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The Intergalactic Final Solution: Nazism and Genocide in Paul Verhoeven's *Starship Troopers*

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The 1997 release of Paul Verhoeven's *Starship Troopers* generated controversy for its obvious Nazi imagery and ironic endorsement of a fascist future. Based on Robert Heinlein's equally controversial novel in which a militarized Earth is engaged in a war of annihilation against a race of insects, Verhoeven's film portrays a society that embraces the logic of extermination and uses Nazi language and signifiers to express eliminationist rhetoric at every turn. Schools, the media, and the future military consistently invoke Nazi terminology and allusions to frame the conflict against the "Arachnids." From the blatant mimicry of *Triumph of the Will* to the twisted use of Frank Capra's *Why We Fight* series, Verhoeven cleverly mixes Nazi imagery with the patriotic fervor promoted in American propaganda films from the Second World War. Verhoeven attempts to seduce the audience into accepting and even cheering for genocide on a galactic scale. The irony of this approach was lost on most of the audience and reviewers.

What could be more like paradise on earth than to live in a community without enemies? To create a world with no more need for borders. A world safe from the deadly contaminations and temptations of the other tribe? What could be more beautiful than to live in a community with people who resemble each other in every particular? What could be more seductive than to kill in order to put an end to all killing? This utopia is so alluring that it is a wonder the human race has been able to survive at all.

Michael Ignatieff

Michael Ignatieff, a Canadian scholar, activist, and politician, articulates the appeal of utopia in the modern age and correctly notes that any quest for utopia is as much a destructive act as it is a creative one. Utopias are defined by what they exclude, and genocide is the ultimate expression of utopian desire. Science Fiction is a natural site to explore the moral and even historical

implications of utopian thought.¹ Robert Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* (1959) depicts a utopian society engaged in an epic struggle against a race of insects for galactic domination. The book remains controversial because it seemingly endorses a militarized and authoritarian state in lieu of a traditional democracy. Heinlein implies that a society faced with an existential threat is better served by efficient militarism than a messy democracy.

Paul Verhoeven's 1997 film adaptation of the novel is controversial for portraying Heinlein's society as a futuristic Nazi utopia. Verhoeven's Terran Federation is attractive, efficient, hyper-militaristic, and rife with Nazi signs and signifiers. Verhoeven's interpretation of the future is satirical, allowing him to mock the forces of militarism and globalization at the end of the twentieth century. However, Verhoeven's choice of a Nazi aesthetic is instructive for understanding his critique of Western Civilization. The Federation is a world government mobilized for racial war, driven by a quest for *Lebensraum*, and ultimately invested in genocide. Verhoeven implies that these impulses resonate in our own society. The fact that Verhoeven populates his utopia with attractive young people enjoying the benefits of a rationalized society is deliberately subversive and not an endorsement of Heinlein's essential message.

The film *Starship Troopers* follows the lives of a handful of high school graduates who join the military shortly before a full-scale war breaks out between humans and the Arachnids, the insect race competing with humans for planets and resources. The protagonist, Johnny Rico, comes from a prosperous family that expects him to attend Harvard, but he decides to join the Mobile Infantry to win the love of Carmen, an aspiring pilot with career ambitions. The first half of the film revolves around a love triangle between Rico, Carmen, and another female classmate, Dizzy. This melodrama is interrupted by an Arachnid meteor attack on the characters' home town of Buenos Aires. The attack transforms Johnny from a spoiled and lovesick child into a vengeful warrior forced onto the front lines of a war of annihilation against the Arachnids. The second half of the film concerns the humans' failed offensive against the Arachnid planets and the subsequent plan to capture a so-called "brain bug" that holds the key to victory. Rico and his classmates play vital roles in this initial phase of the war, and like the World War II dramas familiar to American audiences, the film concludes optimistically as the young heroes assume new and important positions in the ongoing struggle.

¹Joan Gordon, "Utopia, Genocide, and the Other," in Veronica Hollinger and Joan Gordon, eds., *Edging into the Future: Science Fiction and Contemporary Cultural Transformation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), p. 205.

Nazism pervades the film aesthetically and thematically. Screenwriter Edward Neumeier, a frequent collaborator of Verhoeven's, evokes ambivalent feelings about the future in such films as *Robocop* (1987) and *Total Recall* (1990), but the future society in *Starship Troopers* is appealing in every way. "What I really liked about the idea of this movie was that it allowed me to write about fascism," Neumeier recalled. "I had a feeling that today's film audiences would really appreciate Heinlein's ideas. Because the message of the original book was pretty straightforward: Democracy is failing, and we need some strict controls on our culture."² Neumeier argues that fascism "is in our biology" and can easily rear its attractive head in times of crisis. He warns us that "[f]ascism is around every corner, so watch out."³

Fascism is difficult to define because it varies according to national context, but there are some common characteristics transcending temporal and regional differences. Alexander De Grand identified one of fascism's core beliefs as "a radical repudiation of the liberal and parliamentary political order" and "an appreciation of the irrational forces in modern society and glorification of instinct and violence in political life."⁴ Fascism is a "civic religion" uniting disparate interest groups and regions into a national community governed by a military elite. Competing loyalties like family, the church, and ethnicity undermine the authority of the fascist state. Fascism has deep historical roots in European culture, but it was Benito Mussolini who established the first fascist party, named the ideology, and built a regime others would replicate. Mussolini viewed war as the most noble of pursuits and those who survived it the only ones worthy of leading. Fascists of every nationality strove to translate the comradeship and unity of the Front into a national community guided by the same values. Mussolini wrote, "The Fascist State organizes the nation, but leaves sufficient liberty to the individual; the latter is deprived of all useless and possibly harmful freedom, but retains what is essential; the deciding power in this question cannot be the individual, but the State alone . . ."⁵ The Federation is a global community built on fascist principles. While Mussolini

²Edward Neumeier, quoted in Paul M. Sammon, *The Making of Starship Troopers* (New York: Boulevard Books, 1997), p. 10.

³Edward Neumeier, "Commentary," *Starship Troopers*, DVD, directed by Paul Verhoeven (Culver City, CA: Tristar Pictures, 1998).

⁴Alexander J. De Grand, *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: The Fascist Style of Rule* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 10.

⁵Benito Mussolini, "What is Fascism, 1932," *Modern History Sourcebook*, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/mussolini-fascism.html> [accessed July 18, 2008].

and Hitler's visions were crushed by the weight of history, the existence of the Federation suggests fascism will one day be redeemed.

The Federation is a highly militarized state, but it is seemingly free from racism, sexism, and ethnic conflict. The only division in society is between "citizens" and "civilians." Military service, the Federation advertises, "guarantees citizenship," which includes political power and access to state benefits like birth licenses and college tuition. The character of Rasczak, a disfigured veteran turned civics teacher, delivers a historical narrative at the beginning of the film that validates Mussolini's essential philosophy and provides some background as to why the Federation is in power: "This year we explored the failure of democracy caused by social scientists who brought the world to the brink of chaos. We talked about how veterans took control and imposed a stability that has lasted for generations since . . ." Rasczak then compares voting to exercising force and exalts violence as "the supreme authority from which all other authority derives." After Dizzy challenges Rasczak on the true efficacy of violence, he again preaches the fascist ethos: "Naked force has settled more issues in history than any other factor. The contrary opinion, 'violence never solves anything,' is wishful thinking at its worst."⁶

According to the Nazi's own tightly controlled historical narrative, the *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community) was the logical conclusion of the *Frontgemeinschaft* (front community) experienced during the First World War. The idealized front knew no class divisions or regional and religious differences (although antisemitism was rampant).⁷ Hitler identified himself primarily as a front soldier destined to build this veteran's utopia. The Federation is, to use its own slogan, "A World that Works" because veterans implemented their own version of the front community on a global scale. Although there is apparent gender and racial equality within the Federation, other aspects of the society are more indicative of traditional fascism. First, justice is swift and severe, to the point that a criminal is tried, sentenced, and executed on live television all in one day. Second, eugenics is taken for granted. When asked why she joined the Mobile Infantry, a recruit responds, "I wanna have babies. And you know it's a lot easier to get a license if you serve."⁸ The only imperfect

⁶Edward Neumeier, *Starship Troopers*, based on the novel by Robert Heinlein, 1996, p. 4–5.

⁷See David Welch, "Nazi Propaganda and *Volksgemeinschaft*: Constructing a People's Community," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (2004): 213–238.

⁸Neumeier, "Commentary" *Starship Troopers*, DVD.

bodies in the entire film are wounded veterans. Their missing limbs humble the Johnny Ricos of the world, who are eager to prove themselves worthy and acquire their own battle scars. Verhoeven and Neumeier depict a politically correct version of the Nazi national community that is attractive to audiences, but it becomes clear that this gleaming future is just as capable of genocide under the guise of “total war” as its Nazi antecedent.

Both the novel and the film are reminiscent of a classic *Bildungsroman*, the genre of German literature that focuses on the moral and social development of a young man. Johnny Rico’s coming-of-age story mirrors that of the typical protagonist in the flood of German First World War memoirs and fiction. These novels emphasize the transformative experience of war and the inherent right of veterans to lead. Ernst Jünger, a prolific author lionized by the Nazis, wrote important memoirs and novels about his own coming-of-age during the First World War. Jünger’s personal odyssey mirrors Johnny Rico’s journey from a clueless teenager to the “New Man” the fascist movement revered. Edward Neumeier even cites Jünger’s famous war memoir, *Storm of Steel*, as partial inspiration for the screenplay.⁹ Marcia Landy, an expert on Italian fascist film, notes that male characters typically undergo a “drama of conversion” into this idealized “New Man.” Johnny Rico experiences something similar after leaving his life of comfort and privilege for the collective family of the Mobile Infantry.¹⁰ One of the most popular Nazi propaganda films was *Hitlerjunge Quex* (1933), the story of a martyred Nazi boy who was killed during a street battle with communists. Like Rico, Quex turns his back on his family and gives himself selflessly to something greater than himself. When Rico realizes he is cut off from his family fortune after joining the military he accepts it: “Who cares! The Federation’ll give me everything I’ll need for the next two years, right?”¹¹ The weak civilians holding Rico back from his destiny are as dangerous and subversive as the socialist family members featured in *Hitlerjunge Quex*. Rasczak once related to his class his firm belief that “figuring things out for yourself is the only real freedom anyone has,” but the Federation completely contradicts this message by encouraging conformity at every turn.¹² During the course of his training and exposure to battle, Rico is

⁹*Starship Troopers*, DVD.

¹⁰Lene Hansen, “Feminism in the Fascist Utopia: Gender and World Order in *Starship Troopers*,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, Vol. 3 (August 2001): 276–277.

¹¹Neumeier, *Starship Troopers*, p. 26.

¹²J. P. Telotte, “Verhoeven, Virilio, and ‘Cinematic Derealization,’” *Film Quarterly*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (Winter, 1999–2000): 33.

stripped of his civilian identity and transformed into an ideal warrior, one who never questions his role in the epic struggle ahead.

Starship Troopers is just one of many Hollywood productions that embrace Nazi aesthetics without seriously engaging Nazism's historical legacy. Tony Barta maintains that this is Nazism's ultimate victory, the escape from history into cinema. Barta explains that "[t]he mythic Nazi was from the very beginning the accompaniment of the nastier historical one and was designed—by the Nazis themselves—to create the cinematic representation of the future." Leni Riefenstahl, Barta quips, "got the world hooked on Nazism, The Movie" and future generations could not help but interpret Nazism through her images.¹³ *Starship Troopers'* pervasive use of Nazi imagery provided easy fodder for film critics, most of whom were amused by the gory spectacle. *Sight and Sound* entitled their review "Starship Stormtroopers" and *Entertainment Weekly* lampooned the film as an "Aryan Spelling production" because of the presence of so many actors from *Beverly Hills 90210* and *Melrose Place*.¹⁴ One reviewer wrote tongue in cheek, "Let's just enjoy the carnage. And wish Ken and Barbie well as they goose-step their way into the future."¹⁵

Verhoeven likely expected the mockery. He subversively blends Frank Capra's "Why We Fight" and "Know Your Enemy" propaganda style with Leni Riefenstahl's epic *Triumph of the Will* (1934). The sequences in which the Federation produces slick commercials glorifying the military and the unwavering unity of the homefront are lifted directly from Riefenstahl's most famous shots. In an interview, Verhoeven called this "wink wink Riefenstahl." When asked if he intended to link the Federation to the Third Reich, Verhoeven responded: "In a way. But it's not saying that *Starship Troopers'* society is wrong because of that resemblance. It's not making a judgment. These references say, 'Here it is.' The futuristic society that works on this level well—and it fights the giant insects very well. Look and decide. The judgment is yours."¹⁶ Edward Neumeier was refreshingly honest about his affinity for Nazi set design: "The

¹³Tony Barta, "Film Nazis: The Great Escape," in Tony Barta, ed., *Screening the Past: Film and the Representation of History* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), pp. 128, 131.

¹⁴"Starship Troopers," *Sight and Sound* 8, No. 1 (1998); Benjamin Svetkey, "The Reich Stuff," *Entertainment Weekly*, November 21, 1997, <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,290338,00.html> [accessed July 18, 2008].

¹⁵Kathie Maio, "Ken and Barbie in the House of Buggin'," *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, Vol. 94, No. 4 (April 1998), <http://web.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.umuc.edu/ehost/delivery?vid=9&hid=108&sid=63f524d> [accessed April 16, 2008].

¹⁶Paul Verhoeven quoted in Sammon, *The Making of Starship Troopers*, p. 138.

reason for all the German uniforms and everything is because Germans made the best-looking stuff”¹⁷ When asked to comment on the controversy, the Anti-Defamation League admitted “[t]he movie does have some not-so-subtle Nazi symbols. But it’s so ludicrous. I mean—you can’t take giant bugs that seriously.”¹⁸ The filmmakers ask the audience whether it wants the world portrayed on the screen. The concluding comment after every government-controlled news story is direct: “Would you like to know more?”

Verhoeven noted in interviews that “war makes fascists of us all” and *Starship Troopers* is, at its core, a war movie modeled on the formulaic World War II films from the 1940s and 1950s. The war against the Arachnids is the backdrop for Johnny Rico’s evolution into a Federation hero. Verhoeven chose a completely unsympathetic enemy to highlight the appeal of the fascist utopia.¹⁹ Heinlein used bugs as his literary enemy because they are an apt metaphor for communists, specifically Chinese and North Koreans, whom he interpreted as “insect-like” in their discipline and unshakeable devotion to a collective. Heinlein regarded communists as devoid of compassion, creativity, spirituality, and intellect.²⁰ In the context of the Cold War, where each side viewed the other as an existential threat, *Starship Troopers* illustrates a total war between opposing worldviews. Verhoeven told *Time* magazine that he lamented the loss of “that wonderful enemy everyone can fight.” Science Fiction opens up new horizons, Verhoeven explains, since faceless aliens like the Arachnids stand in nicely for communists and Nazis. “They’re bad. They’re evil. And they are not even human.”²¹ Although monstrous and terrifying, the Arachnids are a civilization, and the human race openly argues for its total annihilation using rhetoric all too familiar in the twentieth century. The Federation resembles the Third Reich aesthetically, but its exterminationist war footing and unmistakable quest for galactic “living space” suggests that even in the limitless future the price of utopia is genocide.

We receive only limited background concerning the human-Arachnid conflict, but the two civilizations are imperial powers interested in colonizing the same planets. Humans, we learn from Federal Network broadcasts, may have unwittingly provoked the Arachnids when “Mormon extremists” settled

¹⁷Edward Neumeier quoted in Svetkey, “The Reich Stuff.”

¹⁸Jill Kahn Meltzer quoted in Svetkey, “The Reich Stuff.”

¹⁹Paul Verhoeven quoted in DVD insert, *Starship Troopers*, DVD.

²⁰Adam Roberts, *Science Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 107.

²¹Paul Verhoeven, quoted in Rob van Scheers, *Paul Verhoeven*, tr. Aletta Stevens (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), p. xiii.

inside the Arachnid zone of the galaxy. After the attack on Buenos Aires, the Federation embarks on a war of annihilation using the rhetoric of racial survival. Historian Eric D. Weitz notes that genocide is a product of warfare: “The emergency circumstances of wartime and the heightened fears meant the rulers felt liberated to carry out extreme measures that they would not dare venture in peacetime. War provided cover, but also provided the great opportunity.”²² Although the human race may be unified, as evidenced by integrated units and even an African Sky Marshal leading the human offensive against the Arachnids, the desire to cleanse the universe of competing races is pronounced throughout the film. One survivor of Buenos Aires, played by producer Jon Davidson, stands amidst ruins and tells a Federal Network camera, “The only good bug is a dead bug!” In a more formal setting addressing Federation leadership, Sky Marshal Dienes frames the coming war as a true clash of civilizations, a concept all too familiar in our own time: “We are a generation commanded by fate to defend humankind! We must meet the threat with our valor, our blood, with our very lives, to insure that human civilization, not insect dominates the galaxy now and always.”²³ If World War II is the inspiration for the conflict with the Arachnids and the Federation is the Third Reich thinly disguised, Dienes’ rhetoric assumes a more sinister meaning—the Arachnids stand in the way of human expansion. The influential German military writer Friedrich von Bernhardi gleefully predicted the First World War, calling war “a biological necessity of the first importance.” A hero to Nazi leaders, Bernhardi justified imperialism in terms the Federation leadership would surely understand: “Strong, healthy, and flourishing nations increase in numbers. From a given moment they require a continual expansion of their frontiers, they require new territory for the accommodation of their surplus population.”²⁴ Johnny Rico and his classmates, “the bloom of human evolution” as the script describes them, are the perfect instruments with which to cleanse the universe of the ultimate “Other” and guarantee human supremacy.²⁵

Verhoeven described *Starship Troopers* as “a kind of *Battle of the Bulge*, with the bugs playing the Nazis.” However, a more apt metaphor may be Op-

²²Eric D. Weitz, *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 4.

²³Neumeier, *Starship Troopers*, p. 55.

²⁴Friedrich von Bernhardi, “The Next War, 1914,” www.h-net.org/~german/g-text/kaiserreich/bernhardi.html [accessed July 18, 2008].

²⁵Neumeier, *Starship Troopers*, p. 1.

eration Barbarossa, with the bugs playing the “Judeo-Bolsheviks.”²⁶ The Nazi *Wehrmacht* drove into the heart of the Soviet Union as part of a racial war of conquest for German *Lebensraum*. Under the cover of this onslaught, the Nazi regime implemented the Final Solution. The war against the Jews was indistinguishable from the war against the Soviet Union, and extermination was the only outcome. Historian Omer Bartov argues convincingly that the German soldiers’ constant exposure to ideological training beginning in the Hitler Youth and extending into basic military training led to the *Wehrmacht* waging a racial war on behalf of the Nazi regime. Convinced that only the wholesale elimination of the Soviet Union could save the German “race,” *Wehrmacht* leaders embraced genocidal policies and relied on conscripted troops to execute them. On the eve of the invasion of the Soviet Union, *Wehrmacht* generals, such as Colonel-General Hermann Hoth, vilified the enemy with language that parallels that used by Sky Marshal Dienes of the Federation:

More than ever we are filled with the thought of a new era, in which the strength of the German people’s racial superiority and achievements entrust it with the leadership of Europe. We clearly recognize our mission to save European culture from the advancing Asiatic barbarism. We now know that we have to fight against an incensed and tough opponent. This battle can only end with the destruction of one or the other; a compromise is out of the question.

Similarly, General Walter von Reichenau declared, “The essential goal of the campaign against the Jewish-Bolshevik system is the complete destruction of its power instruments and the eradication of the Asiatic influence on the European cultural sphere.” Reichenau essentially granted soldiers a license to exterminate, heralding them as the “avenger of all the bestialities which have been committed against the Germans and related races.” General Erich von Manstein recognized the war as “a battle for life and death against the Bolshevik system” and asserted that Judeo-Bolshevism must “[n]ever again . . . interfere in our European living space.”²⁷ The *Wehrmacht*, like its futuristic brethren in the Mobile Infantry, acts as the shocktroops in parallel clashes of civilizations.

Genocidal regimes define the targeted race or ethnicity as both subhuman and dangerous. The Young Turks referred to the Armenians as insects; the Nazis portrayed the Jews as vermin, cockroaches, bacilli, and every oth-

²⁶Paul Verhoeven, quoted in van Scheers, *Paul Verhoeven*, p. xvi.

²⁷Omer Bartov, *Hitler’s Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 131, 129, 130.

er conceivable biological threat to the human race; Josef Stalin, the Khmer Rouge, Slobodan Milosevic, Hutu Power, and currently, the janjaweed operating in Darfur repeatedly characterized their “enemies” as insects worthy of destruction. At the same time, these “insects” threaten the health and safety of the vastly superior race responsible for the genocide. Verhoeven, following Heinlein’s narrative, employs actual insects to combat the human race, but the same rules apply. Florentine Strzelczyk argues that the bugs portrayed in *Starship Troopers* “seem to unite a German anti-Semite’s fantasies.” In a particularly graphic scene, students dissect bugs in a biology class while the teacher extols the virtues of the Archnids: “We humans like to think we are Nature’s finest achievement. I’m afraid it isn’t true. . . it reproduces in vast numbers, has no ego, doesn’t know about death, and so is the perfect selfless member of society.” When Carmen argues that humans are superior for having created art, math, and interstellar travel, the teacher lauds the Archnids’ evolutionary prowess and their ability to colonize planets “by hurling their spore into space.”²⁸ The sheer monstrosity of the Archnids serves the purpose of legitimizing genocide.

The *Wehrmacht* dehumanized the Soviet enemy using similar language. An article in a *Wehrmacht* military journal detailed the threat posed by the Bolshevik commissars, calling them “the embodiment of the Satanic and insane hatred against the whole of noble humanity. The shape of these commissars reveals to us the rebellion of the *Untermenschen* against noble blood.” The same article states, “[w]e would insult the animals if we described these mostly Jewish men as beasts.”²⁹ Nineteenth century racial theorists like Houston Stuart Chamberlain and Artur de Gobineau argued that Jews are an extremely strong race because of their single-minded focus on materialism and inclination to avoid racial mixing. However, Chamberlain and Gobineau maintain that Jews are ultimately inferior to the more cultured Aryans.

The Archnids are cast in a similar light. In a televised debate between two “academics,” one argues that the Archnids must be extremely intelligent based on their military effectiveness. The other commentator declares, “Frankly, I find the idea of a bug that thinks offensive!”³⁰ In the end, the humans do in fact discover an entire caste of “brain bugs” responsible for ambushing Federation troops. The idea that the enemy race is simultaneously dangerous and inferior is common to both the Nazi utopia and the Federation.

²⁸Neumeier, *Starship Troopers*, p. 9.

²⁹Bartov, *Hitler’s Army*, p. 126.

³⁰*Starship Troopers*, DVD.

Producer Jon Davidson thought the idea of creating a fascist utopia “was both interesting and amusing.”³¹ The “amusing” portions of the utopia concern the presence of so many elements typical of the plastic world common to teenage soap operas. The casting of veterans from shows like *Beverly Hills 90210* and *Melrose Place*, a television genre that has lost none of its popularity since the 1990s, reinforces this perspective. Some noted critics were bothered by some of Verhoeven’s choices. Richard Schickel questioned the “unexplored premise” of a future society that appears to be “a happy fascist world.” Similarly, Mike Clark was seduced by the “army of sweet-tempered, fresh-faced fascists.” The choice of attractive but forgettable actors floating through a Nazi wonderland is at the heart of Verhoeven’s satiric vision. The twenty-third century Earth is, as one reviewer notes, a mix of “California chic with clean, gleaming futuristic fascism.”³² In another subversive nod to American pop culture, the frightening character of Carl is played by Neal Patrick Harris, aka *Doogie Howser, M.D.*, the endearing television teenage prodigy. Carl evolves from a sweet and bright kid into a cold and methodical killer working as a “government scientist.” There is something disarming about seeing Doogie Howser clad in an SS uniform torturing insects and preaching extermination, which was precisely why Harris was cast in the role.³³ Verhoeven forces the audience to empathize with something it should find repellent, fascism, and implies it is on the cusp of creating this world.

Verhoeven concentrates on the unfettered power of the media in his films set in the future (*Starship Troopers*, *Total Recall*, *Robocop*). Verhoeven suggests that the real culprit is not some shadowy government figure or the military, but our culture and propensity to be distracted by slickly produced sex and violence. J. P. Telotte argues that the Federal Network, the only manifestation of the Federation the audience actually witnesses other than brief appearances by Sky Marshals, is the incarnation of “a fascist spirit of control incubated in a derealized environment.”³⁴ Like any government at war, the Federation suppresses dissent and removes the notion that the conflict is more complex than it seems. During a scene reminiscent of media coverage during the Gulf Wars, an embedded reporter wanders the halls of a battlestation buzzing with activ-

³¹Jon Davidson, quoted in Maio, “Ken and Barbie.”

³²Maio, “Ken and Barbie.”

³³Sammon, *The Making of Starship Troopers*, p. 69.

³⁴Florentine Strzelczyk, “Our Future-Our Past: Fascism, Postmodernism, and *Starship Troopers* (1997),” *Modernism/Modernity*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2008): 93.

ity, stopping to chat with the Mobile Infantry. The reporter presents an opposing viewpoint: "Some say the bugs were provoked by the intrusion of humans into their natural habitat, that a 'live and let live' policy is preferable to war with the bugs . . ." Rico grabs the microphone and responds, "Yeah, well, I'm from Buenos Aires, and I say kill'em all!"³⁵ The reporter smiles, acknowledging that Johnny speaks for the Federation. There is no dissent in the Federation due to the "stability" the veterans have imposed on humanity.

When asked about the tagline "Would you like to know more?" following every Federal Network broadcast, Verhoeven stated, "For Neumeier and myself that meant, 'Do you want to know more about this futuristic society?' Or, in another way, what we're asking the audience is, 'Do you *like* this society?'"³⁶ Verhoeven works under the assumption that we are already halfway there. Florentine Strzelczyk argues that the film allows "viewers to indulge in an exaltation of the beauty of fascist power and to engage in a mock-Holocaust without ever having to confront historical legacies or current views of racism."³⁷ This seems to be purposeful on the part of the filmmakers. Verhoeven's attractive and hyper-aggressive utopia is all too familiar, a reflection of ourselves. He admits: "I tried to seduce the audience to join in [Troopers] society, but then ask 'What are you really joining up for?'"³⁸

³⁵*Starship Troopers*, DVD.

³⁶Paul Verhoeven, quoted in Sammon, *The Making of Starship Troopers*, p. 138.

³⁷Strzelczyk, "Our Future-Our Past," p. 98.

³⁸Paul Verhoeven quoted in Svetkey.