

Paul Verhoeven's Sci-Fi Trilogy:

*Understanding the Media Influence on Capitalism,
Individualism, and Patriotism in the United States*



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M North American Studies

Radboud University Nijmegen

01/08/2017

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Still from:

Total Recall. Directed by Paul Verhoeven, performances by Arnold Schwarzenegger and Rachel Ticotin, Carolco Pictures, 1990.

North American Studies

Teachers who will receive this document: Prof Dr Frank Mehring and Dr Mathilde Roza

Title of document: Paul Verhoeven's Sci-Fi Trilogy: Understanding the Media Influence on Capitalism, Individualism, and Patriotism in the United States

Name of course: Master Thesis

Date of submission: 01/08/2017

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Abstract:

To examine such components of American culture as capitalism, individualism, and patriotism, I will analyze how these three themes are depicted in the three movies Paul Verhoeven directed in Hollywood: *RoboCop* (1987), *Total Recall* (1990), and *Starship Troopers* (1997). Then, I will examine how the Dutch director remediates the above-mentioned pillars of American identity and transforms them into consumerism, conformism, and hegemony to criticize the national self-delusion forged by media. I will demonstrate how Verhoeven engages in a dialectic dialogue with media via media. In other words, I will investigate how the Dutch director uses filmic techniques and genre conventions to satirize the vices of American culture and society of the 1980s and 1990s. To do that, scrutinize the combination of such genres as science fiction, western, and action relying on Barry Keith Grant, Steve Neale, and Rick Altman's theories on genre. Then, I will conduct a shot-by-shot analysis, a practice forged by such scholars as Michael Ryan, Melissa Lenos, and Ed Sikov. Finally, relying on the theory of Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, I will explain how the director draws our attention to the media manipulation using such concepts as immediacy and hypermediacy.

Key Words:

Paul Verhoeven, RoboCop, Total Recall, Starship Troopers, cinema, remediation, immediacy, hypermediacy, capitalism, individualism, patriotism, consumerism, conformism, hegemony

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank my thesis advisor Professor Doctor Frank Mehring of the North American Studies department at Radboud University. Prof Mehring was always very quick to answer any questions I had and eager to supply multiple suggestions to develop this thesis' structure. He never ceased to provide support. The inspiration for this thesis would never have come without his seminar that introduced me to the theory of remediation outlined by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin and his lecture where he discussed Paul Verhoeven's critique of American society by playing clips from *Starship Troopers*. I would also like to acknowledge Dr Mathilde Roza as the second reader of this thesis, who supplied many interesting insights during the RUDESA spring academy. I would like to thank Dr Dietmar Meinel for providing me with positivity and recommendations that helped me conduct my film analysis. I must also express my very profound gratitude to my parents for their endless encouragement throughout my studies at Radboud University and for their help in obtaining necessary materials to research and write this thesis. I would also like to thank my friends who were always ready to make phone calls in order to discuss the hardship of life of an international student, as well as my flat mates and group mates whose own diligence always inspired me. Lastly, I would like to thank Prof Hans Bak for his continuous reassurance and course that helped me develop my own writing style. This accomplishment would not have been possible without them. Thank you.

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Introduction

1.1 The Media Influence in American Culture

Without a shadow of a doubt, American society has always been aware of the media influence on various spheres of their lives. According to Thomas D. Sharts, “many Americans are presently adopting images and performing those behaviors they hear, see, and read via the mass media communication networks” (Sharts 79). The question that inevitably arises is, how do people allow themselves to be guided by images? The author narrows it all down to the alarming scale of the mass media networks’ presence in the country nowadays. What’s more, scholars like Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky refer to James Ledbetter, who signals that the 1990s in the United States are known as the decade when commercialism came upon public broadcasting with broadcasters “rushing as fast as they can to merge their services with those offered by commercial networks” (Herman xv). The process, however, started taking place back in the 1930s, with one feature always being part of it: the public has never had any say in approval of such practice.

In their book entitled “Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media” the two theoreticians focus on structural factors of the media expansion. They define them as “ownership and control, dependence on other major funding sources (notably, advertisers), and mutual interests and relationships between the media and those who make the news and have the power to define it and explain what it means” (ix). Hence, given the capacities of these structural factors, various dominant institutions could use the media not only to promote, but, at times, propagandize their interests. Herman and Chomsky remark that the advancement of these agendas is not usually accomplished by crude intervention, but by “the selection of right-thinking personnel and by the editors’ and working journalists’ internalization of priorities and definition of news-worthiness that conform to the institution’s policy” (xv).

Authors like Arthur Asa Berger have already posed a question about what kind of

influence the ridiculously gigantic exposure to the media might have on American populace. Tying the media power with such aspects of society as family, politics, religion, views on race, gender, and ethnicity, the scholar offers three ways one can characterize the media's impact on peoples' identities: the responsive chord theory, genres, and aesthetics. To put it precisely, one can concentrate on how the media implements peoples' memories to provoke certain emotional feedback. Others tend to scrutinize types of the media, especially their audiovisual forms. Lastly, according to Berger, many pay attention to "media aesthetics and the way light, color, sound, camera angles, kind of shots, and editing create certain effects" (Berger 16). The third method is extremely important, for it shows that theorists have already been concerned with the issue of filmic techniques in delivering dominant institutions' messages and principles. Yet, I argue that this approach needs revision.

First of all, the ways in which the information could be transmitted have gone multiple changes over the last few decades. In other words, David Croteau and William Hoynes track the media development from the print medium, sound recording, film medium, and broadcast media to the Internet and mobile technologies. Still, keeping in mind the continuing interinfluence and interconnectedness of various forms it seems urgent to rely on the theory of remediation, especially if one examines audiovisual materials. In addition to that, the medium of film that, oftentimes, is capable of delivering artistic viewpoints, also allows to analyze how the media could be criticized via one of their forms. Besides, the theorists highlight that in today's analysis it doesn't seem logical to fragment the study of media by investigating each medium individually: "convergence of media technologies has made this kind of medium-specific approach untenable" (Croteau xv). Analyzing a Hollywood production results in questioning what cinematographic components are at work to incite emotions in the viewers. Other than that, if such production makes the media influence the main theme of its plot, one would inescapably compare diverse media (commercials, news reels, talk shows) concentrating on their aesthetics.

Understanding how one portrays the media's role in politics and the Internet surveillance is crucial today, as seeing the process in the medium of film helps gain a broader perspective and realize the horrendous abuse of power invested to governmental institutions. The issue appears to be important today, in the wake of Trump's surprise victory in the United States presidential

election of 2016. As Jeffrey Michael McCall claims, what's more alarming than the media influence itself, is "the low level of insight and awareness people bring to their media-consuming habits. Americans are generally ignorant of how the media operate and the potential impact of mediated messages" (McCall 2). For instance, the journalist David Sillito states that even though the president didn't receive much of attention in press during his presidential campaign, television seemed to endorse him: "the enthusiasm for Trump at CNN was simple: ratings. Jeff Zucker, the boss of CNN, is also the man who employed him to present *The Apprentice* when he worked at NBC." McCall stresses that Americans ought to become more media literate. At the same time, Herman and Chomsky mention that many consider the Internet a promising platform for interactive and democratic media. Nevertheless, the scholars denote that "only sizable commercial organizations have been able to make large numbers aware of the existence of their Internet offerings" and that the platform "has had the effect of creating a world of virtual communities built by advertisers and based on demographics and taste differences of consumers" (Herman xvi - xviii). Likewise, McCall himself questions: "Why would the media industry feel compelled to enlighten consumers about the media ratings practices, setting the news agenda, ... when doing so might actually spark citizens to question what they receive and even challenge it?" (McCall 3)

In a way, becoming media literate is possible if one looks at the subject from another point of view, or, rather within another medium. This is why I suggest turning to the science fiction trilogy of Paul Verhoeven who has always been critical of the media influence on American society. McCall asserts that "media coverage of itself, when it happens, frequently is self-congratulatory, self-promotional, or pop culture based" (3). As a matter of fact, the theme of the media influence is central in *RoboCop* (1987), *Total Recall* (1990), and *Starship Troopers* (1997). The first movie not only serves as an excellent set-up for witnessing how the media are used to sell products and gain more customers but it also depicts how various types of footage are utilized to reinforce capitalistic values. What's more, controlled by the dominant structure in the movie, newsreels, commercials, and even advertisements in the city of Detroit ultimately result in the economic system's abuse and transform the populace into consumerists. When it comes to *Total Recall*, Verhoeven employs a similar formula, only this time the narrative revolves around such cultural milestone as individualism that under the media influence

transforms into conformism. The director draws attention to the fact, that other than the populace's opinions and actions, even their desires could be controlled and constructed by various media that are thoughtfully selected in accordance with the clientele's characteristics. Lastly, *Starship Troopers* renders the narrative about the use of the media to ignite patriotic feelings with the aim to fulfill hegemonic and imperialistic ambitions. Here, Verhoeven doesn't simply hint at the fact that the media are strongly associated with propaganda. Instead, he adds short clips which are direct references to Frank Capra's propaganda videos. Yet, the Dutch director doesn't limit himself to the portrayal of American society manipulated by the media. To deliver his point, he makes the spectators acknowledge the media power, constantly reminding them of the medium and making them realize how immersive, engaging, and moving images can be.

1.2 Introducing Paul Verhoeven

The three case studies that will be discussed in the following chapters are the above-mentioned science fiction movies directed by Paul Verhoeven. Born in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, Verhoeven moved to the United States in the 1980s after the success of his previous and more realistic films, including *Turkish Delight* (1973) and *Soldier of Orange* (1977). The question that one might pose is the following, why would an acclaimed filmmaker known for serious dramas settle for Hollywood blockbusters and, more importantly, remain within the genre of science fiction? The answer is two-fold. First of all, Verhoeven himself has asserted that despite his profound knowledge of American cinema and film narrative structures, he was not familiar with beliefs and values of the society. At the Follow Your Instincts: Filmmaking According to Paul Verhoeven conference held at Berlinale Talent Campus in 2013 the cineaste remarked: "I had so many problems with the language and the culture. ... It's such a transition, you know. Sometimes I didn't even know what the dialogue meant in the script. I made terrible mistakes." The director also confessed that when one character addressed another with the words, c'mon brother, he would actually leave a note in his copy of the script to ask whether it was verified that the two were real brothers.

Nonetheless, this lack of knowledge enabled Verhoeven to concentrate more on the visual aspect of his movies and deal with the problem of the media influence in a more conspicuous way. In other words, making his points about the media within the medium of film permitted him to keep his sense of humor that was mostly transmitted in the Hollywood productions visually. In an interview with *Starlog* in 1997, the director stated:

In the beginning, I felt [making a SF movie] would protect me better against my lack of knowledge about American society. I didn't go for films that would really be embedded in American culture, because I didn't know American culture very well. Making science fiction, where things are not so rigid and where your knowledge of society is replaced by your fantasy of society, was a good thing for me. *RoboCop* and *Total Recall* were both done because I thought that with science fiction, my lack of knowledge wouldn't show so much. (Barton-Fumo 128)

The fact that the director provided a critique of his fantasy of American society enabled him to implement all sorts of allegories and metaphors, yet remain within the constraints of the genre and Hollywood system. In other words, the three movies possess all the features of studio blockbusters released with the ultimate goal to fulfill their box-office potential. Still, Verhoeven's partially realistic approach exposes the romanticized and escapist Hollywood genre. In fact, the Dutch director confirms the media power to be the central theme in his trilogy. Answering a question at Berlinale Talent Campus about an American director's capability of making a movie like *RoboCop*, where the sequences are constantly interrupted by commercials and newsreels, Verhoeven says the following:

Yeah, I mean, of course it was in the script. That was there but also, subconsciously, not to say that I really wanted to do that, but it also shows in the film my amazement with American society. It was really my amazement looking at American television that was complete entertainment and so different from Dutch television. I mean, now everybody's Americanized, culturally imperialism worked very well... for the Americans. So I was amazed and I think I expressed that but not on purpose. It went into the scenes because I felt that it was strange and I tried to give that feeling of strangeness.

Supposedly, it wasn't Verhoeven's intention to work with the medium and simultaneously use the logic of hypermediacy and immediacy in order to express his opinion. However, I think, that it's his "amazement" that resulted in the utilization of added commercials, newsreels, propaganda videos, and the Internet-style featurettes as means of estrangement. Plus, the process of remediation introduced by Jay D. Bolter and Richard Grusin and further discussed in the Theoretical Framework chapter is also present in the productions: one medium isn't simply embedded into the movies' narratives but is actually refashioned, be it a novel or a videogame,. Although the Dutch director might illustrate the utopian future of the United States and doesn't leave any hope for his protagonists, he still sees potential for the viewers to recognize the media influence. To my way of thinking, remediation makes the audience assess the media's manipulative nature and retain their independence and freedom.

1.3 Methodology

To examine such components of American culture as capitalism, individualism, and patriotism, I will analyze how these three themes are depicted in the three movies Verhoeven directed in Hollywood: *RoboCop*, *Total Recall*, and *Starship Troopers*. Then, I will examine how the Dutch director remediates the above-mentioned pillars of American identity and transforms them into consumerism, conformism, and hegemony to criticize the national self-delusion forged by the media. I will demonstrate how Verhoeven engages in a dialectic dialogue with media via media. In other words, I will investigate how the Dutch director uses filmic techniques and genre conventions to satirize the vices of American culture and society of the 1980s and 1990s. To do that, I will scrutinize the combination of such genres as science fiction, western, and action relying on Barry Keith Grant, Steve Neale, and Rick Altman's theories on genre. Then, I will conduct a shot-by-shot analysis, a practice forged by such scholars as Michael Ryan, Melissa Lenos, and Ed Sikov. Finally, relying on the theory of Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, I will explain how the director draws our attention to the media manipulation using such concepts as immediacy and hypermediacy.

After discussing the necessary theories, the subsequent chapters will establish the link between theoretical research and the medium's capabilities. In other words, I'll employ the arguments of the theorists who are concerned with the three concepts' duality to analyze how those oppositions are portrayed in the movies. Then, I'll investigate how Verhoeven works with the genre conventions. To do that, I'll focus on the six components of the genre outlined by Grant: conventions, iconography, setting, stories and themes, characters, actors, and stars, viewers and audiences. Simultaneously, I'll take recourse to shot-by-shot analysis discussing in detail such elements as mise-en-scène, camera movement and cinematography, editing, production design, narrative, motifs and metaphors. Lastly, I'll turn to the theory of remediation to describe how Verhoeven reminds the viewers of the medium to make them acknowledge the media presence in the characters' and their own lives: starting from the practice of adaption and ending with reworking the medium of video games in the medium of film, the Dutch director uses extremely diverse techniques to evoke the feeling of estrangement in the audience.

My research will reveal the powerful and often manipulative influence of audiovisual media on American identity. Not only do Verhoeven's films deal with the depiction of capitalism, individualism, and patriotism, but they also allow for the analysis of how a Hollywood movie can construct the perception of those very concepts. As Paul Verhoeven argues, "the way the surroundings are presented [in *RoboCop*] – I mean the media breaks – I'm pointing out that these people are victimized by propaganda" (Cornea 139). To include masked criticism of Hollywood machinery and media on the society: Verhoeven never takes recourse to dialogue or text to state his opinion clearly; he prefers to turn to filmic techniques.

Chapter 1. Theoretical Framework

In order to discuss how Verhoeven depicts the media influence on American society and what cinematographic tools he employs to reveal such impact, this chapter will present the necessary theories required to answer my research question. How are filmic techniques and remediation used in *RoboCop*, *Total Recall*, and *Starship Troopers* to portray the media power in the 1980s and 1990s implemented to transform capitalism, individualism, and patriotism into consumerism, conformism, and hegemony? To reach a conclusion, it's vital to employ the following three theoretical approaches: the genre theory outlined by such scholars as Rick Altman, Steve Neale, and Berry Keith Grant, film analysis which conduction is explained by Michael Ryan and Melissa Lenos, and theory of remediation drawn up by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin. Although the explanation of audiovisual means that are at work in the science fiction trilogy might seem sufficient in the discussion of the director's criticism of the media via the medium of film, it's also crucial to provide the definitions of the above-mentioned tropes of American culture.

Since there are no universal theories that might give clear and explicit definitions of capitalism, individualism, and patriotism, it makes sense to turn to the authors who focus on the duality of these concepts. While it's true to say that Verhoeven mostly concentrates on the theme of the media presence in society, each of the movies revolves around one of the above-mentioned cultural milestones. Hence, the analysis of *RoboCop* requires both the definition of capitalism and investigation of its dual nature that makes it oscillate with consumerism. In doing so, one should dwell on the ways capitalistic values were dismantled by political, historical, and technological changes that took place in the 1980s. Scholars like Jürgen Kocka and Marcel van der Linden Rodney D. Peterson prove that those dimensions shouldn't be overlooked, as capitalism itself is a system in transition. Key to the comprehension of the emergence of corporate greed that is going out of any decent proportions in the movie is the research conducted by scholars like Dominic Barton, Dezső Horváth, Matthias Kipping, and Nicolaus Mills who focus on the system abuse. In addition to that, the theoreticians George Ritzer and Zeynep Atalay ponder the nature of the capitalistic system advantages' promotion that was executed via the media.

The same method applies to *Total Recall* which narrative stems from the opposition between individualism and conformity in American society. Thus, prior to pinpointing the various tactics the Dutch director has propensity for in his rendering of the media influence on someone's unique identity, one should scrutinize the convictions of authors who adhere to the idea that American individualism has always been closely linked to the concept of conformity. In this regard, the name of James E. Block stands out, as the author provides two contradicting worldviews linked to individualism. Also, having referred to such scholars as Luther S. Luedtke and David Potter who acknowledge the trope's binary nature, it's logical to turn to theorists who try to interrogate the reasons behind such opposition. When taking into account the film's plot and the protagonist's conflict and desire, the theory that partly helps explain how Verhoeven fully transforms individualism into conformity is drawn up by Claude S. Fischer. The scholar operates with such conceptions as voluntarism and contractualism. When it comes to diverse modes implemented to ensure the media interference in people's way of thinking and lifestyle, it's more logical to turn to authors who study the dominating imagery of the decade that led to massive unification of society's aspirations. Theorists like Amaya Fernández-Menicucci speculate the exaggerated masculinity present in the 1990s that could be aligned with the perversion of authority that Block defines as a feature of American individualism.

Lastly, the analysis of *Starship Troopers* necessitates the same approach, for the film's plot is driven by the concept of patriotism inextricably interlaced with the notion of hegemony. In outlining the signs of a hegemonic state, one could turn to George Kateb who attributes the ever-present search of possible enemies as one of the basic principles of hegemony. It's also necessary to account for investigations of theorists like Ella Shohat and Robert Stam who associate patriotism with military force that is depicted in the movie. It should be kept in mind that due to historical, political, and more importantly, economic changes, the US stopped being considered a hegemonic state. As a consequence, one should take recourse to Julian Co who suggests a revised characterization of a hegemon and clarifies what components of the concept could be affiliated with the country. Having established the differences between hegemony and imperialism and listed all the features of a hegemonic state that could be assigned to the United States, one should explain how the populace accepts to indulge into imperialistic activities. At this point, patriotism comes into play. First, not only the pillar of the country's culture should be determined, but also the means of its diffusion. Relying on Carl Boggs' ideas that revolve

around the media means utilized to incite patriotic feelings helps study various types of footage added to *Starship Troopers*.

1.1 Genre Theory

Since Verhoeven worked within the genre of science fiction, it's important to define its conventions which, in turn, are reworked by the Dutch director. Grant draws attention to the fact that, for the most part, genre movies are commercial feature films that heavily rely on the interplay of repetition and variation of familiar characters put in familiar situations (Grant 1). In other words, the scholar refers to such movies as popular cinema marking its interdependent relationship with popular culture. As Altman remarks, "genres provide the formulas that drive productions; genres constitute the structures that define individual texts; ... the interpretation of generic films depends directly on the audience's generic expectations" (Altman 14). Steve Neale also acknowledges the importance of conceptual and empirical enquiry. To put it precisely, the scholar focuses on the accounts that try to define both general characteristics of Hollywood's genres and the socio-cultural roles they play as well as their commercial and industrial basis and their role in Hollywood's output (Neale 4).

Other than that, while trying to define the genre of science-fiction one shouldn't forget about a particular era that is being analyzed. To put it another way, besides focusing on aesthetical and industrial realms of the notion, scholars like Neale call for attempting at linking "Hollywood's genres to cultural and ideological issues, trends and values" (Neale 4). Similarly, Grant notes that since the beginning, American genre movies "have been understood as inevitable expressions of the contemporary *zeitgeist*" (Grant 5) To put it another way, historical events may not only modify the genre's conventions but influence its popularity and account for it during a certain period of time. Thus, understanding the changes that took place during the 1980s and 1990s in the United States and affected the country's popular culture should serve as an equal explanation for choosing science fiction as the genre of Verhoeven's trilogy. Apart from the director's own desire to stay within this category, there are other socio-cultural elements that dictated the interest in science fiction in those decades.

Many scholars agree that one of the explanations why American genre movies are so strongly associated with commercial and mass-mediated cinema is the deliberate standardization of successful audiovisual and narrative components with the ultimate goal of theatrical box office grosses. In fact, Grant remarks that the “formulaic qualities of genre films meant that studios could turn them out quickly, and audiences could understand them just as quickly” (Grant 7). Recognizing such familiar visual patterns as costumes, physical appearances, and characters’ behavior make the audience immediately know what to expect in the scenes to come. In contrast, Neale notes that genres “change, develop, and vary by borrowing from, and overlapping with, one another” (Neale 166). In other words, before trying to pinpoint the common elements of the science fiction genre the “semantic/syntactic approach” proposed by Altman should be referred to as the analysis of Verhoeven’s trilogy comprises such combination.

The theorist distinguishes two ways of studying film genres: the semantic one and the syntactic one: scholars can distinguish “between generic definitions which depend on a list of common traits, ... – thus stressing the semantic elements which make up the genre – and definitions which play up instead certain constitutive relationships which might be called the genre’s fundamental syntax” (Altman 10). To put it simply, those who study genres semantically usually concentrate on the *similarities* of stories, characters, locations, lighting within one given genre. In turn, those who implement the syntactic approach, study the *varieties* of changeable components and their interplay. The latter might depend on a director’s individual style and vision. Hence, the director can break through relatively fixed elements of the science fiction genre yet utilize most generic corpuses. To narrow them down, the common elements of the very term genre should be singled out.

Grant defines the following six: conventions, iconography, setting, stories and themes, characters, actors, and stars, viewers and audiences. The first category constitutes “frequently-used stylistic techniques or narrative devices typical of (but not necessarily unique to) particular genetic traditions” (Grant 10). Keith M. Johnston asserts that science fiction films are traditionally dramas that engage with such themes as “the future, artificial creation, technological invention, extraterrestrial contact, time travel, physical or mental mutation, scientific

experimentation” and are often “reliant upon state-of-art special effect techniques” (Johnston 1). According to Ed Sikov, being the foundation for artistic devices, conventions should be considered “not as exhausted clichés but as essential and valuable parts of a communication system, meaningful components in a wide network of shared ideas. In short, conventions are basic to culture, particularly popular culture” (Sikov 145).

From Sikov’s point of view the audience’s pleasure derives from the familiarity. That is why repetition plays such an important part in the establishment of a genre’s frameworks. This is a recognizable realm within which the audience operates. “Seen from this perspective, genre conventions support rather than challenge social, cultural, and artistic assumptions” (Sikov 145). However, it goes without saying that every movie brings a certain variation. No matter how much people might enjoy recognizing the same genre elements roaming from one movie to another, pure repetition is simply impossible due to dissimilarities of artistic points of view, historical challenges, and industry developments. What’s more, as Robert Warshow points out, “variation is absolutely necessary to the type from becoming sterile; we do not want to see the same movie over and over again, only the same form” (Warshow 147).

Many directors choose to play with conventions, yet manage to stay within the genre frameworks. This is the case for Verhoeven, since his interrupting the movies’ sequences with commercials, news segments, and propaganda videos challenges the invisible editing Hollywood movies incline to. According to Grant, “such moments are violations of conventions analogous to those normative values lampooned in these films’ narratives” (Grant 10). Nevertheless, since Verhoeven’s obvious breaches are linked to the story and in a way contribute to the plot development, they are accepted by the audience. With the exception of *RoboCop*, such artificialities are strongly integrated in the narrative: characters that will be introduced later could be seen in the commercials in *Total Recall*. Likewise, Neil Patrick Harris is shown in the news reels in *Starship Troopers*.

Johnston identifies another convention of the science fiction genre stating that the “desire for a possible realism is not a requirement of science fiction, but most genre films relate aspects of their mise-en-scène to realistic traits” that audiences can relate to (Johnston 14). For example,

military costumes in *Starship Troopers* portray the future society through a fashion statement. The romantic lines in the trilogy also make the characters relatable. Other than that, the scholar identifies the “expectation of wooden or robotic acting styles” as the genre’s feature (20). In my opinion, the adherence to this convention allows Verhoeven to turn almost all of his protagonists’ scant cues into meaningful messages: in this case, the dialogues and monologues are employed to say more about American culture rather than move the plots along. Apart from that, Johnston underlines technology as one of the conventions of the genre: “many science fiction films contain a desire to portray new screen technology” (Johnston 18). For the most part, the characters in Verhoeven’s trilogy, like the viewers, receive their information via visual interfaces. To my mind, by endorsing one of Hollywood sci-fi conventions the Dutch director emphasizes the nation’s dependence on this kind of communication and information acquisition.

Lastly, Grant mentions that even a movie’s soundtrack can be conventional saying that the science fiction genre is usually prone to electronic music because of futuristic connotations (Grant 11). While the Dutch director’s movies don’t include electronic music per say, they all come with very prominent music themes that may be connected with action flicks. This is proof of Verhoeven’s hybridisation of genres which will be explained in detail later. What’s important to keep in mind is that the familiarity of conventions can be a source of parody. In fact, this is one of the reasons why all the familiar conventions in the director’s science fiction movies are so carefully recognized and reworked.

Another common element of a genre defined by Grant is iconography, a set of archetypal characters or particular objects (12). Johnston narrows down such iconographic elements of science fiction genre to “flying saucers, robots, ray guns and aliens” (Johnston 7). All of them are deconstructed by Verhoeven in his trilogy, despite the fact that they are present and introduced to the audience in a familiar way, especially in recognizable settings. According to the theorist, designing “near (or far) future habitats, ... is an important way that fantastic science fiction concepts can be at once iconographic and rooted in the familiar, the known” (Johnston 14). Grant states that the “physical space and time – where and when a film’s story takes place – is more a defining quality of genres than other” (Grant 14). The fact that Verhoeven constantly

switches between reality and dreams in *Total Recall*, the Earth and the distant planet Klendathu in *Starship Troopers* makes the spectators concentrate on the portrayal of future developments.

Among the common elements of a genre Grant also singles out stories and themes. Naturally, most genre films depend on the principles of classic narrative cinema. According to both Bordwell and Todorov, the narrative begins when the state of balance is disturbed and the hero must overcome the given obstacles. Bordwell says that such primary dramatic arc is usually accompanied with a second romantic plotline. As a consequence, the narrative is driven by the presence of conflicts. If scholars like Thomas Schatz attribute all conflicts shown in the movies to those between an individual and the social order, Grant mentions conflicts between heroes and villains. Nonetheless, it would be an inexcusable omission not to take into consideration internal conflicts, or, rather desires described by Sikov. To put it another way, in each movie of the trilogy the protagonists are guided by such conflicts: whether it's a recuperation of one's identity, search for a better life, or protection of one's home.

The classic Hollywood narrative structure usually offers an ending. Interestingly enough, Verhoeven doesn't give his audience a definite closure. To a certain extent, the finale of *Total Recall* is paradoxically more realistic as the viewers can't be sure of what happens to the protagonist after the ending credits. Grant writes that such lack of knowledge "is associated more with realist films" (Grant 16). Besides, Altman stresses that "the repetitive nature of genre films tends to diminish the importance of each film's ending, along with cause-and-effect sequence that leads to that conclusion. ... The repetitive and cumulative nature of genre films makes them also quite *predictable*" (Altman 24). Yet, Verhoeven's outstanding artistic decision was partially dictated by changes in the movie industry and American society's tastes, beliefs, and preferences too. Those changes resulted in the tendency to create sequels that started propelling in the 1980s and 1990s. Still, when analyzing the films it becomes clear that open ends are chosen to provide meanings rather than to catch up with the Hollywood practice.

The fifth common element outlined by Grant revolves around characters, actors, and stars. According to the theorist, in "genre movies characters are more often recognisable types rather than psychologically complex characters" (Grant 17). The theorist mentions both Vladimir Propp and Northrop Frye in order to explain character types and the set of their repetitive

actions. The former critic describes such actions as “functions”. To put it simply, they act in relation to their “significance for the course of the action” (Propp 21). For example, in *Total Recall* Kuato character’s objective is to help the protagonist fulfil his quest. In contrast, Frye acknowledges myth, romance, high mimetic, low mimetic, and ironic modes of fictional narration. However, it would be unfair to attribute only one mode to Verhoeven’s protagonists; the Dutch director breaks the conventions set by Hollywood again making his characters more complex.

Ed Sikov remarks that “audiences make immediate judgements about a character based on the actor’s face, or physiognomy” (Sikov 135). In fact, the way an actor looks on a physical level is crucial since characters can be described as types. Grant takes this argument further stating that “character actors contribute to the look of particular genres, populating the worlds of genre movies and becoming part of their iconography” (Grant 19). For example, although Ronny Cox is a very talented actor who has portrayed a diverse range of characters he’s mostly known for the performances he gave in *RoboCop* and *Total Recall*. Likewise, Michael Ironside playing Richter in *Total Recall* was so convincing that he was typecasted in *Starship Troopers* as a very rigorous and adamant man whose morals seem to be very questionable. Grant notes that at times actors are deliberately cast against their type (Grant 20). As a matter of fact, some directors jump at the opportunity of possible parody such miscasting can provide. In *Total Recall* the director practically dismantles the image of Arnold Schwarzenegger forged by his action flicks by placing him in a different generic context. In my opinion, this is one of the reasons why the audience refused to believe that everything in *Total Recall* was a dream. The actor is so strongly associated with action films that to have him fooled in the genre of science fiction was unacceptable.

The last common element that Grant distinguishes is viewers and audiences. The scholar sheds the light on the fact that a genre largely depends on the audience: “from the beginning movies have been promoted in the media primarily through their generic affiliations. They signal to prospective viewers the type of story as well as the kind of pleasure they are likely to offer” (Grant 20). Nevertheless, the audience depends on a genre too. In other words, a given genre can inflame expectations. The pleasure derived either from familiarity or variations ultimately can be

explained by introducing the term “hybridization”. Indeed, there’s a certain extent to which the audience is ready to bear with repetitions or alternations of recognizable formulas. Yet, Ira Jaffe denotes that rarely “are film genres as uniform or homogenous as some definitions imply” (Jaffe 132). Apart from Verhoeven’s borrowing from other media and reworking the genre of science fiction, he actually combines elements of various genres. Practically all of the three movies include components of western that will be discussed in detail in their analysis.

1.2 Shot-by-shot Analysis

Other than examining the genre constraints Verhoeven adroitly refrains, the film analysis of his science fiction trilogy should be conducted to comprehend how he satirizes American society and the country’s culture of the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, since a movie is a combination of techniques and meaning, the only way to grasp all the ideas of the films’ creators is to execute what Michael Ryan and Melissa Lenos call a shot-by-shot analysis. While it’s undeniable that the Dutch director’s movies must be subject to critical analysis (in terms of historical, psychological, ideological, gender, and political criticism) it’s also vital to interpret all the meanings his movies contain. As a matter of fact, since Verhoeven chooses to stay within the genre of science fiction his opinions may not be entirely obvious due to the constraints of fantastical elements of the narrative. Yet, drawing conclusions via shot-by-shot analysis is key: as Ryan and Lenos suggest, filmmakers “would not do certain things with technique in their films if they did not make sense to people They do them precisely because they know we in the audience will probably feel and think in response to them as they intend us to feel and think” (Ryan 12).

First of all, to explicate the meanings behind a film’s techniques, the fundamental elements of film analysis should be listed: *mise-en-scène*, camera movement, editing, production design, narrative, metaphors, and motives. According to John Gibbs, a *mise-en-scène* is “the contents of the frame and the way that they are organized” (Gibbs 5). The contents of the frame don’t only consist of objects and actors. In fact, the scholar stresses that they include everything the viewer sees in a film image: settings, properties, *décor*, costumes, make-up, and lighting. The

notion of composition also implies the relationship of actors towards each other depicted via their gestures and facial expressions. Besides taking into consideration the position of the characters, distribution of space, background and foreground, the scholars also suggest not to forget about the meaning behind symmetrical and uneven compositions. Other than being used to introducing various types of conflicts, they're also employed to lend themselves "to a sense of implied order in the world" (44). In my opinion, such reliance on orderly compositions in Verhoeven's movies couldn't be overlooked as it hints at the image of the world artificially constructed by the media. The fact that these compositions are also preferred to the uneven ones to show rebellion and chaos only reinforces the idea of how powerful the media can be.

Camera movement and cinematography should be regarded as the continuing elements of composition as they reveal "a sense of spatial coherence and expressive fluidity no static shot could ever achieve" (Sikov 25). Blain Brown evokes the "Hitchcock's rule", a point made by the famous director in the *Hitchcock / Truffaut* book: "a basic rule of camera position and staging is that the importance of an object in the story should equal its size in the frame" (Brown 54). Naturally, close-ups, medium shots, three-quarter shots, full shots, long shots, medium close-ups, extreme long shots are all used in Verhoeven's movies to convey different meanings, whether it's a sense of intimacy or objectivity. Similarly, eye-level, low-angle, high-angle, and bird's-eye shots are all employed to translate the character's feelings or development. Ryan and Lenos stress that film directors "often alternate long and close shots in the same sequence for semantic endings" (Ryan 56). For instance, in one of the battle scenes of *Starship Troopers* the medium shots of soldiers are juxtaposed to the extreme long shots of Arachnids. From my point of view, the director almost connects the American hegemony with the disturbance of the natural order.

The theorists also remark that if various types of shots along with zooms and at times focus pulls are mostly used to depict a certain character's involvement, pans are usually elaborated to show unity, especially in *Total Recall* and *Starship Troopers* (Ryan 60). Tilts are at work in *RoboCop* to emphasize the limited view of the transformed protagonist that at the same time echoes the narrow-mindedness of the OCP executives. Tracking and moving shots usually highlight either the degree to which the film's events affect the characters, be it asphyxiated citizens in *Total Recall* or countless victims in *Starship Troopers*. In scenes like these the choice

to turn to mobile framing is justified as it only reinforces the extent of horrendous control of those who're in power which is associated with news censorship and propaganda videos.

When it comes to editing, Verhoeven's sci-fi movies manifest the Classical Hollywood style which main goal is to "keep audience members so wrapped up in the fictional world created on screen that they cease to be conscious of watching a movie, and instead, believe that they are witnessing something real" (Sikov 61). This should come as no surprise since the main idea all the storylines revolve around is the media influence. Such style depends on continuity or invisible editing. According to Valerie Opel, the "narrative structure relies chiefly on enigma and resolution, a cause and effect relationship" (Opel 16). The scholar defines two dimensions that allow to achieve such coherence: spatial and temporal. While Verhoeven completely adheres to invisible editing in *Total Recall*, sequences are interrupted by fake commercials and news reels in *RoboCop* and *Starship Troopers*. As it turns out, the director deliberately doesn't stick to what Robert Edgar calls matching on action: "if the action is not matched, the cut would be visible, producing a noticeable jump" (Edgar 185). While, in my opinion, it would be quite a stretch to say that Verhoeven draws attention to cuts like that for an artistic purpose in his attempt at breaking the forth wall, it's undeniable that such editing is used by the filmmaker in order to satirize the short attention span of the American spectators making his movies resemble TV segments interrupted by commercials or news breaks. Ryan and Lenos point out that editing could also be utilized to reflect on the characters' transformation (for example, scenes with RoboCop's modification where every shot is equal to a short moment of consciousness), stage conflicts, and create parallels and contrasts. For instance, in *Starship Troopers* shots juxtaposing Rico's enlisting with Mobile Infantry with Carmen's becoming a spaceship pilot are associated with tightly framed barracks and loosely framed Rodger Young battleship. What's more, such contrast leads to the audience identifying with the protagonists in conformity with gender.

Ryan and Lenos enumerate such production design elements as setting, lightning, props and costumes, color, and sound. According to Heidi Lüdi, these components translate the film's ideas and depend on its genre at the same time: "The audience puts together the overall picture of the real or symbolic reference to the world and the possible meaning from the absorbed elements. ... conventions and expectations also influence film productions" (Lüdi 40). Thus, the futuristic

sets of *Starship Troopers* and locations featuring Mexican modern architecture in *Total Recall* do not only serve the purpose of the plot but also owe to the above-mentioned conventions of science fiction genre and aesthetic pleasure the viewer can derive from it. The expressive results of lighting should also be considered, for instead of using low key lighting Verhoeven mostly opts for bright lighting. According to Maria Pramaggiore, high-key “lighting tends to create a hopeful mood, appropriate for light comedies and for cheery scenes in musicals” (Pramaggiore 81). However, I’m inclined to believe that this deliberate choice permits to draw a parallel between the director’s shots and high and vivid colors of commercials. In a nutshell, this visual tension allows the audience to take a detached view and realize how sometimes the immersive nature of the media can be absurd.

The scholar also notes that props and costumes constitute characters and hint at their development (73). In addition to that, scholars like Jane Bardwell say that “props can be symbolic devices that reference themes that exist in the narrative” (Barnwell 75). Without a doubt, the costume of RoboCop plays a part as significant as multiple screens the audience sees in the background of many scenes throughout the film, for it signifies a hybrid human that is a consequence of the 1980’ corporate greed. When it comes to the use of color, most theorists agree that the semantic effect cineastes wish to produce goes hand in hand with the emotional factor: “filmmakers can pragmatically verify a desired emotional response to a color. ... colors are being [digitally] altered in order to emotionally emphasize a scene” (Bellantoni xxxi). Hence, the shade of red in *Total Recall* provokes feelings of anticipation and danger and blurs the line between dream and reality. As for the sound, Verhoeven works with both diegetic and nondiegetic sounds and music in a very sophisticated way. Despite what Ryan and Lenos call the primacy of the visual experience, the sound in this trilogy conveys more information about the world the characters live in, be it dialogue or silence (Ryan 110).

Verhoeven’s sci-fi trilogy features the three-act formula which, according to Jon Lewis, conforms to the hero narrative drawn up by Joseph Campbell: it involves “a lone male hero who must endure or fight to achieve his goal” (Lewis 27). Ryan and Lenos remark that in a heroic narrative “the hero embodies norms we all share, while the villain usually breaches those norms and violates the basic rules of civilization such as respect for life and property” (Ryan 121).

Interestingly enough, with the exception of *RoboCop*, the main characters in *Total Recall* and *Starship Troopers* are hardly the embodiments of the norms to be respected. Verhoeven takes the classic Hollywood formula and makes his heroes' quests either pointless since the pursuit of their objective isn't even real or questionable because the community the hero belongs to is the first to violate the rules of another civilization.

Discussing the narrative perspectives that determine the set of values the audience will adhere to, the scholars also highlight "that the basic format of the hero narrative has something to do with our need to reinforce the basic norms of our culture and of civilization" (Ryan 126). In the words of Ed Tan, characters are a source of identification and empathy for the viewers. The scholar asserts that an "empathetic emotion is characterized by the valence of the events in relation to the concerns of the protagonist. In the first place, misfortune for the character produces a negative emotion in the viewer, and good fortune a positive emotion" (Tan 171). To put it another way, regardless of the amount of satire and irony, the narrative perspectives invite the audience to endorse the beliefs of the protagonists without realizing how wrong or destructive their motives are.

Lastly, Ryan and Lenos mention structure, motif, and metaphor as the tools to provide meaning. From the theorists' point of view, while "structure describes the architecture of a movie, motifs are more like a thread of a different color from the main fabric that runs through a movie" (Ryan 137). Hence, one might argue that if the structure of Verhoeven's trilogy is the attempts of opposition to media control or, at the very least, its questioning, the main motif is the abundance of audiovisual manipulative material. As for metaphor, the scholar Trevor Whittock defines it as "the presentation of one idea in terms of another, belonging to a different category, so that either our understanding of the first idea is transformed, or so that from the fusion of the two ideas a new one is created" (Whittock 5). For instance, in *Starship Troopers* the image of thousands of soldiers driven by aggressive messages is compared to the one of the insects signaling their resemblance in terms of cruelty and mercilessness.

1.3 Theory of Remediation

Finally, since, in my opinion, one of the most convincing ways for Verhoeven to prove the atrocious and manipulative power of the media is to make the audience actually realize it by themselves rather than simply see it as part of the movies' narratives, the theory of remediation must be implemented in my analysis. In the introduction of their book "Remediation. Understanding New Media" Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin state that their main objective is to demonstrate that media today are interconnected. To put it precisely, while new media refashion older media, older media modify themselves in order to adjust and keep up with rapid developments (Bolter 15). To explain how the process of remediation takes place, the authors single out two methods: immediacy and hypermediacy which both new and older media rely on. W.J.T. Mitchell also emphasizes the strong link between media without trying to divide them into newer or older forms. Instead of pinpointing the ways that allow media to become interfluent, he simply notes that one medium could reside inside another one just like an organism resides in a habitat. When applying these theories today one should keep in mind the growing power of such phenomenon as interactive perception of media. In case of Verhoeven's trilogy one should focus on the remediation of such media as comic books, news reels, advertisements, propaganda videos, and commercials.

Since its introduction the theory of remediation has received a lot of scholarly attention. For this reason, in my analysis of Verhoeven's science fiction trilogy I apply findings of other theorists who have been contemplating various types of remediation focusing on specific media. Aside from that, the fact that Verhoeven adds diverse forms of footage as elements breaching the narratives could be ultimately narrowed down by the explanation of the logic of hypermediacy. In other words, every time the medium reminds of itself, the spectators get a chance to distance themselves from the action and assess the media power that is the subject of Verhoeven's inquiry. In contrast, the rest of the movies' narratives stems from the process of immediacy, and in this case, the media that are being refashioned into the medium of film might not be as easily identifiable as news reels, the Internet videos, and TV featurettes. In a way, the logic of

immediacy is the main device of the Dutch director to make the audience identify with the characters; it's what proves Verhoeven's point about the undeniable force of the media. For instance, the examination of *RoboCop* wouldn't be complete without linking the media influence shown in the movie with the ideas of Drew Morton. Since the scholar is more interested in the stylistic aspects of the process he suggests using the term "stylistic remediation". This theoretical approach is logical, as, though they're not immediately apparent, such stylistic components of comic books as strips, gutters, and contents of panels are all reworked in the movie. Hence, regarding *RoboCop* as a case in point of the medium of comic book refashioned into the medium of film, it seems logical to rely on publications of scholars like Mila Bongco and Steven Philip Jones who dedicate their research to comic books esthetics. Another medium that is remediated in the movie is the very experience of watching a tape. Barbara Klinger's ideas aid to explain how the repetitive nature of the protagonist's recorded videos substituting his memory help the audience relate to him.

As for *Total Recall* and *Starship Troopers* it's important to account for the fact that both productions are adaptations. In other words, they involve the remediation of the medium of book to the medium of film. As a consequence, in the analysis of these movies it's logical to depend on authors like David Wertheim and Linda Hutcheon, who pinpoint the differences between the two formats. On the other hand, it shouldn't be ignored that visual effects that are at work in film are outdated today and in no way increase a viewer's immediate experience. Unlike its predecessor where the following assumption could only be linked to the movie's plot, *Starship Troopers* could be viewed as an example of the medium of film where multiple elements of video games esthetics are refashioned. Moreover, the immediacy in this case is executed through interactivity. Several components borrowed from video games are present in *Starship Troopers*. To define them and link their use in various sequences that deliver Verhoeven's message it's convenient to turn to Mark J.P. Wolf. Short videos embedded into a game after a player finishes a level together with information they contain align with the addition of diverse footages throughout the film. It's also of great significance to cite Jessica Aldred's concept of "multiple perspectives", for the constant switching between male and female protagonists increases the spectators' engagement with the film. All in all, the afore-mentioned theories and theoretical approaches will help me reveal the powerful and manipulative influence of audiovisual media on

American identity: not only do Verhoeven's films deal with the depiction of capitalism, individualism, and patriotism, but they also allow for the analysis of how a Hollywood movie can manufacture the perception of those very concepts.

Chapter 2. RoboCop

According to Dominic Barton, Dezső Horváth, and Matthias Kipping, capitalism is “a system based predominantly on private ownership, individual incentives and rewards, and exchanges through markets” (Barton 3). Giving his own definition, John Kenneth Galbraith remarks that the system is linked to high social efficiency: “there could be no misuse. An innocuous role [is] assigned to government because there [is] little that [is] useful that a government could do” (Galbraith 12). Despite such advantages as higher employment and supplying the market with products that are in demand, the concept of capitalism is also intertwined with two complex notions. First of all, with such diminished role of the government, many assume that the system isn’t capable of asserting the wealth of the whole American populace. Moreover, as Barton remarks, some have suggested that it has “become detrimental not only for the economy, where long-term value creation is being sacrificed to the pressures of short termism, but also for society, where the gap between rich and poor has increased” (Barton 2). Other than that, scholars like Jürgen Kocka and Marcel van der Linden underline one feature as common for capitalism’s numerous definitions: “authors have used the concept to identify basic experiences of *their own time*, perceived as modern, new, and different from more traditional socio-economic relations. ... capitalism has always been a concept of difference” (Kocka 2-3).

In other words, when analyzing the ways Verhoeven criticizes the vices of American capitalism in *RoboCop*, one should keep in mind the disadvantages of the system and the historical setting the movie is part of. Indeed, FJ Rocca notes that the laissez-faire aspect of capitalism could be easily abused: “It is sometimes a means of acquiring wealth in unethical and even immoral ways. But, where there is a prevailing moral compass in society, capitalism also adopts that moral compass” (Rocca 51). In turn, the Dutch director does his best in order to depict the absence of such moral compass in American society in his film. Naturally, *RoboCop* does promote younger professionals’ desire to come up with their own initiatives and immediately monetize them. In fact, most of the characters in the movie enjoy a very high standard of living. Yet, the filmmaker shows what the innocuous role of government can lead to: the city of Detroit is under control of OCP executives, as the company is among the most

profitable ones. The businessmen's lifestyle vividly contrasts with the rest of society portrayed in the movie: while the aspiring yuppies live in luxurious houses equipped with huge TV screens in their living rooms, most of other citizens are seen in the streets having a difficult time to break out of the cycle of poverty, alcoholism, vandalism, and criminalism.

As for the second point, Rodney D. Peterson claims that "American capitalism has been, is, and will undoubtedly continue to be a system in transition. Technology perennially changes, ... , and society's institutions continually adjust to these technological changes" (Peterson ix). Needless to say, *RoboCop* captures how the technological advancements of the 1980s influenced the economic system's development. In his analysis of the decade Graham Thompson identifies the following features: genetic engineering, computer technology, and the emergence of video cassette. According to the scholar, the 1980s "was a time when a human body – its genetic structure and the possibility of altering this – was at the forefront of scientific developments. The radical nature of scientific enquiry was often driven by ... breakthroughs and discoveries" that "could be turned into profit" (Thomson 26). It goes without saying, that in the movie a significant amount of time is dedicated to the character of Alex Murphy (Peter Weller) being transformed into a hybrid. Verhoeven takes things to a certain extreme and instead of showing how Murphy's body could be altered, he hints at the fact that it's simply being used to constitute a part of the police reinforcement machine. Other than that, Thompson evokes home computers that became essential in every household in the 1980s. In the film, computer screens could be seen practically in every scene being strongly embedded in people's surroundings. Moreover, without their help, it's often impossible to look up information and, therefore, prove your point. Lastly, Thompson states that another cultural product contributing to a new form of cultural consumption in the decade was a video cassette that allowed to rewatch movies and shows and no longer depend on TV schedules. The theorist casts light on the fact that "the digital world which had for several years only been projected was now becoming a new order of reality and a new space in which culture would be produced and consumed" (30). For the most part, *RoboCop* is the story of a human adjustment to such consumerist reality.

The 1980s became the decade when the government supported big corporations and overlooked the needs of the middle-class. Nicolaus Mills states that the dream consumer of the

era became the yuppie. “It was the yuppie lifestyle that the Reagan administration had in mind when it adopted the Laffer curve, which said that if tax rates, especially at the upper level, were lowered, the rich would try to get even richer and in so doing improve the economy and government revenues” (Mills 15). Everette E. Dennis highlights that the 1980s are the time when “the entrepreneurial spirit and the ideology of consumerism ... are pushed beyond the limits of decency, good taste and social and moral control” (Dennis 44). In *RoboCop* Verhoeven depicts such decadence when the viewers witness the criminals robbing banks, selling and buying drugs. Hence, embracing the central principles of capitalism and abusing the notion of free enterprise, (most notably, the profit motive) undermine “the legitimate economy’s longstanding efforts to discipline its work force” (44). In an overexaggerated manner the Dutch director shows how the foundations of capitalism are dismantled in the society of Detroit. For instance, at a certain point one of the criminals says: “No better way to steal than free enterprise.” John Kenneth Galbraith points at the fact that the first requirement of the capitalistic classical system is competition: “This held that the act of producing goods provided the purchasing power, neither too much nor too little, for buying them. Thus, there was invariable equivalence between the value of what was produced and the purchasing power available to buy that production” (Galbraith 13). However, in *RoboCop* there’s no place for healthy competition: driven by corporate greed Dick Jones (Ronny Cox) chooses to eliminate his competitor Bob Morton (Miguel Ferrer).

The question becomes, how at a time where the difference between upper and middle class is so drastic, can people still be convinced of buying goods they don’t really need, and, more importantly, can’t even afford? George Ritzer and Zeynep Atalay draw attention to the fact that during the 1980s capitalism promised that everyone would get rich if they accepted its distorted values. The promotion of all the advantages the economic system could offer was effected via the media. As the scholars put it, the power of the media “was also geared up to tell everyone what was available and, crucially, to persuade people that this culture-ideology of consumerism was what a happy and satisfying life was all about” (Ritzer 193). Not surprisingly, with audiovisual materials becoming the essential and inescapable part of reality, people soon became bombarded with all kinds of information. The emergence of multiple music channels, appearance of cable television, and ability to watch movies on videocassettes only intensified the infamous short attention span ridiculed by Verhoeven in *RoboCop*. Ritzer and Atalay claim that

with the help of advertising the media reduce the time between production and circulation of different goods. Furthermore, the predominant ideology is instilled into people's minds by "the systematic blurring of the lines between information, entertainment, and promotion of products" (193). To put it precisely, almost everything is assessed from the consumerist point of view. As the Dutch director ironically notes, that also includes someone's memories and body, for RoboCop is property of OCP. As Morton announces, Murphy "doesn't have a name; he's got a program. He's product."

Since the notion of capitalism is inextricably interlaced with the historical era that influences its development, one should account for political changes when examining the movie. As Thompson asserts, Ronald Reagan became the symbol of consumption. The scholar quotes William Gibson who describes the president as a celebrity for whom "oppositions that traditionally organized both social life and social critique – opposition between surface and depth, the authentic and the inauthentic, the imaginary and the real, signifier and signified – seem to have broken down" (Gibson 18). To show the lack of American moral compass that was a logical result of consumerism executed with the help of the media Verhoeven takes recourse to the process of remediation and multiple filmic techniques.

When it comes to applying the theory of remediation to *RoboCop*, it makes sense to concentrate on the two following media: comic books and different types of TV footage. Interestingly enough, the comic book series of the same title span off after the movie's release, hence, *RoboCop* couldn't be considered as an adaption simply reworking one medium's form into another. Scholars like Drew Morton suggest concentrating on the stylistic aspects of the process. In doing so, the theorist wishes to differentiate his study with the term "stylistic remediation" which "can be generally defined as the representation of formal or stylistic characteristics commonly attributed to one medium within another" (Morton 5). The Dutch director pays attention to the fact that even though the movie had a comic book moral, the depicted events are more or less believable. Verhoeven asserts that the comic book aspect is rather stylistic: "When I started working on this project ... the first thing I read was a pile of comic books! ... Spiderman, Roboman, Ironman, etc. ... I studied pictures, the points of view, and the style. I also made the cinematographer, the technician and all of my collaborators read

them” (Barton-Fumo 50). In this regard *RoboCop* bases its remediation on the logic of immediacy and resorts to the following three stylistic characteristics of comic books: strips, gutters, and contents of panels.

According to Mila Bongco, if not placed in balloons narrative texts “are usually utilised to supplement images, as in providing additional information about critical persons or objects, expounding on the intervening events in the interval between panels, or reveal the internal thought of characters” (Bongco 70). These texts are called captions and superimposed over the imagery in panels. The medium of a movie provides sound, hence, doesn’t necessarily require textual captions. Nevertheless, put together with gutters these images reveal more information about the protagonist. For instance, in the sequence where RoboCop’s sensory reactions are tested, the *mise-en-scène* has Murphy strategically placed right next to four monitor screens that are clearly separated from each other. Hence, they resemble a comic strip where panels visibly divided by gutters. As Aylish Wood suggests, “since these screens show RoboCop’s visual field, the image must be being ‘seen’ by RoboCop, and what he sees is the same image of Clarence Boddicker” (Wood 70). Even though the filmmakers resort to associative editing to connect visual cues and the main character’s feedback, the comic book stylistic device is utilized to translate his internal thoughts.

Panels also influence such aspect of the movie as framing. As Steven Philip Jones alleges, “Time and Space are totally subjective in any comics story. Action in a story takes place at the same speed that a reader reads it, so ... it is up to the creator(s) of a comics story to communicate how much time passes between each panel” (Jones 29). In fact, one of the ways to manipulate the reader’s speed is to either break a scene into a series of panels or dedicate more space to it depending on its importance in the narrative. Opting for the former often leads to characters being tightly framed within one panel. In the movie, the filmmakers resort to tight framing in two-shots when two characters are placed in extreme proximity to each other. To my mind, such shots are utilized to draw a parallel between OCP executives and Boddicker’s gang: all of them lack a moral compass completely destroyed by abuse of the principles of capitalism. In contrast, RoboCop’s interactions with other characters are filmed in shot reverse shot sequences.

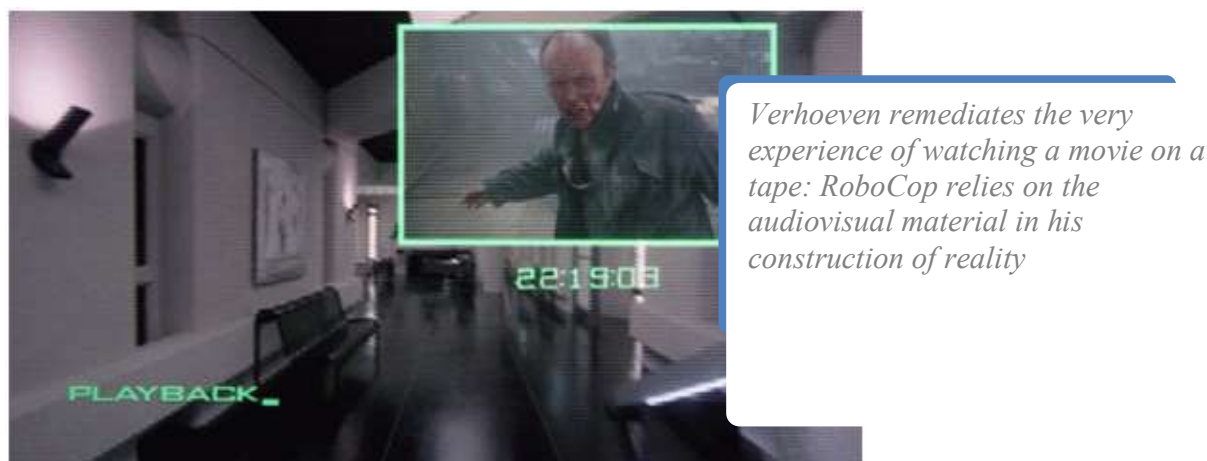


The use of two shots in the movie inspired by the comic books esthetics

Lastly, the contents of panels effect mise-en-scène and camera movement in some of the film's sequences. That is to say, the protagonist is often shown in the middle of the frame occupying most of it. With the exception of the scenes where such props as billboards, signboards, and furniture play a role in augmenting meaning, the characters stand out due to the sustained backgrounds. In the interview to *American Film* the Dutch director acknowledges the film's fast pacing present in spite of multiple layers of imagery. To achieve this effect the filmmakers used either 16mm or 25mm lenses which gave them "deep perspectives and sharpness all the way back" (Barton-Fumo 45). More than that, this kind of stylization results in certain kind of camera movement. To put it another way, unmotivated camera movements that Sikov defines as "those that pertain to the filmmaker's commentary on characters and events" are very few in numbers in *RoboCop* (Sikov 28). For the vast majority of scenes, especially the ones where the protagonist is on duty, camera movements are motivated, i.e. prompted by his actions. For instance, in the hostage situation sequence Murphy's blow is captured within three static frames with no major details in décor or interior dominating the background. At the same time, this rigidity permits to translate the movie's motifs and metaphors.

Another medium that is refashioned in the movie is the very process of watching a video cassette. In multiple sequences throughout the movie the protagonist could be seen relying on his memories, experiencing recurring dreams. Those flashbacks present themselves in the form of recorded videos that RoboCop usually rewinds either to get a grip of his remaining human identity or to render evidence to back up his charges. The scenes are easily identifiable as they constitute part of Murphy's vision. Recorded earlier, these short videos are embedded into the

main character's head-up display and feature the word "playback" only to emphasize the stylistic conventions generated by videotape image quality. RoboCop literally falls back upon the help of audiovisual material not only to execute his duties, but also to collect the remains of his human identity and take vengeance. In addition to that, adding shots substituting Murphy's point of view makes the audience sympathize with the protagonist.



According to Barbara Klinger, repetition “amplifies any domestic medium’s ability to become part of viewer’s daily lives, even part of their autobiographies, resulting in an intense process of personalization” (Klinger 139). The repetitive action of playing the clips recorded earlier comprises the essence of RoboCop’s identity, i.e. robot police officer. The scholar also argues that repetition confirms individual identities as it evokes strong emotions. In RoboCop’s case, memories in the form of prerecorded flashbacks frequently played after his transformation embody and reaffirm his hybrid nature. In fact, those short videos are the only thing that don’t fall under the main directives and that can’t be controlled by OCP. In my eyes, by borrowing from a domestic repetitive film screening the movie sheds light on the fact that once an audiovisual material’s emotional profile is known, “the viewer can screen it repeatedly to administer the kind of emotional “cure” sought” (164).

Moreover, the theorist underlines that viewers “may return to certain titles to amplify or change moods, to insulate themselves from the world, to address or compensate for problems, or to learn inspirational life lessons” (164). In the sequence where the protagonist visits his own house he awakes the most precious moments skipping the rest just like a viewer would fast-

forward to either the funniest, scariest, or most romantic parts of a movie depending on its genre. Klinger stresses that rewatching favorite movies can instruct and guide viewers, especially if it's a question of the future (167). When it comes to *RoboCop*, films are substituted by another audiovisual form, the short memory clips, where Murphy sees his wife confessing her love to him or preparing for Halloween with his family. They serve as an amplifying power for the character to get his revenge. As Bolter remarks, "film continues to offer metaphoric copresence through narrative identification, that is, by putting the viewer into intimate contact with the main character" (Bolter 23). This technique turns out to be crucial when the audience finds itself justifying some of Murphy's questionable actions.

Apart from using the logic of immediacy, repetition is also employed with hypermediacy coming into play. In this case, the footage mainly consists of television news sequences and commercials. Verhoeven notes that those sequences were shot digitally as it "brings an electronic feel to the image. The difference in style between the digital and the filmic image is what made shooting sequences appealing" (Barton-Fumo 52-53). By breaking the movie into three segments only to interrupt them with digital footage, the filmmakers rework the practice of watching a movie on television where commercials are inevitable. Klinger remarks that "repetition is a cornerstone of the consumer's experience of entertainment that has the potential to be as enjoyable as inescapable" (Klinger 136). In this way, reworking the very practice of watching a movie on television points at the development of taste among the audience. The theorist stresses that the fact that the viewers are ready to "watch the same texts over and over again on television – a medium some critics already associate with passive viewing – exacerbates the notion of mindless activity" (Klinger 164).

To my mind, the above-mentioned mindless activity of seeing the same footages on television contributes to thoughtless consumption. In fact, apart from directly adding the clips that look like commercials, Verhoeven remediates this medium with the logic of immediacy. Keesley says that "Verhoeven ... figured that a genre film with lots of action and little dialogue (English was still problematic for the Dutch director) would not be a bad choice for his first movie in the USA" (Keesey 95). Curiously enough, the inability of being fluent in English at that time and relying more on action scenes actually enabled Verhoeven to transform the movie itself

into one big commercial. In other words, characters' lines sound more like slogans. In addition to that, the action sequences make up for the simple storyline making spectators concentrate more on a meaning of one captivating scene rather than the whole film's message. In a way, the sequences in *RoboCop* look like commercial breaks where every episode features a character's cue at the end summarizing the message. In turn, such manner helps deliver the idea that Murphy is treated like a product fully under control of OCP. Fulfilling his responsibilities, he's devoid of any emotion which is clearly seen in the range of commercial-like scenes where Murphy comes to the rescue of Detroit's citizens. Instead of showing some compassion to the victims be it a woman he saves from a rape attempt, a couple whose shop's robbery he prevents, or hostages he frees, RoboCop simply does his job and then leaves to continue to execute his duties being accompanied by heroic music that due to its receptiveness starts to sound like a jingle.

The footage that differs from the rest of the movie stylistically is also linked to the logic of hypermediacy. *RoboCop* comprises what Sue Clayton aptly defines as "the three-act transformative character-arc model" (Clayton 178). Despite the adherence to invisible editing, these three acts are clearly identified not only due to the plot development but also to the insertion of news reels and commercials. Indeed, after each part the viewer witnesses the protagonist's transformation: from the cop Murphy, to RoboCop trying to remember his past, and finally, to the hybrid, Murphy who has accepted his new identity of RoboCop. According to Sikov, segmentation breaks the narrative down into components so that the meaning could be created. As the theorist puts it, "filmmakers use narrative structure not only to tell stories but to raise issues and make arguments, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly" (Sikov 108). Hence, the three-act structure is employed to address such issues as media omnipresence and to satirize the short attention span of the American audience. In my opinion, by choosing to "cover" topics of vital importance (such as riots, deaths, latest technological advancements) in the fake news reels and then interrupt them with commercials Verhoeven draws attention to how many significant issues remain unnoticed or ignored by the nation. To put it simply, a salient piece of information about the changes affecting the city the characters live in doesn't have a huge impact on them; ultimately, it's just another form of audiovisual material broadcasted on TV.

In order to understand the way Verhoeven depicts the ubiquitous presence of the media and contorted capitalistic values in people's lives, it makes sense to focus on such filmic techniques as motives. Conforming to the definition outlined by Ryan and Lenos, in the case of *RoboCop* they could be put in the following categories: things and evocative thematic elements. The former comprises the enormous amount of TV and computer screens, both in the background and in the foreground, often shown in the film's pivotal scenes. As for the latter, themes like corporate greed and corruption run throughout the whole movie. They're all shown through such editing technique as the combination of similar shots. For example, in order to portray the corporate greed that drives merciless OCP executives as well as the criminals, the shot of Bob Morton's dead colleague lying on the mock-up of the future Delta City is later mirrored by Clarence (Kurthwood Smith) throwing one of his team mates onto Lewis' (Nancy Allen) car. The capitalistic aspirations are so prevalent, there's no room for camaraderie or empathy left. After the ET 209's slaughter Morton coldly comments: "Life in a big city". Similarly, before throwing his partner out of the truck Clarence mockingly asks him: "Can you fly, Bobbie?"



The editing technique of mirroring various scenes is used to remind the audience of the power of the media

Other than that, this editing technique addresses the issues of the media influence not only on the populace in the movie but on the audience too. The scene of the main character's murder makes the viewers sympathize with him and root for him every time he gets a chance to seek his revenge. For instance, to prevent crime and not let a white collar that's lost his job kill innocent victims, RoboCop chooses to throw him out of the window. Despite the fact, that he's a cop and his job is to arrest, he simply eradicates what seems to be one of the consequences of the

80's capitalism, the middle class' despair and disappointment in the system. This scene foreshadows the movie's finale where the protagonist shoots Jones regardless of stating that the man is under arrest. By making the viewers emphasizing with Murphy Verhoeven provokes them to accept this violent form of justice. In this regard, the Dutch director proves how deceitful the image (walking over water as a saint figure) and its true meaning (assassination instead of forgiveness) could be.



The slaughter of the OCP executive is mirrored by the murder of one of Boddicker's teammates

Lastly, the thematic element of consumerism is also depicted via the usage of this cinematic tool. To underline the idea of people being treated as objects the following juxtaposition of two identical shots is utilized to predict the film's future events. The story starts with Murphy being transferred to Detroit's police department after one of the officers' murder. Emptying Frank Frederickson's locker Sergeant Warren Reed (Robert DoQui) removes the locker plate with his name delivering the lines: "Funeral's tomorrow. The department asks all officers not on duty to attend. Donations for the family to be given to Cecil... *As usual.*" His words suggest that this has happened many times before. The cop was gunned down by Boddicker. As a consequence, the ending of this sequence where Murphy's plate is captured in the similar close-up signals that the same thing awaits him too.



The editing technique of mirroring various scenes is used to portray the absence of moral compass provoked by consumerist worldview: a human life is easily replaceable

As for the motives that fall into the category of objects, one couldn't simply ignore the abundance of various screens in the movie. First of all, the viewers are reminded of their own screens they're watching the movie on because of the stylistically modified image used to differentiate news reels and commercial segments from the rest of the film. Secondly, Verhoeven satirizes the total dependence on the media in everyday life. For instance, Jones relies on the audiovisual materials during his presentation of ET 209 to convince the board of its advantages. Multiple screens could be seen in the background making them a significant part of the conference room's interior. Before revealing the droid Jones describes the current situation in Detroit noting the rise of crimes. His audience becomes aware of the city's criminal rates only because of the videos put up together for the presentation. One might suggest that the filmmakers imply that those who have power can construct their own version of reality using media. Indeed, executives and the OCP President have no idea who orchestrates all that chaos. Similarly, in the scene where Jones informs Morton of his future death he chooses to do that by delivering a video message with Boddicker.



The characters' complete reliance on the media in their everyday life: they deliver and receive information with the use of audiovisual materials

More importantly, diverse filmic techniques permit to render the image of someone who has to adjust to the era of the 1980s, marked by capitalistic perverted ethics and the media influence: the very identity of RoboCop is constructed through the media. In fact, the very first time the spectators can see the transformed version of Murphy, they see only a glimpse of his costume on the small screen during Morton's presentation. To my mind, the filmmakers stress that the figure of RoboCop is from now on a part of American culture and entertainment, a construction of a concrete medium, a movie. In contrast, besides highlighting this idea of artificiality, the protagonist's dreams are also shown on two screens while the other two film his movements and reactions. As a consequence, dreams, the most intimate and perhaps human element left in Murphy other than his memories, are visible for everyone. To my way of thinking, the filmmakers accentuate how immoral media could be: the aim is to reveal Murphy's hybrid's nature without any consideration for his feelings. Likewise, once the man RoboCop throws out the window lands on the ground, journalists and cameramen quickly gather around him. The director of photography, Jost Vacano, mockingly films them capturing the fall lowering their cameras in unison. Their goal is to promote RoboCop as the future of law enforcement.



The first time the audience sees the transformed version of Murphy, it's on a screen. Later on, his memories and dreams are also shown on different computer and TV screens

The spectators see how deeply television is integrated into other peoples' lives in the movie. To put it precisely, phrases from commercials and the luxurious way of life are so deeply implanted in their minds they all aim for that kind of lifestyle. For instance, after the successful RoboCop launch, the new OCP president refuses to join his colleagues for handball explaining: "I've got a date, a couple of models are coming to my place. You know what I mean?" The colleague, indeed, knowingly replies: "I'd buy that for a dollar." Finally, throughout the movie various characters could be seen watching TV. Curiously enough, the infamous commercial which slogan Morton's colleague quotes is added in many scenes, including the one with the couple who almost got robbed or one of the Boddicker's team mates. Watching TV seems to be the only activity the citizens of Old Detroit engage in. In my opinion, RoboCop's actions correlate with the attempts at breaking out of this vicious cycle.



The characters' lifestyles are influenced by the media. The perfect consumers (also known as yuppies) aim for luxury

That is to say, the protagonist breaks TV and computer screens on many occasions revealing his frustration with those artificial constructions of reality. Indeed, for him those actions become necessary, as he's the one who desperately tries to rediscover his true identity. For example, in the scene where Murphy rushes to the police department to use the database he employs his terminal strip. The device comes out of his middle knuckle, thus, making it seem like he gives people the finger. This "middle finger" is inserted into a data port of a device used for showing audiovisual materials. Similarly, in the scene where RoboCop visits his house he's first greeted with the recorded video message of a realtor saying: "Welcome, shopper. Let's take a stroll through your new home." The screen is strategically placed in every room of the house only to interrupt RoboCop's attempts at memorizing the most intimate and valuable memories of his past life. The whole sequence ends with the protagonist smashing the screen in reaction to the realtor asking: "Have you thought it all over? Why not make me an offer?"



The protagonist's multiple attempts at breaking out of the media influence

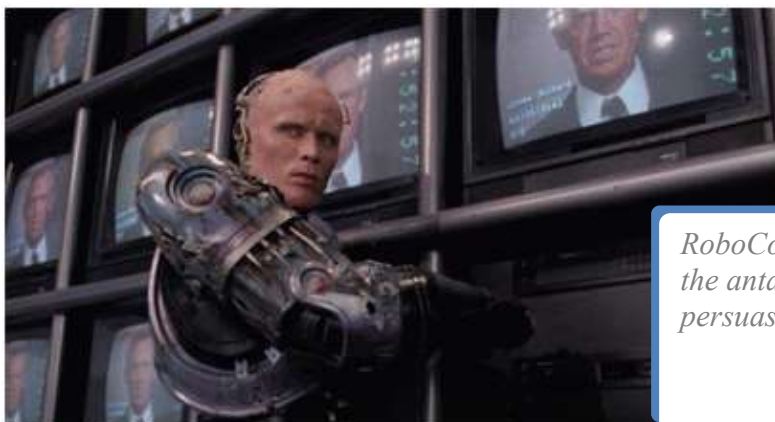
The metaphors play an important part in the movie's analysis too. I'm inclined to believe that they fall into the following two categories. Such vices as vanity and greed are mostly displayed via metonymy. Jon Lewis defines it as "a type of metaphor in which a thing is represented through one of its attributes" (Lewis 58). Thus, the mock-up of Delta City replaces the image of the future Detroit controlled by Jones' enforcement droids and bogged in crime generated by Boddicker. The shot of a murdered executive whose blood stains the scale model signals either the amount of victims who have already suffered from the present policy or the number of those who won't be able to withstand Delta City's regime. Asking Boddicker to destroy RoboCop so that the police officer won't mess with his plans Jones notes: "Delta City

begins construction in two months. That's million workers living in trailers. That means drugs, gambling, prostitution. Virgin territory for the man who knows how to open up new markets. One man could control it all... Clarence.”

According to Angela Ndaliansis, in *RoboCop* “Verhoeven merges SF with Western action and cop film conventions, and the union (particularly in relation to the Western) becomes a potent, parodic tool” (Ndaliansis 12). To put it precisely, RoboCop’s skill of twirling his gun that impresses his son so much is multi-layered. First of all, the Dutch director implies that Americans are introduced to cinema (in particular, the US productions) and fascinated with it from a very young age. Murphy’s son asks him to perform this action associating his father with a hero because of those Western filmic codes. Second of all, this memory is not only the key to tracing his identity but also one of the few unique features the protagonist still possesses after his reincarnation. In this regard, his individuality has been cut down to only one specific feature that is supposed to distinguish him from others but ironically stands for a great Western hero’s characteristic.

In his interview to *L’Ecran Fantastique* given in January 1988, Verhoeven stated that *RoboCop* doesn’t really have a message. To the director, the movie is a complete fantasy depicted in the form of a comic book scenario. However, the segmentation reveals an implicit argument about the search of identity highly manipulated by the media and transformed due to the capitalistic changes of the 1980s. Despite the seemingly pessimistic ending, the director himself points at a message full of resilience and acceptance of oneself and immortality of the soul. “Let’s just say that the theme of the film is this: that no matter what we do to the soul, if the body remains it will find a way to transcend it” (Barton-Fumo 50). J.P. Telotte also denotes that OCP has no control over emotional bonds with family and longing for it. Indeed, in spite of having implanted memory chips and controlling software, Murphy’s urge to reconnect with his loved ones hints at the impossibility of controlling the nation via images and messages. The theorist states that “love persists, even if only as a dream” (Telotte 170). Moreover, in his final attempt at disrupting the media’s power RoboCop kills Jones implementing the villain’s own means. As Telotte highlights, “the same wall of video monitors Jones had previously employed for his ED 209 presentation, this mechanical mediation of humanity (RoboCop) replays a

confession he has recorded, thereby turning the media against Jones” (176).



RoboCop turning tables on Jones using the antagonist's own means of persuasion and influence

Yet, the movie's ending appears to be dubious. Regardless of the fact that at the end of the film the society seems to be restored once all the villains are either killed or destroyed, the scene where RoboCop acknowledges his new social role hints at the inevitability of capitalism power. Indeed, when the OCP president asks what the protagonist's name is, "Murphy" sounds more like a brand; the feeling is reinforced due to the commercially stylized scene. Indeed, RoboCop provides the executives with the recording of Jones' statement, proves him guilty, and finally kills him. The president is impressed with his work, but by asking his name he makes RoboCop present himself as a product to be bought and used. The whole sequence looks like a commercial to convince police force to use titanium armor robots. Murphy's spectacular walking off after having showed what he's capable of only emphasizes that impression. As a matter of fact, after the crucifixion the protagonist's lines are reduced to one-liners like "dead or alive you're coming with me." In this way, after having accepted his new identity Murphy comes to terms with the fact that the only way for him to exist is to become part of capitalistic world and be useful as an efficient product. Unlike in *Total Recall* and *Starship Troopers*, the simple act of acknowledging the impact of the media isn't enough to escape it. Although the protagonist takes off his helmet that, from Telotte's point of view, "has conditioned and limited how he sees and functions in this world," he can't break out of the system (Telotte 174). The human interactions and lives are so devalued in the movie's techno-capitalist society, the only way for the populace to fit in is to accept its cruelty just the way the audience, misled by the medium's capacities, accepts RoboCop's questionable form of justice.

Chapter 3. Total Recall

American individualism is inextricably intertwined with the notion of polarity. In his book “Making America: The Society & Culture of the United States” Luther S. Luedtke refers to the scholar David Potter who notes that this trope has been associated with conformity. “The most disconcerting fact about these two composite images of the American is that they are strikingly dissimilar and seemingly inconsistent with one another as two interpretations of the same phenomenon could possibly be” (Luedtke 23). In his discussion of postindustrial American society James E. Block cites authors who hold contradictory opinions about the national trait. On the one hand, he cites Theodore Roszak, Henry Malcolm, and Kenneth Keniston who basically claim that shifting from work to self-expression would only contribute to autonomy and confirm one’s individuality in various spheres (Block 11). On the other hand, the theoretician refers to Daniel Bell, Philip Rieff, and Richard Sennett who think that such developments didn’t lead to “increased freedom but a retreat to primitive emotional life in which apparent autonomy and individuality concealed deep levels of psychological dependence, disorientation, and conformity” (11). Hence, if the former group considers the new character as adaptive, the latter decries the level of conformism.

In order to define the contradiction that shaped American behavior and institutions, Claude S. Fischer suggests using the term of voluntarism. The scholar states that individuals in American society are voluntarily bound to different associations: “Unlike individualism, voluntarism incorporates, even celebrates, group affiliation. Indeed, in this worldview, individuals pursue their personal goals *through* the voluntary association” (Fischer 368). Determining contractualism as an indispensable feature of American voluntarism Fischer then defines the line between individual agency and commitment to a group: “So long as someone chooses freely to remain an American, he or she owes the nation loyalty” (369). Nonetheless, holding the view of Robin M. Williams Jr., the theorist acknowledges that in the country’s culture it’s more common to consider an individual as a source of meaning and responsibility. The elusive definitions of duties and responsibilities someone bears as a member of a group constitute the topic Block focuses on. The scholar remarks that “the combined inference emerging from the various perspectives ... was that significant pressure toward conformity and

group accommodation had shaped self-formation throughout the course of American history” (Block 12).

In *Total Recall* Verhoeven satirizes the idea of conformism being closely linked to individualism. To put it another way, the protagonist’s identity is affirmed within the realm of heroic actions and excessive masculinity implemented once the group, the mutants of Martian community, is endangered. However, not only Quaid’s figure (Arnold Schwarzenegger) of a super hero is deconstructed, the very decision to pursue such a noble goal is in no way personal. Quite on the contrary, bombarded by commercials and news segments concealing the truth, just like many other inhabitants of Earth he buys into the promise of a more interesting life. Although never clearly portrayed, the nation’s gullibility is unmistakably implied. Regardless of whether Earth’s citizens or the Martian mutants are shown, they seem to function within the groups they belong to taking minimum action outside of these constructions and never questioning the higher authorities’ privileges. Even though there are rumors of a revolution breaking out at any moment on Mars mentioned at the beginning of the movie, the spectators soon learn that Kuato is a mutant who’s simply incapable of doing much without Quaid’s help. As for the citizens of Earth, with the exception of Lori (Sharon Stone), they don’t show their dissatisfaction with the media’s ubiquitous presence. Having become accustomed to numerous TV screens in subway cars up to the point where they don’t even question the reasonableness of offered products or statements made by the future’s leaders.

In addition to that, together with the screenwriters Ronald Shusett, Dan O’Bannon, and Gary Goldman Verhoeven bases the movie’s narrative on the very idea of duality. In the commentary track the director and Schwarzenegger cast light on the fact that throughout the whole movie the plot makes the audience wonder if what is happening on the screen is real or just a memory implanted in Quaid’s brain at Recall. For instance, among the first sequences the spectators witness the protagonist confessing to his wife that he feels like he’s missing out and the life of a middle-class worker isn’t fulfilling. Lori does her best to soothe her husband but is then portrayed worried in a close-up. This shot leaves the viewers guessing whether she’s really concerned with Quaid’s state of mind or if she’s Cohaagen’s agent. In another sequence the main character is shown confessing to his friend Harry (Robert Constanzo) that he’s been thinking of

giving Rekall's memory trips a try. Harry strongly discourages the idea and is also depicted at the end of the sequence looking perplexed. Similarly, it leaves the audience imagining if Harry is genuinely clutched as one of his acquaintances got lobotomized after visiting the company and he doesn't want the same thing to happen to Quaid or if he's Coahaagen's agent now determined to undermine the protagonist's desire to recollect his memories about Mars.

Furthermore, whether it comes to the juxtapositions of characters, colors, or sets, oppositions are abundant in *Total Recall*. However, in order to understand how they're all at work to visualize the influence of the media on the protagonist's identity and individualism's complete substitution with conformity, one should start with the implementation of remediation theory. Naturally, the process of reworking the novel's storyline into the film's plot determines the filmic techniques utilized to provide a more negative account on the complex notion of American individualism. In contrast to *RoboCop* where the remediation is effected both via immediacy and hypermediacy, *Total Recall* mostly comprises immersive sequences with nondiegetic sounds. Scholars like David Wertheim stress Bolter and Grusin's definition of remediation as "the transformation of one medium into another with the aim of obtaining a more direct connection with reality" (Wertheim 161). Naturally, in comparison with Philip K. Dick's short story "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale", the viewers don't have to overcome the barrier of written language. The theorist states that the "departures from the precise details described in [the] book are therefore compensated for by an experience which pretends to be more real as it is more direct, or in Bolter and Grusin's vocabulary of remediation: more "immediate" (161). To my mind, the choice to rely more on immediacy while dealing with the theme of artificially implanted memories incites the audience to speculate whether the story taking place is real or part of the hero's imagination. Plus, it leaves more room for examining the binary nature of the concept of American individualism. Lastly, according to the Internet Movie Database, *Total Recall* was one of last studio productions "to make large-scale use of miniature effects as opposed to CGI. It was also one of the first major Hollywood blockbusters to use CGI (mainly for the scenes involving the X-Ray scanner)." As a matter of fact, the movie won in the Special Achievement Award category for its visual effects in 1991's Academy Awards.

Nonetheless, I'm inclined to believe that the technological developments in computer generated imagery shouldn't be neglected. What's more, scholars like Scott Bukatman and Vivian Sobchak remark that CGI advancements affect the very spectatorial relationship with the projected images. In their conversation published on the official web-site of "The Journal of e-Media Studies", the two discuss CGI influences on the materiality of the image. Bukatman notes that nowadays "digital effects are integrated seamlessly into all kinds of film, to the point where we don't always know that we're seeing something computer generated." In turn, Sobchack pinpoints the two ways CGI could be added to a film. According to her, it's either fully "integrated into a narrative but still visible as such" or "fully integrated into the image to the degree that it's not visible and we're not really noting it as a difference." To prove her point, the theorist states that if earlier amoral or questionable scenes featuring live performances would make the audience cringe, now the spectators are well aware that such images are made through CGI. As a consequence, due to their subconscious realization of the artificially built universe, the contemporary viewers familiar with much more advanced Hollywood blockbusters are both engrossed with the film and reminded of the medium at the same time. Indeed, now appearing dated in comparison to such effects as motion capture, performance capture, and contour reality capture, the visual effects in *Total Recall* employed in the process of the novel's remediation could also be viewed in the realm of hypermediacy.

Total Recall is *loosely* based on the short story "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale" written by Philip K. Dick and published in 1966. Linda Hutcheon highlights that in the case of most adaptations the core element that's been transported from one medium to another is the story itself (Hutcheon 10). Undoubtedly, the filmmakers weren't significantly constrained by technology as Dick's story was turned into a film 24 years after it was published. Thus, the choice to considerably alter the plot was deliberate. To put it precisely, in the movie the unsuccessful attempt at implanting the memory of Quaid's trip to Mars contains the short synopsis of the future events. Because of this and the hero's aforementioned interactions with his wife Lori and friend Harry, the audience is left to guess from the very beginning whether what's happening after the visit to ReKall is real or part of the purchased memory. After Ernie (David Knell) and Dr. Lull (Rosemary Dunsmore) insert the 41A cassette into the console the sequence is juxtaposed with the conversation between Dr. McClane (Ray Baker) and another client. In this

way, parallel montage allows to create suspense, for it's never clear at what point Quaid starts "acting out the secret agent role from his Ego Trip" and whether he does that in the first place, since there's no evidence that he couldn't as well be a real government agent.

In line with the idea of duality on which the film is based, the filmmakers take recourse to invisible editing. Utilized to engross the viewers more in the universe created onscreen, continuity editing keeps the narrative "moving forward logically and smoothly, without jarring disruptions in space or time, and without making the audience aware that they are in fact watching a work of art" (Sikov 63). Nonetheless, in this particular case, the logic of immediacy only increases the viewers' doubts. In addition to that, it's vital to keep in mind that Verhoeven uses cutting instead of crosscutting. According to Jon Lewis, crosscutting is "the process of cutting back and forth between parallel actions" (Lewis 144). As a consequence, editing doesn't alternate between different lines of actions that occur in different places. As Bolter and Grusin state, new media present "themselves as refashioned and improved versions of other media" (Bolter 15). In other words, the story's extremely short paragraphs are substituted with fast paced episodes. As Hutcheon puts it, in the process of adaptation pacing "can be transformed, time compressed or expanded. Shifts in the focalization or point of view of the adapted story may lead to major differences" (Hutcheon 11). Naturally, transforming a 17-page-long story into a full-fledged film results in the creation of additional storylines, and, more importantly, requires stretching the intrigue throughout their whole duration.

The two following examples of the medium's remediation that deal with the transformation of the narrative units help explain how Verhoeven constructs the negative account of American individualism. If in the movie Quaid's mission is to liberate the human colonists of Mars from Coahaagen (Ronny Cox), in the story the protagonist's memories reveal that he was visited by aliens at the very young age. Being mesmerized with his empathy and innocence they decided not to invade Earth. In other words, by simply being alive the hero remains the most important person on the planet. To use Fisher's terms, the movie shows the protagonist achieving his individual goals within the group he used to belong to, and to which he, therefore, is supposed to be loyal to. Block stresses that by the 1980s the difference between the two opposite opinions on what American individualism really is (either the national character could be

regarded as adaptive or simply degraded and conformist) was extremely vague. Moreover, “the combined inference emerging from the various perspectives ... was that significant pressures toward conformity and group accommodation had shaped self-formation throughout the course of American history” (Block 12). Verhoeven opts for the latter point of view, concentrating more on the concepts of degradation and conformity.

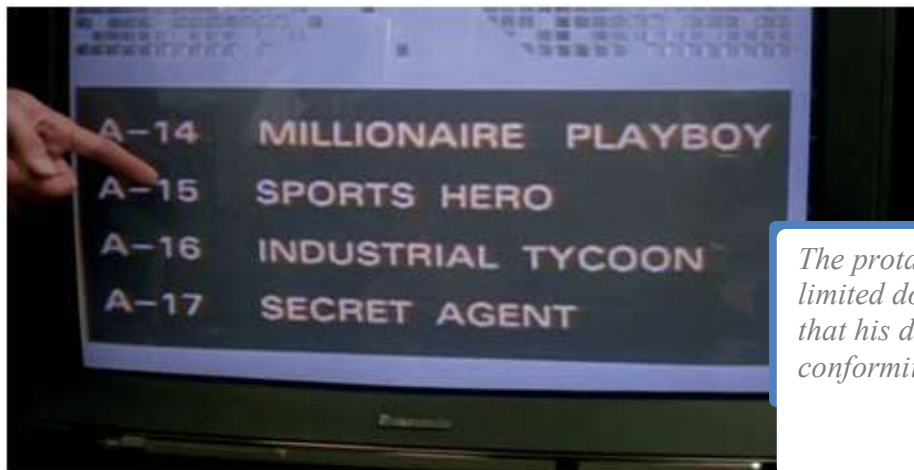
Scholars like Amaya Fernández-Menicucci also focus on the negative consequences the belonging to an association might lead to. The protagonist is part of the working class and is not only bombarded by the commercials promoting Rekall’s trip packages but has to settle with fake memories rather than a real vacation. The pervasive presence of the company’s advertisements suggests that Quaid is not the only one who might be buying into Rekall’s promises. What’s more, Harry warns him against going there, as one of his friends has already gotten lobotomized after accepting Dr. McClane’s offer. Fernández-Menicucci underlines that once the memory has been implanted, Quaid finds out that he’s already “who he longs to be: the adventurous, powerful, invincible embodiment of archetypical masculinity” (Fernández-Menicucci 7). Apart from that, relying more on his agency in the movie rather than contenting himself with the significance of his very existence, the main character eventually takes “over strategic and political power as well” (7-8). Block also evokes the concept of authority noting the ever-present challenge of identifying the collective dimension of American individualism. According to the theorist, the reconstruction of “the discourse on modern individualism and the constitution of liberal society must begin by acknowledging the primordial role of authority in constituting all cultures, in shaping a society’s citizenry and framing its institutions” (Block 17).

To put it another way, *Total Recall* shows Mars under control of corrupt Chief Administrator, Vilaos Coahaagen. In the sequence where Quaid and Lori watch the news reel about a revolution that might break on the planet at any moment, the audience can witness Coahaagen’s statements the protagonist blindly believes in. Having been transformed into a tourist attraction, Mars still remains a settlement that requires its own administration. After finding out “the truth” the main character’s convinced that the establishment of collective dimension is only possible if he succeeds in ending Coahaagen’s tyranny. Nonetheless, Quaid soon discovers that he has always been the villain’s agent. Even though the protagonist chooses

to liberate the Martian mutants and to start the reactor to restore air into the Martian atmosphere, in the process he nearly transforms into his antagonist. In fact, Fernández-Menicucci points out that by “shifting the target of his violence from the ‘good’ guys to the ‘bad’ ones” the hero “justifies territorial colonisation and the murder of Dr. Edgemar, a terrified and unarmed man, as well as that of the woman with whom he had been romantically involved” (Fernández-Menicucci 15). Apart from that, it’s never clear whether Rekall’s Ego Trip comes with a story where Quaid has been Hauser, one of Coahaagen’s closest allies or whether he truly realizes that he’s been fighting a wrong battle and now has to bear his responsibility towards the group he belongs to. Either way, since the main character together with Milena (Rachel Ticotin) saves the planet, one might assume that he’ll become Mars’ next Administrator. In my opinion, this is where Verhoeven draws a parallel between the antagonist’s greed and despotism and the protagonist’s violent measures to reconstruct authority hinting at the meaninglessness and, more importantly, fakeness of revolution under Quaid’s command. Indeed, the hero is able to achieve his personal fulfillment within the given association, that of the Martian mutants. At the same time, he was fed by the fake promises of the talented salesman, Dr. McClane, and influenced by multiple media that only unify people’s desires. In this regard, the collective dimension on Earth is acquired at the cost of free choice and individuality. Other than that, Quaid’s Godlike status accompanied with the blue sky and modification of the Martian settlement resembles the concept of American Jesus defined by Verhoeven in his own discussion of *RoboCop*. Like Murphy, the character of Schwarzenegger doesn’t waste a second to ponder the horrendous degree of violence he generates throughout the film (Keeseey 106).

From Fischer’s point of view, American voluntarism “combines the autonomous self *and* commitment to ... freely formed groups. ... Groups must be voluntary if they join together autonomous selves; members must be autonomous for a community to be voluntary” (Fischer 369). Curiously enough, in *Total Recall* such association affiliation is not only involuntary but also artificially constructed. In the scholar’s terms, the character of Schwarzenegger pursues his personal goal through the association of the resistance organized by Kuato. Yet, one should keep in mind that this experience is part of the purchased memory offered by Rekall. The society the main character belongs to is in no way free: despite the fact that Quaid confesses to Lori that he feels like he was made for more than a construction worker’s life , the choice he ultimately

makes has been premeditated. For instance, in the sequence of the protagonist's consultation with Dr. McClane the viewer can see the four identity options the company offers its clients.



The protagonist's choices are limited down to four meaning that his desire to break out of conformity is in no way unique

Moreover, since Quaid belongs to the working class he has to settle with a cheaper version of his vacation. After experiencing an episode of schizoid embolism and believing that he's chased by Mars intelligence officials the main character ends up in a subway car, the same place where he first saw the Rekall's commercial featuring Dr. Edgemar (Roy Brocksmith). However, this time the audience sees the footage of the company's competitor promoting the space travel in the old-fashioned and presumably affordable way. In other words, Verhoeven shows how advertisements are designed for different groups depending on their lifestyle and income. In Fischer's terms, the members of associations depicted in the film are in no way autonomous but are forced to remain within those groups, as their very needs are being meticulously manufactured for them. Indeed, in the scene where Dr. McClane is in a meeting with "a very important client" (who, based on her looks and capricious mannerism is supposedly wealthier than Quaid) the audience witnesses the talented salesman relying on the company video clips specifically chosen for rich female clients who would love to go on a vacation with a handsome partner. On top of that, the film portrays how the citizens are literally being bombarded by the media.



The members of different associations are forced to remain within their groups, as their very needs are being meticulously manufactured for them

For example, the aforementioned space travel commercials are simultaneously broadcasted on multiple TV sets installed in every subway car. The filmmaker points at the fact that the media has so strongly implanted itself into the environment, people don't even acknowledge it anymore. To reinforce this idea, Verhoeven doesn't turn to the use of commercial breaks or news reels based on the logic of hypermediacy the way he did in *RoboCop*. Quite on the contrary, if in the director's previous film such footage symbolized the protagonist's desire to break away from the manipulated society, in *Total Recall* the main character seems to be guided by it. The depictions of media are not only blended into the narrative inciting the events in the second and third acts of the film but also constitute a significant part of production design helping to emphasize the idea of duality. If RoboCop desperately tries to reconstruct his authentic identity, Quaid is dissatisfied with the existing one. He relies on media not to rebuild what was lost but turns to its promise of a better life and opportunities of fulfillment.



The protagonist is not only surrounded but also guided by the media

Another case in point is the huge TV screen built into the wall Quaid turns on to watch news at the beginning of the movie. As Verhoeven and Schwarzenegger assert in the audio commentary, the protagonist only gets to hear one side to a story. Plus, focusing a lot on the state of affairs on Mars television seems to cater to the promotion of the planet as of a tourist attraction and only reaffirms Coahaagen's totalitarian tendencies. In fact, the only character who seems to acknowledge media influence and doubt the reliability of information resources is Lori. First concluding that the reason why the character's weird fascination with Mars is turning into an obsession is him watching too much news, she then is mesmerized with how easily Quaid can believe everything Coahaagen says. Noting that a revolution can break on Mars at any moment Lori hears Quaid citing the Chief Administrator's promise to restore peace. "You actually believe him?" she asks in amusement. Interestingly enough, all of the character's attempts at bringing her husband to his senses are immediately suppressed. Moreover, after the encounter with Dr. Edgemar where the protagonist is given the last chance to accept the fact that he's been acting out the role of a secret agent of his Ego Trip, Quaid kills Lori. In this regard, the character consciously renounces to any other alternative perspectives and happily continues to be an easily manipulated member of the society under control of corrupt leaders and greedy salesmen. To make the point even more obvious and to show how much pleasure Quaid gets from his own delusion, Verhoeven ridicules the character having him say a one-liner that would be typical and appropriate for extremely masculine super heroes, "consider it a divorce."



The main character doesn't question the authenticity of news. He fully accepts the media presence in his everyday life and its influence on him

Besides editing and props other filmic techniques are also utilized to illustrate the ideas of duality and the media's ubiquitous presence. In my opinion, the former is inextricably

intertwined with Verhoeven's destruction of the masculine heroism abundant in Hollywood blockbusters and action movies. The remediation of "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale" permits to focus more on what Fernández-Menicucci calls "blissful unconsciousness followed by recollection and narration, which enables the sad little man that [the protagonist] seems to be at the beginning of the story to emerge as the unquestioned hero of human history at large" (Fernández-Menicucci 9). Foreseeing the future presidential elections with their emphasis on male power and leadership, the movie is "linked to an ongoing project of securing particularly male authority" (Amy Villarejo 72). Fernández-Menicucci stresses that "the aftermath of the Vietnam War conditions a masculinity still in its Rambo-esque phase, obsessed, that is, with men's physical capability for accomplishing feats of bodily heroism" (Fernández-Menicucci 12). Releasing his movie in 1990 Verhoeven seems to cater to the trend, yet he completely ridicules the alpha-male figure.

Delivering one-liners and acting out the role of a strong and cold-blooded secret agent seventeen minutes into the film, Schwarzenegger is in no way cast against his type. Yet, seemingly staying within the realm of just another action flick Verhoeven uses the means of the science fiction genre to dismantle the image of hyperbolic masculinity usually associated with the actor. According to Ellexis Boyle, "cultural representations of muscle have appeared at times of perceived or real crises in the political, social, and economic power of White men" (Boyle 47). Listing the roles the actor played before his collaboration with Verhoeven, the scholar underlines that such movies as *Commando* (1985), *Predator* (1987), and *Running Man* (1987) mainly revolved around the actor's body and the character's physical abilities to solely lead different groups to freedom. The theorist also recalls the actor's desire to play more complex characters that would rely on their intelligence to reestablish justice in films' universes. Nonetheless, Boyle doesn't dwell on the fact that together with the genre of action flicks the exaggerated masculinity that determines "one's belonging as an "American" in *Total Recall* is subject of Verhoeven's satire (56). To put it another way, the Dutch director reworks such elements of narrative as the character, desire, and conflict. As Sikov puts it, the narrative films are so "often about an individual character in search or pursuit of a goal in a convention to Americans' experience of motion pictures" that the audience takes it completely for granted (Sikov 97). Naturally, Quaid's goal to free the mutant colony on Mars from the totalitarian

despot Cohaagen is driven by his desire of personal fulfillment and tested by the numerous conflicts with the villain and his helpers. Nevertheless, one should take into account that the whole storyline about the protagonist's heroic arrival on Mars is part of the implanted memory which automatically underestimates the main character's actions.

Other than that, Verhoeven extensively uses the futuristic design of the set along with the props and costumes to portray Quaid in an extremely ridiculous manner. In the opening sequence, Schwarzenegger is shown together with his love interest, Melina (Rachel Ticotin), happily and romantically exploring the surface of Mars only to be exposed to its atmosphere a few seconds later with his eyes eventually popping out. John Semley pinpoints various degradations Quaid goes through in the film: "in one scene, he wraps a wet towel around his head to jam a tracing beacon; in another, his nostril stretches absurdly wide as he wrenches that beacon from his skull." Things are taken to another extreme in the sequence of the character's arrival on Mars. To make it through the planet's customs the protagonist is obliged to appear in disguise: he's dressed as an overweight woman in a yellow dress. Without a doubt, the absurdity of what's depicted on the screen is overshadowed by the impressive special effect showing how the costume malfunctions and reveals the protagonist in conformity to the genre's astonishing future technologies. Still, I think, one couldn't imagine a more ludicrous and, to a certain extent, humiliating costume for the actor associated with the masculine heroism. Lastly, after the memory implantation the character of Lori punches and hits Quaid every time they appear in the same scene together. Utilizing medium shots to show the protagonist kicked in the crotch the director mortifies his alpha-male persona. Along with the deconstruction of the hero Verhoeven makes fun of action films. As Frank Grady notes, heroism is rendered possible only after Quaid's meeting with the mutant Kuato who says that "a man is defined by his actions, not by his memories." The scholar asserts that "this is a congenial formulation for an action film, reducing one's identity to one's deeds - not even to the sum of one's deeds but to the deeds of the immediate present" (Grady 45).



Verhoeven degrades the protagonist on multiple occasions: either by making the main character wear a wet towel on his head and stretch his nostril to retreat a tracing beacon or dress up as an overweight woman

The arrival on Mars features scenes where the Dutch director makes the science fiction genre an object of his satire. If, before that, Verhoeven heavily depends on the conventions of science fiction, here he deconstructs its imagery of futuristic limitlessness. Michael Chion outlines two sequences in particular where the emphasis on the written message turns out to be crucial for the movie's meaning. First, the scholar evokes the scene where after his check-in into the Hilton, the protagonist is given a message box by the receptionist. Vividly contrasting with the items of modern décor of the character's apartment and *Rekall's* office, the box contains folded paper with a hand-writing on it. "Its shabbiness contrasts with the enormity of the concept – space voyages, machines of the future, and so forth" (Chion 65). Another example given by the theorist is the analysis of Mars customs' procedure. The sequence where the character receives the *Mars Immigration Admitted* stamp in his passport makes the scholar question "what could express better than an immigration stamp the dialogue between the importance of a written thing and the ordinariness of what it is written on?" To my mind, such genre discrepancies are also at work as they might remind the audience of the association Quaid belongs to, that of the middle-class workers. When Dr. McClane offers him the basic Mars package containing two full weeks of memories he mentions that a longer trip will be more expensive as it requires a deeper implant. The protagonist has to settle with the two-week package. The mundane and routine processes he goes through together with other travelers once more point at the unification of the Earth citizens and prosaicness of their dreams. The idea of duality is present in most key scenes of the movie and provided either by the characters' interaction or the use of props and special effects that, in turn, work on the metaphorical level. For instance, other than never being sure

whether Quaid is a secret agent or just a construction worker who's experiencing an episode of schizoid embolism, the audience is later introduced to the character of Hauser. The hero receives the video message pre-recorded by him to learn that Hauser used to work for Cohaagen but later switched sides. The character tells the protagonist that he decided to erase his memory to protect himself and also instructs Quaid to "get his ass on Mars". The words sound just like another of Schwarzenegger's classic one-liners and, thus, make the audience root for the character more. Nonetheless, if one was to assume that the dream narrative constitutes another reality it would turn out that the audience is rooting for someone who doesn't even exist. Indeed, Quaid is artificially created so that Cohaagen and Hauser can get to the central command of the Martian colony. At the same time, if the whole storyline about the protagonist's trip to Mars is considered to be a fantasy then Hauser is just a projection of everything Quaid has ever wanted to be, he's really a secret agent, even more cold-blooded and composed than his double.

Comparing the story to its adaptation Fernández-Menicucci highlights that "this particular version of the main character's alter ego is not to be found in Dick's short story" (Fernández-Menicucci 14). The protagonist receives Hauser's instructions and is led by his inspiring imperatives as they live up to his expectations of the hyperbolized masculine identity. The concept of duality is interlaced with the notion of media influence. First of all, Quaid sees Hauser only on screens in prerecorded videos. The desire to transform into a more heroic and powerful man is taken over the top when the main character, never doubting the sanity and logic of his double's words, quickly effects everything that's asked of him, including pulling the beacon out of his scalp and dressing up as a woman to go to Mars. As Hauser affirms, "you are not you, you're me." His image on the screen becomes so alluring that Quaid readily jumps at the opportunity to live out his fantasy and act out a new and exciting identity of a secret agent leaving behind his mediocre background. In another sequence distinctively resembling one of the opening scenes in *RoboCop* the character of Cox again relies on the visual representation to convince Quaid that he's just a mole tailored in conformity with the villains' plans. This time the image of Hauser shaking hands with Cohaagen is seen on three TV screens in the background as Quaid scowls at his antagonist in the foreground. This *mise-en-scène* echoes the earlier sequence in the movie where the character is visited by Dr. Edgemar in his suite at the Hilton hotel.



The characters rely on videos to provide information and mislead others

Once again, Verhoeven interlaces the idea of duality with the concept of the media power. Having been seen by Quaid earlier in the Rekall commercial in the subway car he now visits him on Mars. Hence, the scene portrays both the ubiquitous presence of the media (Dr. Edgemar appearance is preceded by multiple advertisements, billboards, and signs that could be seen both on Earth and Mars) and their ability to manipulate the protagonist. Describing the future events of the movie that are part of Ego Trip package, the character of Roy Brocksmith stands between Quaid and his reflection in the mirror. In a way, he represents the media influence, for ultimately it's his convincing words that incited the protagonist to opt for a memory implant to begin with. Verhoeven highlights that even when Quaid hears the doctor's logical statements underlining the absurdity of what is going on, he refuses to accept his true reflection, that of a construction worker, and *chooses* to remain under the media influence even if his own points are ludicrous. As Dr. Edgemar remarks, "Mr, Quaid, can you hear yourself? She's [Milena] real because you dreamed of her?" As it turns out, the promise of a more exciting life forged by commercials is way too enticing to be disrupted so quickly.



The mirror metaphorically acknowledges the duality on the narrative level. It's also used to remind the audience of their own experience of watching the movie

Finally, the scene of Quaid's encounter with Dr. Edgemar is pivotal as it divides the movie into two equal segmentations and offers the protagonist the last chance to return to reality. At the same time, the strategic placement of Rekall company's CEO between the main character and his reflection in the mirror is also a metaphor of the audience never being sure if Quaid's really a secret agent or just acting out this role. According to Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener, "the mirror metaphor in the cinema points to a reflexive doubling of what is being seen or shown: such moments tend to signify in film theory a distancing and estranging effect rather than disclosing deeper meaning" (Elsaesser 71). Indeed, together with its suddenly slowed down pacing (compared to the impressive number of action scenes preceding it), this *mise-en-scène* makes the sequence one of the most salient ones in the film. To my mind, its significance for the audience couldn't be ignored. The scholars mention that "the mirror as reflexive-reflective doubling, stopping a narrative in its tracks, and ... referring us back to our situation as viewers of an artifact" (71). Much like Quaid tied to a chair back at the Rekall office, the viewers realize that they're in the middle of watching a movie. In this moment they're metaphorically given a pill to be withdrawn from the cinematographic reality. Still, the idea that Quaid is just a construction worker who's about to return to his ordinary life one hour into the movie seems unexcitable. Furthermore, as the critic Peter Travers notes, "Schwarzenegger's superman presence and jokey asides keep real emotion at bay. By the final third of the movie, gore obliterates all traces of logic and artistic ambition." Much like Quaid's the American audience's preferences are constructed and well-known by the entertainment industry (which Verhoeven

caters to). Identifying themselves with Quaid they blindly accept the promise of individualistic fulfillment meticulously formed by the medium and tailored in accordance to their values.

Chapter 4. Starship Troopers

According to Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, the United States “has come to gather all the major “threads” of contemporary power – political, military, economic and financial, and informatics-cultural – that give it an unprecedented hegemony in the world” (Shohat 218). The scholars note that the status of “hyperpower” still hasn’t been undermined by any counterforces, including the domestic and foreign ones. At the same time, Julian Co remarks that a fair number of theorists, among which he cites David Harvey and Immanuel Wallerstein don’t regard the US as a hegemonic country at all: “Hegemony refers to the relative economic preponderance of a state over the world economy, and in this light the US has been on the path of decline since the 1970s” (Co 6). As a consequence, the scholar calls for using the two definitions of hegemony: the preponderance over the world economy and political and cultural dominance. Although he outlines Asia and the European Union as the main competitors for the US, he nevertheless casts light on the fact that “even scholars who identify hegemony in political terms argue that political and cultural domination tends to follow from economic domination in the world-system” (7). Not surprisingly, a significant amount of screen time in *Starship Troopers* is devoted to depicting the evidence of such economic domination. In fact, in the future the only possible enemy and competitor for the country that is left is a colony of insects in outer space.

Never fully connecting the concepts of imperialistic activity and hegemony to one another, Co nonetheless remarks that all forms of the former phenomenon would take place in hegemonic competition. From his point of view, “imperialistic activity is ... the exertion of influence by one state over other states or territories through formal political control or overt uses of force” (8). In the utopian world represented in the movie where gender and racial equality has been achieved, a new foe is needed so that these conditions could remain. Similarly, in his historical analysis George Kateb remarks that after the demise of possible competitors the United States needed a new enemy to make American mass-cultural hegemony possible. As he puts it, “without an enemy how else could the national security state and its economy thrive? The quest for political-military hegemony must be constantly challenged; ... The hegemonic power needs enemies, ... and it needs victories, but not a complete and final victory” (Kateb 64). Holding the scholar’s opinion that the ideal should be combative yet manageable, Co asserts that

“historically, most imperialistic activity has been directed at weaker or peripheral states” (Co 10). Not surprisingly, the characters in *Starship Troopers* automatically find “the idea of a bug that thinks offensive.”

In one of the sequences, a news reporter at AQZ mentions that “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.” Interestingly enough, the statement revealing this information is made almost one hour into the movie events: as it turns out, the enemy was indeed constructed artificially and, perhaps, even chosen in conformity to its “manageable” status. Shohat and Stam highlight that “the hawks seem to want to place the world in a permanent state of emergency. Underneath the glove of “democracy” is the fist of military force, encapsulated in the old colonial nostrum “all they understand is force” (Shohat 218). In fact, hearing those words that might imply a more challenging perspective on the state’s military actions, the protagonist Johnny Rico (Casper Van Dien), interrupts him: “Let me tell you something, I’m from Buenos Aires, and I say kill them all!” In the same manner, Rico’s teammates confirm that they hope the war isn’t over before they “get some.” Although, such bold comments might be part of military bravado, it confirms the need to always have an enemy in order to maintain American hegemony. Stephen Mennel argues that “America’s power position in the world ... has made it especially susceptible to hypocrisy and collective self-delusion” (Mennel 165). But how is such self-delusion constructed, and, more importantly, how does it continue to exist? I’m inclined to believe that the process is intertwined with the notion of patriotism that is manipulated to ensure the world dominance even if it results in territorial occupation and military actions.



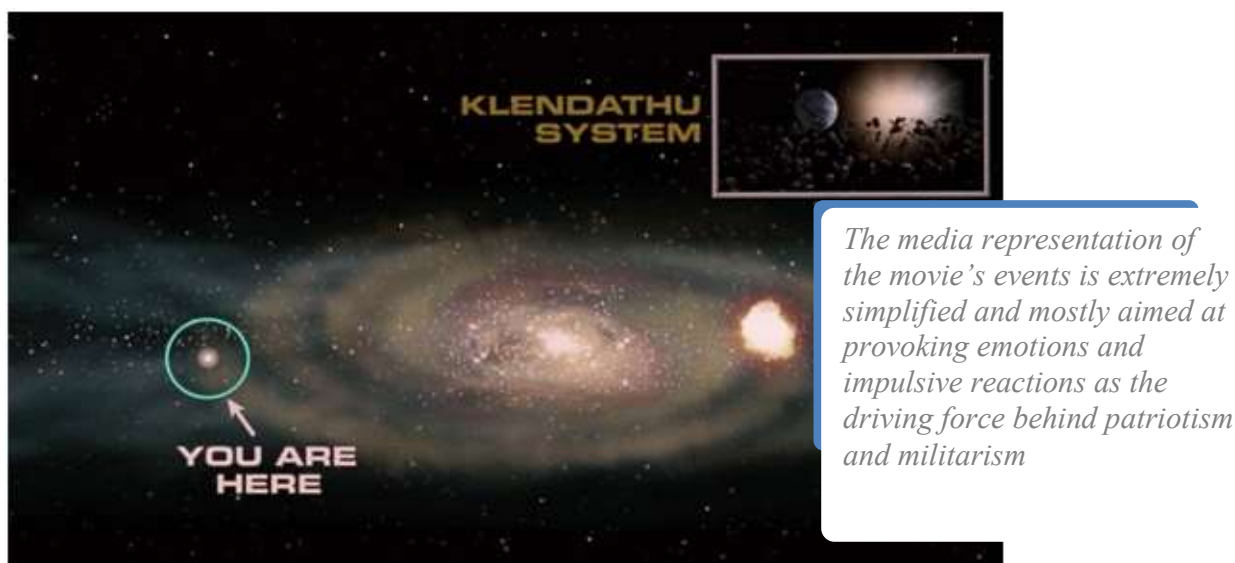
Portraying the US as a hegemonic state Verhoeven shows how the country chooses another “manageable” enemy. Any challenging perspectives on the governmental actions are undermined due to the influence of the media on the populace’s patriotic feelings

In his definition of patriotism Kateb stresses that besides possessing physical entities, such as buildings and historical sites, a country is constructed out of memories that might be overly heroized. As a consequence, patriotism is “a readiness to die and to kill for what is largely a figment of the imagination. For this figment, one commits oneself to a militarized and continuously politicized conception of life that is entirely masculinist” (Kateb 8). Two important ideas drawn from this statement are perfectly aligned with the way patriotism is reflected on in Verhoeven’s movie. First of all, the over-the-top violence in the film subdues most of feminine characteristics, whether it’s the scene where men and women shower together or the sequences where the characters of Carmen (Denise Richards) and Dizzy (Dina Mayer) appear to be just as tough and strong as their male comrades. On top of that, Carmen makes a decision to break up with Rico declaring that she’s decided to “go career”. Another case in point features a love scene where Dizzy has a t-shirt pulled up covering her face, thus, blurring the differences between sexes. Second of all, Kateb highlights that “patriotism is, from its nature, a commitment to the system of premature, violent death, inflicted and accepted, in whatever spirit ... that is current in one’s time and place, and with victories and defeats coming as they do” (8). Hence, the readiness to accept such militarized conception of life is linked to the fact that the only way to become a citizen and gain more privileges in the movie is to render military service.

Likewise, focusing on the significance of time and place, Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean cast light on the fact that “discourses organize statements” and “can at any one time achieve greater authority within the cultural system” (Campbell 16). Naturally, the discourse of American patriotism could become central in a time of war. But how does one provoke one’s imagination to rebuild the fragments of hyperbolically heroic past and endangered future? Whilst Campbell and Kean underline “a gathering of texts such as the flag, emotional music, images of heroism and sacrifice and speeches of resolution and determination from the White House”, scholars like Carl Boggs concentrate on the United States media as the main means to induce patriotic feelings and justify military actions (17). More importantly, the theorist states that “the vast majority of Americans receive the bulk of their news and its interpretations from TV and talk radio, hypercommercialized venues that ... are not only overwhelmingly conservative but generally (except for times of war or crisis) devote little coverage to foreign affairs” (Boggs 98). Without a shadow of doubt, Boggs’ observation is key in understanding the elements of

patriotism's portrayal in *Starship Troopers*. In other words, these powerful ideological formations, as Campbell and Kean put it, help organize patriotism "as logical, acceptable and 'natural' – as if it is a timeless and eternal condition of all normal, good Americans" (Campbell 17). To put it another way, apart from being so ubiquitous that they inculcate the false memories of the nation's purity and heroic past, various media are at work to show the enemy in the worst way possible.

For instance, in the sequence of the first strike on Klendathu, a news reporter declares: "It's an ugly planet, a bug planet. A planet hostile to life as we..." Before he has a chance to finish the sentence, he's attacked by one of Arachnid Warrior bugs. Two important implications could be made from the character's words. First, the planet is hostile because of the human invasion. This is why the human life along with its values simply couldn't be natural to Arachnids. Yet, the point could be easily dismissed not only by the characters, but by the spectators as well. Due to the movie's pacing and impressive special effects included in all of the action scenes, the audience doesn't have time to question why the reporter would call this planet "ugly". After all, if it differs so drastically from Earth, why would the human race want to invade and colonize it? As Telotte puts it, Verhoeven shows how these news reports "fashion an illusion of the democratic dissemination of information" (Telotte 198). In fact, in order to enflame the feeling of patriotism and militarism but, at the same time, hide its hegemonic desires, the higher institutions take recourse to a carefully mediated environment. The scholar also highlights that the director is interested in delivering "the extent to which the sense of reality ... seems driven by emotion, impulsive reactions, and spectacular effects" (200). As a matter of fact, the representations of the narrative's events are extremely simplified, be it the educational video available on the Federal Network official web-site (with the planet of Klendathu graphically and pompously destroyed) or TV footage of cities erased and civilians dying. With the ultimate goal to convey aggression, the Federal Network's resources heavily rely on impressive imagery which in its variety is relatable for all the generations and classes. By and large, the media continue to play an important part in Verhoeven's science fiction film. However, this time the director reflects on the theme of self-illusion on a totally different scale. In *Starship Troopers* the media infuse massive aggression, and not once the characters are given a chance to break out of the governmental apparatus.



Just like in both *RoboCop* and *Total Recall* remediation is also present in *Starship Troopers*. In order to understand what media are refashioned in the movie, and more importantly, what purpose such process serves to, one should take into account the technological developments that took place in the 1990s. According to Johnston, the genre of science fiction was deeply influenced by such innovations as dissemination and networking technologies: “The rise of videogames, the internet and mobile devices ... may have experienced the range of generic inputs” (Johnston 105). Holding the scholar’s opinion on the science fiction-action-military hybrid becoming one of the key themes in the genre, the critic J. Hoberman remarks, “that the movie has no more depth than the early eighties video games that were based on Heinlein's novel is Verhoeven's ultimate joke” (Hoberman 36). , Gardner Dozois recalls the stories of several parents he knows who claim that their “kids watching *Starship Troopers* looked as if they were intently playing a video game, bouncing and jerking and bobbing in their seats as if operating an invisible joystick” (Dozois vi). Apart from refashioning the medium of film in order to comply with the audience’s preferences of the decade and enrich the extensive use of digital compositing, *Starship Troopers* is also noteworthy for creating a very immersive and interactive environment.

The call for interactivity, which happens to be a salient element of video games, explains the drastic changes in the remediation of the book implemented via immediacy. As Keesley notes, Verhoeven decided to make bugs more realistic. The designer Phil Tippett was

“able to use a Digital Input Device that allowed stop-motion animators to move the limbs on scale models of the insects, and to have these movements linked to a computer which converted them directly into the digital environment” (Keesey 150). In comparison to Heinlein’s novel where the bugs wore their own uniforms and fired arms, the more realistic portrayal of the insects in the movie renders them more frightening. As Johnston notes, “the main stylistic change in the genre towards the end of the 1990s ... came from ... the move away from live action towards a completely computer generated world” (Johnston 106-107). While the depicted world in *Starship Troopers* combines digital components with live footage and even includes animation (the scenes with great numbers of fast-moving bugs) it doesn’t fully rely on these techniques. Quite on the contrary, the actors are part of this audiovisual environment just like the characters who find themselves in outer space and on Klendathu. In fact, each action scene is juxtaposed with a sequence where the characters are given a moment of respite.

The scenes where the audience sees Rico with his mates in barracks or Carmen with Zander Barcalow (Patrick Muldoon) with the emphasis on the spaceship’s interior serve as apt examples of interactivity achieved by remediation. First of all, like the characters, the viewers are given a chance to take a break from the military operations. To a certain degree, the slow-paced sequences in the movie resemble moments when one can pause a videogame. As Mark J.P. Wolf remarks, the “player is often given brief pauses in the action after successfully completing a certain objective or before advancing to a new area or “level” of the game” (Wolf 84). For instance, after the second successful strike on Klendathu and Rico’s killing a Tanker Bug, the viewers are shown the sequence where the whole unit celebrates their victory. The narrative that has been revolving around the war is interrupted by the romantic storyline showing the protagonist finally reciprocating Dizzy’s feelings. Similarly, after maneuvering an asteroid, Carmen is complimented by the captain who claims that she has “a hell of a flight team.” Wolf also stresses that sometimes “game information may be displayed between levels ... ; scores or time remaining can be shown, or bonus lives may be given for the completion of a level” (84). In *Starship Troopers* many action scenes are followed by either news reels reporting the horrific numbers of victims, extracts from talk shows, and Internet-style feeds moving the plot along. What’s more, after the first military operation on Klendathu that turns out to be a complete disaster and results in the troopers’ retreat, Rico is seriously wounded by one of the bugs. The fade-out

suggests the protagonist's death. Yet, after a series of the Federal Network videos, the spectators see Rico in the statis tank where his leg is being rebuilt so that he could enter upon his duties again.

Wolf also claims that players "are often called to make a decision at points on the game where the action stalls or loops, or during action sequences that allow player input which can stop or change the course of action while the video clip is still running" (Wolf 89). After receiving his punishment and being publicly flogged, Rico resigns and reconciles with his parents. However, the war is declared, so the protagonist tries to convince the sergeant to let him rescind his resignation. The decision is made throughout one sequence: starting from Dizzy calling him out for his cowardice and Sgt. Zim (Clancy Brown) permitting him to remain within the infantry. If the audience sympathized with Rico's parents who recognized the Federal Network and formal education's negative influence, they would be relieved to see Rico coming back home. After all, throughout the first act, the main character's milieu draws his attention to the fact that he's about to enlist for the wrong reasons. At the same time, those viewers who might be more interested in the action scenes that could only logically follow if the protagonist takes part in them, would root for Rico to fight against Arachnids. Lastly, the call for interactivity could also be sensed in the opportunity to follow the plot from what scholars like Jessica Aldred call "multiple perspectives".

To put it another way, the spectators are given a chance to follow the plot either from Rico's or Carmen's point of view. Furthermore, because the characters haven't been given much of background story, the viewer just like the player can quickly get accustomed to such replacement. In fact, the main characters' objectives are stated from the very beginning: Carmen desires to be a pilot, while Rico proves to be more prone to Mobile Infantry where his aptitude and craftiness which are seen earlier during the football match could come in handy. Despite the fact that the film portrays the utopian future where gender equality is achieved, one might assume that the constant switching between the two characters hints at the attempt to raise the interest of male and female audiences. In other words, regardless of Carmen's ambitions to go career and her initiative to break up with the protagonist, she still embodies the image of exaggerated femininity: Carmen is the only one who throws up during a bug dissection. In

contrast to Dizzy who's one of Rico's teammates in the football team, the character of Denise Richards is hyperbolically flirty and is admired both by the protagonist and his competitor, Barcalow. Rico, on the other hand, boasts an alpha male characteristics being the school football team's captain and later quickly becoming the leader of Raszak's squad. In this regard, just like various videos and footages are aimed at different kinds of viewers in the movie, the constant juxtaposition between the two main characters is directed at two audiences.

Moreover, the difference in Carmen's and Rico's surroundings also complies with female and male preferences. In other words, the beautiful and romanticized scenery of outer space contrasts with rigorous barracks. In fact, a lot of props used in the movie not only metaphorically describe the characters' feelings and development but also serve as the elements that spectators can identify with. For instance, the disgustingly looking food served at the Mobile Infantry canteen is opposed to the cup of tea Carmen puts on her chair's handle in the spaceship. Whilst the former contributes to Rico's cold-blooded character formation, the latter signifies coziness and comfort, components female viewers could relate to watching a science fiction movie. Other than that, the protagonist's conversations filled with crude jokes are opposed to Richard's flirting with the character of Muldoon. Lastly, the amount of violence captured in the sequences featuring Carmen (at least in the first segmentation of the movie) is reduced to its minimum and practically substituted by her joyful experience of flying big spaceships. Not surprisingly, Rico's experience is shown in a more brutal manner, where his character is constantly tested and has to prove his masculinity. As Bolter and Grusin remark, "the viewing can be interactive, although the interaction may be as simple as the capacity to change one's point of view" (Bolter 28). Indeed, even though it's the editors who control the movement, the spectator's provided with the illusion of choosing different perspectives and thus being more engaged in the sequence of shots.



The audience is just as much manipulated by the medium of film as the characters are influenced by the media in the movie. The logic of interactivity together with constant juxtaposition between Rico and Carmen immerses male and female viewers in the narrative

Wolf also highlights that “interludes or “cut scenes” between levels or areas of a game will advance the game’s narrative There are a few exceptions, for example, the cut scenes between certain levels ... which feature simple animated sequences of the game’s characters” (84). When it comes to *Starship Troopers*, the movie employs the logic of hypermediacy and features a few “top news” episodes that don’t align with the plot. One of the videos entitled “Crime and Punishment” depicts a murderer who’s been sentenced to death. The execution is promised to be broadcast on all channels and all net. David J. Hogan underlines that the news feature “introduces an intimidating courtroom whose style and décor are ... strongly reminiscent of the Third Reich. The accused appears helpless and somehow innocent as he hears himself sentenced to death.” (Hogan 254). In this regard, the filmmakers draw attention to the fact that by skillfully mixing the reports about the war, national news features, and commercials showing kids stepping on cockroaches and playing with the bullets troopers give them, the government creates the martial spirit. According to Hogan, Verhoeven illustrates “what can happen when news becomes entertainment. Successful propaganda is not possible without the complicity of media” (251).

Remediating the medium of book into the medium of film obliged the filmmakers to meet box-office requirements and led them to the development of romantic storylines. The movie’s cast plays an important part in the analysis of the director’s criticism of American patriotism and its transformation into hegemony. Regardless of the fact that the characters all

come from Buenos Aires, at Berlinale Talent Campus the director himself admitted that they're an allusion to Americans. Rico, Carmen, Dizzy, Carl (Neil Patrick Harris), and Maldoon are played by young beautiful actors whose background career includes participating in such projects as *Beverly Hills 90210* (1990-2000), *Melrose Place* (1992-1999), and *Days of Our Lives* (1992-2012). Casting against the type allows the filmmakers to make two important points to deliver their message across. First of all, such attractive ensemble could be easily associated with the self-proclaimed elite slowly turning into an insatiable hegemon. Comparing the adaption to its original source, M. Keith Booker and Anne-Marie Thomas assert that "the text places no emphasis" on the fact that "the protagonist Juan Rico is presumably Hispanic, while Verhoeven cast the ultra-Aryan Casper Van Dien as Rico, producing a protagonist who looks like a recent graduate of the Nazi Youth and thus calls attention to the potential fascism of Heinlein's text" (Booker 220). Secondly, the deceitfully poor performances, which seem out of place at times and would be more appropriate in TV dramas and soap operas the actors stepped out of, point at the artificiality of the movie's world manipulated by the media. Verhoeven asserts: "I was looking for a certain physical type that happens to abound in television shows – superficial characters, people who have a certain one-dimensional quality, nearly comic-book characters" (Barton-Fumo 133).

To put it another way, by stretching the genre of science fictions beyond its conventions and adding overly simplified romantic plots, Verhoeven stresses the influence of media on all of the spheres of human life. Besides the creation of martial spirit, the media downgrades the value of friendships and relationships. For instance, the two groups at the centre of the narrative who appear to have built strong bonds are the high school friends and the squad. The former is tested when it turns out that it was Carl's decision to send Johnny's unit to the planet P even though he knew the mission had a very low survival probability. Nonetheless, Carmen and Rico immediately forgive him after the character of Harris declares that they're "in this for species" and justifies his immoral actions. Carl's hideous betrayal is completely disregarded when Carmen throws her arms around the men saying that whenever the three of them together everything will be okay. Likewise, the camaraderie between Rico, Dizzy, and Ace Levy (Jake Busey) is depicted in a very idealized way when they all get matching tattoos.

Although, the act might seem genuine, the word they get on their forearms is “death” revealing their aggressive intentions further amplified by the media propaganda.



There's no depth to the romantic storylines as they're told in a clear and explicit manner. In turn, these simplifications make it easier for the audience to relate to the protagonists. Verhoeven calls for acknowledging how manipulative the medium can be when it comes to the spectators' emotions

When it comes to relationships, in the romantic triangle between Rico, Carmen, and Dizzy the roles are explicitly defined: Rico wants to be with Carmen who appears to be more interested in Maldoon. At the same time, Dizzy's obviously attracted to the protagonist, up to the point where Carl (Neil Patrick Harris) flings out a remark about not needing to read her mind: “It's pretty clear what she wants.” The characters are seen to be surrounded by the media influence and enjoying the latest technologies as well. In the sequence showing Jean Raszak's (Michael Ironside) key lecture, Rico is shown drawing a picture of him and Carmen kissing on an electronic screen to animate and send it to his girlfriend later. Carmen receives the picture and adds the animated bit where she blows a bubble in her boyfriend's face preventing them from kissing. Hence, the screen represents their relationship in an extremely understandable way implying that Carmen has already one foot out the door.



The media dictates the way people interact with each other: the movie's friendships and relationships are depicted in a overly simplified way. If even the most intimate spheres of the characters' lives are effected, it comes as no surprise, they're easily turned into troopers by the Federal Network

The superficial performances with Richard's and Van Diens' big smiles, Mayer's sad eyes, and Harris and Levy's witty jokes make it easier for the audience to identify with the characters. In addition to that, the continuous concentration on the characters' naiveté linked to their private lives makes discarding of morals and looking past one's questionable actions immediately excused, for they're regarded as necessary in the battle against the bugs. As Booker and Thomas state, Verhoeven's excessively "realistic Bugs are so menacingly alien that there is little chance of audiences truly sympathizing with them, even though the murderous humans have vastly superior weapons" (Booker 220). As a consequence, the audience is more likely to relate to the characters during the sequences dwelling on their interaction with each other. With the exception of news reels that reveal the brutality of the war, the violence in the movie is depicted in the over-the-top manner which Verhoeven is known for. Apart from that, keeping in mind that the movie falls into the category of the science fiction genre, the viewers will probably discard the extent to which the troopers are relentless and cruel. After all, even the main characters' sufferings are pushed aside making it trickier for the spectators to evaluate their personal development.

The human relationships perfectly mirror the way the population receives the information. To my way of thinking, this points at the degree to which everyone is influenced by

the media. Hogan remarks that each “broadcast is a fast-paced compilation of Federation-selected scenes buttressed by stimulating headlines and simplistic, manipulative voiceovers. No event is covered in depth and words and images flash by, competing with each other for viewer’s attention” (Hogan 254). Similarly, all of the romantic storylines lack depth and only offer viewers little glimpses of what is really going on. For example, when Carmen offers Rico to come over, she delivers a coy line: “Dad is not home tonight.” Nevertheless, the audience is left dubious, as it’s never clear whether the two get together given the fact that Richards’ character is more distant. Another apt example is the sequence where Rico and Dizzy finally end up with each other. After taking Raszak’s advice, the protagonist decides against “passing up a good thing”. Nonetheless, any chances of their happy future are cut short, as Dizzy dies in the next episode. Moreover, the two quickly hide under the blanket disturbed by Ironside’s character; the scene echoes the news reports featuring censored patches.



The characters and the audience’s simultaneous manipulation by the media

In other words, similarly how the characters are provided with fast-paced compilation of various materials grouped together by the Federal Network, the spectators are offered the similar compilations where the three romantic storylines all compete for their attention. Just like in case with news reels, talk shows, and propaganda videos where none of the materials are covered in depth, the audience only sees bits of flirtations, coy smiles, and chaste kisses that seem to flash by. Hogan notes that Verhoeven portrays a functioning fascist society which is so attractive the audience can’t help sympathizing with them. As the scholar puts it, “Gestapo-type uniforms and the overbearing authority of the State present a disturbing contradiction to the beautiful people we’re rooting for, forcing us to consider one of Verhoeven’s points: Don’t be fooled by appearances” (254). Indeed, one of the main questions the movie raises is, to what

extent do we allow the image to build the sense of our reality? Other than revealing how strongly influenced the characters are, the Dutch filmmaker also reminds the audience of the medium's power too.

As Telotte claims, the movie's aim is to involve the viewers "cinematically in its compelling actions and to warn against those same filmic compulsions" (Telotte 30). To my way of thinking, in *Starship Troopers* Verhoeven uses the logic of hypermediacy in a twofold manner. When it comes to the film's narrative, the scholar describes the moment in which monitors and radios built to reinforce the mediated environment on which the troopers rely on refuse to work as pivotal. Indeed, it makes them realize how disoriented they are once they find themselves pushed out of the familiar realm as the logic of the Federal Network doesn't apply to the complexities of other civilizations and planets. The institution's clear illustrations that could be witnessed at the beginning drastically contradict with the movie's reality. Other than that, the character of Denise Richards for the very first time admits that the humanity underestimated the bugs' intelligence and force. As for the way the audience is reminded of the medium, the propaganda videos satirizing the gun control, news reels commenting on the shortcomings of judicial system in the US, and internet-style featurettes don't match with the movie's plot and, hence, are employed to deliver the Dutch director's message across.

Hogan draws attention to the fact that the "movie creates a society in which all information comes from one source, to the complete satisfaction of the populace, who enjoy every luxury except individualism and the ability to think critically" (Hogan 249). Naturally, the audience can observe how all of the materials appear to be carefully selected by the Federal Network. Moreover, its official web-site is divided into five sections: "federal", "galaxy", "top news", "enlist", and "exit". In comparison to a more obvious way the characters in *RoboCop* and *Total Recall* were practically bombarded with commercials and advertisements, the state in *Starship Troopers* seems to offer people more freedom in regards of what kind of information they want to receive. Yet, Hogan identifies participative citizens and a government delivering accurate information as the foundation of a true democracy stressing that the "Would you like to know more?" question at the end of each segment serves as ostensible evidence of the

Federation's willingness to provide information. There is little doubt but that the information will simply be more propaganda designed to prevent critical thought" (Hogan 251-252).

Telotte highlights that Mr. Raszak's injunction that "figuring things out for yourself is the only real freedom anyone has" "clashes with a narrative wherein all we see is a constant impulse to conformity and to action based on a kind of unexamined sense of rightness" (Telotte 34). In an interview with *Starlog*, Verhoeven himself asserts that in spite of Mr. Raszak's wise advice the society in the movie is in no way free to follow his words. "Yes, you don't have to go into the military, but if you want to be a respected citizen, ... , you *must* go into Federal Service. ... So you can't say it's completely voluntary, because it's really the pressure of the society that makes it for many people not possible to skip the Federal Service." (124) The young and naïve troopers aren't really volunteers. Maxwell Burkey claims that the concept of patriotism is interlaced with the notion of being a citizen: "A citizen who is only ambivalently attached to the nation or whose identification with the nation or whose identification with the nations remains opaque or contingent is less of a patriot, and may be denied membership in the policy" (Burkey 134). Patriotism turns out to be irresistible.

Verhoeven admits that he uses the news segments to criticize the American regime: "In the newsreels, the question "Would you like to know more?" begs the question "Do you want this type of society? Do you want to dive even further into this system that already exists in America?" (127-128). In this way, the medium's logic of hypermediacy is implemented to emphasize the impossibility of clicking on the button and points at the media's contribution to the populace's close-mindedness. What's more, the web-site doesn't offer any materials on culture which might imply that the Network worries about the emergence of oppositions and countermovements supporting the "live and let live" policy. Boggs' conviction that "the U.S. media have evolved into probably the most significant conduit of patriotism and militarism" is taken to its extreme in the film (Boggs 98).



Telotte denotes that in the movie's universe "the brain becomes not a resource for making decisions, for asking questions, for outthinking the bug enemy, but rather a device for reading their minds, and thus just one of the tools for military surveillance and intelligence" (Telotte 35). However, the scholar doesn't dwell upon one of the most significant scenes in the movie where Maldoon's brain is being sucked out by the Brain Bug. As Hogan remarks, "it is a tribute to Verhoeven and Tipette's skills that we actually feel sympathy for this otherwise repulsive Bug" (Hogan 254). Indeed, the creature's sad eyes together with the idea that it possesses intelligence overwrite its horrible actions. I'm inclined to believe that in this sequence Verhoeven implements the medium of film to accentuate its ability to disorient the viewers. The mesmerizing special effects and invisible editing immerse the audience in the sequence and it is at this moment that Verhoeven proves how an audiovisual material can suck someone's brains out. To my mind, with the aforementioned instances of interactivity and simplified and relatable romantic storylines, the scene provokes emotions affirming the medium's capacities. Likewise, in the movie, according to Keesey, the "young heroes are being seduced into a mindless patriotism and a belief in the warrior ideal. It is then that Verhoeven springs the trap, as these idealistic innocents go off to war and viscously slaughtered" (Keesey 157). The parallel drawn by Verhoeven becomes obvious: if filmic techniques can make the spectators sympathize with the bug that earlier sucked someone's brains out, it comes as no surprise the Federal Network's footage can incite martial spirit. As the Dutch director states, "the audience has a hard time

identifying the hero's cause for which he is fighting for. He doesn't see the big picture" (Barton-Fumo 126). And if in *RoboCop* and *Total Recall* the protagonists are given a chance to acknowledge their heavily mediated environment, in *Starship Troopers*, according to Telotte, the removal of cultural constraints forged by the media and signified by the helmets is dangerous: such action would lead either to punishment or death (Telotte 34).

Conclusion

When it comes to Hollywood movies, any attempts to bring the elements of high culture in them are usually undermined by the abundance of components that assure the movie's significance in pop culture. As a consequence, the examination of someone's ability of communicating a strong opinion or even a critique within a big budget blockbuster calls for creating a connection between film analysis and several other fields of study, such as the theories of genre and remediation. At a time when the media shape people's political views, one should be able to figure out dominant institutions' ideologies. Turning to the forms where artistic components could still predominate seems to be the key. Yet, identifying an author's point of view requires the knowledge of the techniques at his disposal. Turning to the medium of film to identify the way messages and principles are spread by those who have power can help reshape society and incite their acknowledgment of the media influence.

1.1 Summary

The three pillars of American culture, capitalism, individualism, and patriotism were examined in the discussion of Paul Verhoeven's science fiction trilogy featuring *RoboCop*, *Total Recall*, and *Starship Troopers*. Relying on the ideas of the authors who focus on the duality of these concepts helped highlight their transformation. To put it precisely, to show how capitalism oscillates with consumerism in *RoboCop*, the insights of Dominic Barton, Dezső Horváth, Matthias Kipping, and Nicolaus Mills were scrutinized. Afterwards, connecting the assumption of George Ritzer and Zeynep Atalay who pay attention to the promotion of the capitalistic system advantages via the media produced a more detailed analysis of the movie's narrative revolving around the dominant institution's abuse of the economic system. Similarly, in order to reveal the interconnectedness between individualism and conformity in *Total Recall*, it was necessary to focus on the convictions of such authors as James E. Block, Luther S. Luedtke, and David Potter who recognize the trope's binary nature. Also, employing the notions of voluntarism and contractualism defined by Claude S. Fischer resulted in a more sufficient explanation of how the dominant institution in the film takes advantage of these principles, distorts them through the media, and controls the protagonist. Likewise, investigating how

Verhoeven portrays hegemony as one of the extensions of patriotism in *Starship Troopers* required taking recourse to George Kateb who pinpoints basic principles of hegemony. Plus, linking Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's opinions on military force as the indispensable part of patriotism led to a more detailed examination of the movies' plot. Lastly, aligning Carl Boggs' findings on the media usage to increase patriotic feelings allowed for a deeper comprehension of Verhoeven's techniques to depict various audiovisual materials' impact on the characters.

The theories that were discussed in chapter one established that being part of the media, film necessitates just as much audience's literacy as their other forms. Since the issue of the media ubiquitous presence is addressed in a self-referential way with the ultimate goal to provide more coverage but never truly explain what principles are at work in their expansion, it was crucial to fully scrutinize the medium of film. To put it another way, the media influence is the central theme in Verhoeven's trilogy, and it goes without saying that the director draws the audience's attention to the negative consequences of their impact on one's identity, worldview, and actions. Hence, to see how he delivers this message, film as the very form of media must have been understood. Establishing the link between Barry Keith Grant, Steve Neale, and Rick Altman's theories of genre and the three case studies permitted to see how Verhoeven stretched the science fiction conventions to construct more complicated narratives which, in turn, enabled him to add philosophical issues into Hollywood blockbusters. In this regard, analyzing how such components of the genre as conventions, iconography, setting, stories and themes, characters, actors, and stars, viewers and audiences were modified, ignored altogether, or made extremely recognizable aided to explain how the characters deal with corporate and governmental oppression where the media are the indispensable beacon of power. Each movie was analyzed individually, for despite the fact the topic of the media impact is present in all of them, they revolve around different pillars of American culture. Hence, the shot-by-shot analysis introduced by Michael Ryan and Melissa Lenos with concentration on such elements as *mise-en-scène*, camera movement and cinematography, editing, production design, narrative, motifs and metaphors revealed that capitalism, individualism, and patriotism and, most importantly, their dismantled representation in the media are profoundly engraved in peoples' lives; they're not only part of the country's culture, but all three also constitute American identity. Lastly, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's theory of remediation clarified how Verhoeven makes the

spectators media literate: using the logic of hypermediacy and immediacy he reminds them of the medium and prompts them to question the scale of its influence on their actions and opinions.

1.2 Conclusion

The three case studies show the limits of the media intervention into peoples' lives. Creating a utopian future in each of his science fiction movies, Verhoeven implies that the trajectory the country takes being directed by intensified propaganda and a political system that is either corrupted or driven by totalitarian and imperialistic motives can eventually transform the United States into the nation of fascists. *RoboCop*, *Total Recall*, and *Starship Troopers* are constructed around the act of a total dismantlement of the most profound values of American culture. Those values are deeply integrated into the characters' identities are either damaged, or perverted. By and large, the Dutch director renders an image of the society that isn't free: no one sees the whole picture and no one is able to take a step back and assess the media impact on their lives as every medium has become strongly embedded into their surroundings. The hypothesis that the medium of film can be investigated with the employment of film analysis and remediation theory since they offer new perspectives in the study of the media influence on the nation's culture can, therefore, be applied in the examination of Verhoeven's science fiction trilogy.

Starting rather optimistically, Verhoeven renders the character of *RoboCop* as a rebellious figure. Indeed, in comparison to others, the protagonist tries to liberate himself from the mediated environment. To convey the feeling of estrangement produced by the abundance of the media in the city of Detroit, Verhoeven heavily relies on props: TV and computer screens could be seen practically in every sequence of the movie. Yet, while the citizens don't seem to mind them, Murphy is the only one who doesn't only acknowledge their pervasiveness but attempts at destroying it. The protagonist breaks TV screens and utilizes the technology to ruin the antagonist's plans. Nevertheless, being a hybrid, he accounts for the fact that he'll never be able to reconnect with his family. Verhoeven shows that the only way for a human being to fit into the 1980s' technocapitalist society is to become a hybrid, serving the ones who retain control over others. Other than being an example of the medium where elements of comic books

are reappropriated to signify the fact that *RoboCop* is nothing more than a product of American pop culture, the movie serves as an interesting case study where the whole experience of viewership is remediated. In fact, Verhoeven constantly adds the recorded videos mimicking the action of rewinding or fast-forwarding a tape to show how someone's memories literally depend on technology. In the same manner, continuous interruption of the narrative with the news reels and commercials executed via hypermediacy doesn't only parody Americans' short attention span but reminds the viewers of how immersive a movie can be: rarely aligning with the plot these sequences disturbingly stand out, and the annoyance one might experience while watching the movie signals of how engaging the medium is.

In contrast, in *Total Recall* the filmmaker appears to endorse the characteristics of a Hollywood feature movie more. Instead of juxtaposing the movie's events with different kinds of footage, Verhoeven adds scenes where the protagonist either watches news on his gigantic TV screen or is bombarded with commercials in a subway car. The media in *Total Recall* are completely diegetic which, to a certain degree, makes the director's prognosis of their power rather discouraging. Unlike Murphy in *RoboCop* who turns to the media and technologies to recuperate the remainders of his identity he desperately tries to obtain after his transformation, Quaid is controlled by the media that produces in him a desire to opt for something more than the life of a construction worker can offer. Yet, the scale of the media bombardment in the film (billboards, signs, newspapers) implies that this aspiration is carefully constructed and adjusted to fit the protagonist's gender and social class. In this case, the mediated environment is no longer considered harmful; instead of being a means of reconstruction and a reason of rebellion, it's a catalyst of action. In terms of remediation the movie is a peculiar case in point, as it shows how special affects that were once ensured immediacy are now viewed as elements of hypermediacy. The dated visual effects that pale in comparison to modern technologies constantly make the views recognize the medium and, hopefully, acknowledge how ridiculous the highly mediated environment can be. In contrast to the previous film, *Total Recall* might be considered an interactive experiment, for the audience is practically given a chance to draw up their own conclusions about the movie's ending.

In the end, perhaps, the most pessimistic movie of Verhoeven's science fiction trilogy is *Starship Troopers*. Despite the rather optimistic and pompous ending that convinces the spectators of a gentler and kinder Americanization, the amount of violence together with fascist imagery hints at how deluded and gullible the depicted nation is. Here the media aren't used to retain or change one's identity. In *Starship Troopers* the characters are inculcated completely distorted notions of patriotism which are narrowed down to militaristic and imperialistic aspirations. Any attempts to eliminate the media's presence in someone's life leads to punishment and death. The images are used to control the characters' emotions and a plethora of news segments available on the Federal Network's official web-site represses any desire to try to find out more. As a result, the protagonists and the spectators don't get to see the whole picture. When it comes to remediation, the medium of video games is reappropriated here to create a more interactive, and thus, immersive experience. Moreover, just like the dominant structures which carefully select materials to transfer their messages, the filmmakers constantly switch between female and male audiences to emerge them in the sequences. Finally, the special effects in the movie are executed to ignite emotional feedback and it's at this moment, that Verhoeven's message becomes clear: only by alienating oneself from what is happening on screen and actually questioning the scenes' sanity can someone become more media literate.

1.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Due to the scope of this thesis, I did not have the opportunity to fully investigate all the constituents of the genre of science fiction present in *RoboCop*, *Total Recall*, and *Starship Troopers* which would be an interesting subject to examine. As a matter of fact, out of the six outlined by Grant (conventions, iconography, setting, stories and themes, characters, actors, and stars, viewers and audiences) not all play a significant role in the three movies. Some of them are crucial but in my investigation I paid special attention to those that helped deal with the theme of the media influence and the transformation of capitalism, individualism, and patriotism into consumerism, conformism, and hegemony. The same goes for the employment of all the techniques in film analysis defined by Ryan, Melos, and Sikov: mise-en-scène, camera movement and cinematography, editing, production design, narrative, motifs and metaphors. Verhoeven's science fiction trilogy is extremely interesting in that regard and a further

examination may reveal how the above-mentioned cinematic tools aid to provide the director's outtake on the technological, political, and cultural changes and their impact on American society in the 1980s and 1990s. In addition to that, the trilogy also could serve as an apt example of remediation if one wanted to solely concentrate on the process itself without trying to link it to the Verhoeven's treatment of American cultural tropes.

Another subject that is interesting to further research that the limitations on this thesis simply did not allow for stems from the fact that audiovisual products continue to be a form of imprisonment. Indeed, being quintessential films of the 1980s and 1990s, *RoboCop*, *Total Recall*, and *Starship Troopers* have left behind an impressive cultural legacy: franchise, merchandise (action figures, souvenirs, posters), television series, comicbook adaptations. The first two films have been remade (*RoboCop* directed by José Padilha was released in 2014, *Total Recall* was directed by Len Wiseman in 2012), the third one's reboot is in the works. It seems compelling to compare the way the media influence was treated by Verhoeven and portrayed in the remakes.

Finally, an extremely fascinating topic that could provide a better understanding of Verhoeven's critique is the inquiry of his autobiography. In fact, that kind of research could explain how a Dutch director's work both compliments and criticizes American audiovisual legacy. Verhoeven's figure serves as an excellent example of a cineaste who has been fascinated with American cinema from a very young age. Born in the Netherlands he was exposed to a marvelous number of American movies that came after the World War II. In his interview with *Hollywood Interview* he states: "It was like after all these years of being cut off from the rest of the world, there were all of the sudden all these different realities: westerns, musicals, science fiction. ... All these sort of action-oriented movies with a lot of movement and a lot of splendor." Consulting Verhoeven's interviews given in the 1980s and 1990s and comparing them to the statements he makes today might be especially efficient in the analysis of *Starship Troopers*. For example, in one of them the director confesses: "During the bombings, going to the movies was not all that convenient, so when you did go, you really loved it, even if the film was German propagandistic shit. Then in 1945 we were liberated by the Americans, and in the years afterwards the only thing you could see were American movies." Yet, one should be cautious

and keep in mind that Verhoeven's nationality doesn't in any way make him more objective in his judgment of American culture.

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