terran Federation Armies are the impartial agents of a law that is objective and equally fair to all classes in society. Their consciousness is thus 'bourgeois, and their propaganda films 'produce' its viewers as bourgeois subjects who accept their relationship to the socio-economic system as fair and natural.

It goes without saying that this is a false consciousness because it denies the 'true' meaning that such conflict is caused by social relationships, not by the nature of Bugs: their bitterness is caused by their position in a universe that consistently disadvantages them and privileges humans. This consciousness cannot see the Troopers as they 'really' are – the agents of a law designed to preserve the interests of those with property and power and thus to maintain the status quo against any force of social change. The concept of ideology as false consciousness was important in Marx's theory because it appeared to explain why it was that the majority in capitalist societies accepted a social system that disadvantaged them.

#### 4. Psychonarratological Transformations

The passage from novel to film enabled the filmmakers to negotiate their cognitive dissonance by operating at three different levels of narratological rendition: the intent statement, the semiology, and the discourse. The expressed discomfort with the original material permitted its re-appropriation and deviation (see table below):

	<b>First Narrative (Novel)</b>	<b>Second Narrative (Film)</b>
<b>Statement</b>	Bildungs Novel	Propaganda Film
<b>Semiology</b>	Military Fetishism	Agitprop Art
<b>Discourse</b>	Anti-Marxist	Marxist

**Table 1: Psychonarratological Shifts**

The filmmakers kept the literality of the initial statement (a narrative about the recruitment and training of a young soldier) and transformed it into a propaganda film. The nexus between the statement and the rendered semiology goes straightforward to the logic of the propaganda film: the use of agitprop art<sup>28</sup> is obverted to denounce the fascistic tendencies of the US society. The last expression of cognitive dissonance consists in changing the political discourse of the novel from Marxist to anti-Marxist. Heinlein's novel is positioned against leftist ideas and 'Communist threats'. On the other hand, the script antagonized the original belief and proposed an antithetical view: amplifying Marxist determinism on the governance of the proletariat and their preservation in a state of false-consciousness.

The filmmakers' displeasure, with the source material, stimulated a relentless cognitive dissonance that they tried to reduce by hyperbolizing the scope of the initial narrative and incorporating doubt, satire, and manipulation. The statement of Heinlein's novel was deflected by the replacement of military fetishism with fascistic iconography. Moreover, the second order of signification mirrored reshaped the story as an anti-war pamphlet through the sarcastic depiction of patriotism and jingoism. The heroes in the film are young, beautiful, and white. They fit the canons of eugenics' principles and refer to an idealized form of the 'Superman'. The thinness of the line between irony and sincerity is so insignificant that it may induce the viewer into confusion about the sincerity of anti-war claims. Verhoeven and Neumeier intend to moralize the audiences / film readers without over-outlining the tragic outcomes. What resulted is a deviated perception of Heinlein's narrative and a re-focalization on other possible constructions

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<sup>28</sup> A trend in art that is oriented towards political and ideological propaganda. It prevailed in the communication techniques of the Soviets and the Nazis. See : Ingo Grabowsky's *Agitprop in der Sowjetunion*, 2004.

of meaning. The new propositions tend to create more confusion on the filmmakers' intents. The movie's overutilization of violence and military propaganda alienates the characters and the viewers in a global carnage under the banner of liberty and patriotism: the film protagonists serve as a cannon fodder that substantiates their abnegation and devotion to a cause they scarcely understand.

Another significant act concerns the suppression of complicity that filmmakers install with their viewers. In fact, Verhoeven seems to have ventilated the 'ridicule' as a personal defense-mechanism to confront his audience to their inconsistencies. The movie addresses the issue of heroism but does not allow any identification possibility. While Heinlein's novel appealed to the political unconscious of the 1950s American youth, Verhoeven's film rescinded the myth and reconstructed the narrative in an antagonizing optics: the movie subtly invites to a reconsideration of patriotism and militarism.

## **Conclusion**

In film adaptation, *Starship Troopers* constitutes a rare example of an assumed and purposeful case of cognitive dissonance. The moral and ideological conflicts arisen by the novel have led the filmmakers to settle for psychonarratological artifacts to thwart Heinlein's statements. The novel was a contextual response to the US' lenient foreign policy towards the Reds. The juvenile tale of a young soldiers' rite of passage was enhanced by a heavy ideological discourse on the role of wars in the settlement of peace and the importance of the militarization of youth.

In the theories of cognitive reception and responses, readers are expected to reduce their cognitive dissonance via a complex system of appraisal, questioning, bargaining, and judgments. Verhoeven et al have opted for hyperbolization and distortion to pervert the first narrative and propose their own artwork. The movie exploited the themes of militarism and otherness in an antagonistic way: the fascistic drifts in current US culture, the relationship with otherness, and the role of media in shaping false consciousnesses. The authors reworked the script to challenge the novel's discourse and semiology.

In their narratological rendition of the original text, Verhoeven and Neumeier have managed their salient cognitive dissonance with a hyperbolic approach made of ideological extrapolations that are inspired from the socio-historical context of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Paul Verhoeven's *Starship Troopers* remains a controversial oeuvre not only because of its original approach to SF, but furthermore, for the study of cognitive dissonance in psychonarratological processes (literary reception and response). Although misunderstood, the film increasingly earned a flattering reputation, after 09/11th events. What was taken then as a fascist film, is, now, seen as a prophetic rendition of the American policy of Imperialism. The film seems to blame not only the US institutions, but further the American citizens and their excessive patriotism.

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