

THE VIOLENT EXCESS OF THE IMAGE AND THE NEGATION OF LAW IN *STARSHIP TROOPERS*

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Paul Verhoeven's film adaptation of the classic science fiction adventure story *Starship Troopers* ostensibly articulates (among other things) a vision of everything that is wrong with the law today. The law is simply another spectacle in a world overflowing with spectacles. Using the affective framework developed by Brian Massumi from the work of Deleuze and Guattari, I suggest that Verhoeven's use of the affective power of the spectacle is not populism, but recognition that affect cannot be expunged. As powerful and dangerous as affect may be, it is potentially a productive tool.

It is not enough simply to know the thing you wish to destroy; to complete the task, you have to have felt it.¹

This article concerns the intersection of law and the image in Paul Verhoeven's 1997 film adaptation of Robert Heinlein's pulp novel *Starship Troopers*. The law appears only briefly, among the media clips which punctuate the film. A man stands before a panel of elevated judges. Behind them rises an immense statue of Justice, her eyes uncovered. A grave voice-over provides commentary on the events transpiring before us: 'A murderer was captured this morning and tried today.' A gavel strikes, the accused's face is crestfallen, his head bowed in submission; the voiceover continues, 'Sentence: DEATH!' The audience stands and applauds. The image cuts to a sterile metal room filled with elaborate equipment and an air of therapeutic austerity, the voice lightens in tone: 'Tonight at six, all net, all channels!'

This sequence embodies the nightmare of critical legal scholarship; the legal process reduced to a powerful, striking, but empty spectacle to be consumed and discarded like the rest of popular culture. In a handful of seconds, this scene captures the anxiety surrounding the encroachment of images on fields such as the law, normally reserved for the patient and calculated application of reason. The statue of justice, her eyes uncovered, serves as a succinct metaphor for the threat of images to the institution of law. According to Douzinas: 'Justice must be blindfolded to avoid the temptation of facing the concrete person and putting individual characteristics before the

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¹ Walter Benjamin, cited in Theweleit (1987), p 226.

abstract logic of the institution.² Sight is a seductress which compromises the objectivity of the law.

In this article, I want to depart from the immense body of theory which views the intrusion of images with unreserved suspicion and horror. I will argue that, while the aforementioned scene presents us with the lurid and horrifying example of the encounter between the law and the image, there exists another encounter with the image which, while dangerous, is both unavoidable and creative. In *Starship Troopers* we find both encounters of the image thoroughly immersed in one another. On the level of content, this produces an ambiguity, but more profoundly this ambiguity cues us to the relational nature of the image. The image is not predetermined according to an essence, but is a field which is actualised (made to mean) in particular contexts. Instead of engaging in a struggle over contexts, the creative — albeit dangerous — capacity of the image resides in unbinding, or at least loosening, the grip of meaning from the image.

There is a considerable body of theory which focuses on the harm done to law by images. This perspective owes itself to a long tradition of modernist thought — typified by Kant but which also finds its expression in Weber and Habermas — that divides human experience into three mutually exclusive spheres: the cognitive, which embraces science and all forms of truth-seeking, rational inquiry; the moral, which embraces the political; and the self-explanatory libidinal-aesthetic. Of course, these three realms have never been accorded equal weighting. As far back as Plato, a hierarchy was instituted, with the cognitive at the top and the aesthetic relegated to the bottom. Law, as we all well know, belongs to the realm of the cognitive. As Douzinas puts it:

Modern law was born in this separation from aesthetic considerations. The self in art — as painter or viewer — is free, desiring with gender and history. The subject of law — as judge or litigant — is constrained, rational, genderless.³

The increasing difficulty in maintaining the boundaries between these realms in our televisual age is an increasing source of concern not only for cultural theorists, but also for legal theorists. Sherwin has recently argued that the unrelenting flow of images, circulating at an ever-increasing rate, has deprived audiences of the distance necessary for critical engagement with what they are seeing. Images are effective at producing an easily digestible vision of the world, but one which does not necessarily correspond to reality. Sherwin goes on to argue that we increasingly find lawyers adopting the methods of televisual culture in order to create the most powerful version of 'reality.'⁴

It was certainly the intent of cultural studies to redress the conservative estimations of image, yet a considerable school exists which continues to regard the image as inherently conservative and inextricably linked to fascism.

² Douzinas (1999), pp 1–2; see also Jay (1999).

³ Douzinas (1999), p 1.

⁴ Sherwin (2000).

For Kinser and Kleinman, Nazism could be accounted for by the fact that: 'German consciousness treated its own reality — developed and lived its own history — as though it were a work of art. It was a culture committed to the aesthetic imagination.'⁵ While few writers today would suggest an isomorphic relation between contemporary societies and Nazi Germany, there remains a relationship.⁶ Terry Eagleton has been outspoken in this regard:

The wholesale aestheticization of society had found its grotesque apotheosis for a brief moment in fascism, with its panoply of myths, symbols and orgiastic spectacles ... But in the post-war years a different form of aestheticization was also to saturate the entire culture of late capitalism, with its fetishism of style and surface, its culture of hedonism and technique, its reifying of the signifier and displacement of discursive meaning with random intensities.⁷

The brazen spectacle of our modern image cultures exemplifies the amoral, if not completely immoral, consequences of the imperialist colonisation by the aesthetic sphere of the other two spheres of human experience. An aesthetic imagination untempered by the restraints of reason would lead to the most dire social and political consequences. An aesthetic is incapable of formulating an ethical mode of engagement — that is, it has no counter-hegemonic force. The world is reduced to a multiplicity of monads concerned only with their rampant pursuit of pleasure.

There is a constant play between the power of the aesthetic — the visceral and the sensual, which knows no limits and contains no moral sense — and the necessity of reason to control and place limits on this power. There is undoubtedly the institution of a hierarchy here. Reason plays the censoring role to aesthetic excess. The body to whom the aesthetic speaks is a passive receiver of the external stimulus. It takes reason to restore activity to the relationship. Hence, even if aesthetics can be assimilated into reason, it is always a process fraught with danger which depends on reason. The value of the body and aesthetics derives from the action of the mind. The danger in the introduction of the aesthetic to the political concerns the intermingling of boundaries of ostensibly mutually exclusives spheres. But this relationship is only ever articulated as one of respective dominance. If the aesthetic penetrates the cognitive, it threatens to overwhelm the cognitive whereas the proper order of things is for the cognitive to dominate the libidinal-aesthetic. This is not say that there are no problems with privileging the cognitive which aren't well traversed by contemporary cultural theories; it is just that the problems the cognitive presents seem to be infinitely more desirable than the dangers of the aesthetic.

The association is not entirely unjustified. There are countless statements which validate the aesthetic interpretation of fascism and countless pieces of

⁵ Cited in Jay (1993), p 71.

⁶ See Koepnick (1999).

⁷ Eagleton (1990), p 372.

programming that are hopelessly ideological. Even those who have advocated the aesthetic imagination as providing a credible alternative to Judeo-Christian morality, such as Schiller, acknowledge the dangers of unrestrained aestheticism, although he attributed such consequences to an deficient experience of the aesthetic rather than as inherent to the aesthetic.⁸ While there is undoubtedly a relationship between aesthetics and oppressive regimes, is this relationship essential or synthetic?

In the aesthetics of political modernism, aesthetics has in many cases become a virtual synonym for ideology. Ideology, in its most general sense, refers to the process by which our knowledge and understanding of the world are determined by political interests. It is the dissemination of ideology through mechanisms of communication and education that dominant social and political relations are reproduced. In its explication of the cinema's politics of representation the definition of ideology extended beyond the explicit content or 'narrative' of a film to include how techniques of signification (*mise-en-scene*, etc) determine the possible viewing positions open to a spectator, thereby reproducing acquiescent subjectivities. Althusser called this process 'interpellation'. The yardstick of ideological cinema was Hollywood 'aesthetic realism' and, for certain theorists and filmmakers, narrative and representation in their entirety.⁹

To hamper the seductive effects of aesthetic realism, political modernism pursued a strategy of formalism. The underlying assumption was that, by foregrounding the process itself, privileging the signifier, the spectator's incorporation within the illusionistic world is frustrated, alternately focusing attention on the mechanisms by which meaning (signification) is produced.¹⁰ What is essential here is the role mystification plays as the explanatory schema for the perpetuation of oppressive social and political relations.

Certainly there is much in *Starship Troopers* which lends itself to an ideological reading, from either of two perspectives. First, the film *Starship Troopers* can be seen as a symptom of the dominant ideology of Western culture. A superficial action film which revels in mind numbingly graphic violence, where audiences unproblematically identify with Johnny and his friends creating the sense of a self-sufficient subjectivity, perpetuating obedience to the dominant authority. Second, *Starship Troopers* can be seen as a film which foregrounds the ideology of contemporary dominant culture as a means of making a satirical comment on those processes. What prevents us from reading the film one way or another, what frustrates an ideological reading of *Starship Troopers*, is precisely the viability of either of these readings. We will return to this point below.

Shaviro goes so far as to sum up political modernism as 'an almost reflex movement of suspicion, disavowal and phobic rejection' of the image.¹¹ Certainly, the ideological reading of film has reached something of an impasse.

⁸ Chytry (1989), p 90.

⁹ Rodowick (1988); Rutsky and Wyatt (1990).

¹⁰ Rodowick (1988).

¹¹ Shaviro (1993), p 15.

These readings seem increasingly detached from the actual cinematic experience, providing a coherent but nonetheless hollow understanding of a film. In *Starship Troopers* for instance, while both of the former ideological readings are viable, neither seems commensurate with the actual experience of the film; neither seems adequate for explaining the pleasures and sensations that accompany its viewing. This is not simply a phenomenological issue but one of fundamental political importance. If the aesthetic experience operates for a spectator in a way other than as a means of mystification and seduction, then the political function also changes.

Deleuze and Guattari have argued that ideological accounts are inadequate for explaining the fascist phenomenon. They are at pains to distinguish between fascism and totalitarianism. While fascism undoubtedly incorporates a totalitarian state, this is only half the equation. 'The masses do not passively submit to power; nor do they "want" to be repressed, in a kind of masochistic hysteria; nor are they tricked by an ideological lure.'¹² In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they suggest that fascism draws its power from molecular forces which interact on a local level before resonating together as a totalitarian state. Fascism can only be accounted for by microfascisms, a bottom-up process which compliments the top-down processes of totalitarianism. This is what Foucault called: 'the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us'.¹³

This bottom-up, micropolitical element is precisely what cannot be accounted for by ideological readings of image cultures. Ideology remains a top-down process and, while undoubtedly a feature of the contemporary media, it is no longer a determinate feature. In accordance with Deleuze and Guattari's account of fascism, it is my contention that *Starship Troopers* exceeds both of the ideological readings of the film. If we are to understand why Johnny and his friends fight 'for' their bondage, we have to look towards the aesthetic qualities *but* from a perspective other than as a receptacle for ideological content.

Ontology of the Image

Brian Massumi, working within a Deleuzo-Guattarian framework, has explicated one such alternate perspective.¹⁴ For Massumi, image reception is not a process which addresses a unified 'spectator', but one which takes place simultaneously on multiple levels via multiple mechanisms. Massumi calls these levels 'quality' and 'intensity', and they are commensurate with content and effect. These levels, while not opposed or completely disconnected, are nonetheless characterised by a gap and operate according to different logics.

Quality refers to the image's 'indexing to conventional meanings in an intersubjective context, its socio-linguistic qualification'.¹⁵ It is a conscious,

¹² Deleuze and Guattari (1988), p 215.

¹³ Foucault (1983), p xiii.

¹⁴ Massumi (1996).

¹⁵ Massumi (1996), p 218.

semiotic process which captures or qualifies an image for insertion within a linear, narrative or discursive context and action–reaction circuits. Quality is what we refer to when a film ‘means’ something. It does not simply refer to dialogue or expressions, but camera angles and lighting effects. Ideology, whether as a question of form or content, belongs to qualification.

Intensity, conversely, is what is qualified by quality. Whereas quality refers to static states, intensity refers to a dynamic process of excess. Whereas quality is embodied in conscious processes, intensity belongs to the surface, embodied in the purely autonomic reactions of the body. Whereas quality seeks to fix distinctions, organise, structure and make meaningful, intensity does not. ‘It vaguely but insistently connects what is normally indexed as separate. When asked to signify, it can only do so in a paradox.’¹⁶ Intensity is associated with super-linear processes, feedback, the suspension of narrative progression, a short circuit in the passage from past to future.

These levels, while not parallel, are related. They participate in one another as a conscious–autonomic mix with each pole actualised to a greater or lesser extent. While each pole may be present simultaneously, their relationship is inverted. As intensity waxes, quality wanes and vice versa. The aesthetic quality of images themselves seems to have a greater affinity with intensity, whereas language is all about qualification. As Deleuze and Guattari note: ‘Language is not life; it gives life orders.’¹⁷ But it is not as simple as this. Language/qualification is not simply in opposition to intensity, but a question of resonance or interference, amplification or dampening.

Massumi equates intensity with affect. He suggests that, contrary to the suggestion of some that affect is disappearing in our postmodern world, it is emotion that is waning. Emotion and affect are quite separate. Emotion is intensity, or affect once it has been captured and inserted within socially recognised lines of action and reaction. Emotion is a subjective category — intensity owned, recognised and named. Affect does not belong to the subject or consciousness; it is exterior to and preceding the subject. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari call intensity ‘the war machine’: ‘The man of war has an entire becoming that implies multiplicity, celerity, ubiquity, metamorphosis and treason, the power of affect.’¹⁸ Affect is the weapon of the war machine: ‘affects transpierce the body like arrows, they are weapons of war’.¹⁹ Affect operates directly on subjectivity, rips it from its interiority and projects it outwards. Affect, like a surge of energy, overwhelms subjectivity by either short-circuiting the action–reaction circuits, freezing subjectivity in its place, frustrating our ability to respond to a situation (catatonia), or by filling the subject to the brim so that it actually overflows into the world, dissolving

¹⁶ Massumi (1996), p 218.

¹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari (1988), p 76.

¹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari (1988), p 243.

¹⁹ Deleuze and Guattari (1988), p 356.

the boundaries between ourselves and the world, sweeping the subject away (the flash).²⁰

Guattari, in his book *Chaosmosis*, makes the connection between affect and subjectivity even clearer. The central thrust of the book is the centrality that subjectivity must assume in any future politics. By subjectivity, Guattari means the *production* of subjectivity, which displaces the traditional emphasis on the Subject.²¹ What is significant for Guattari in the media (and theory, for that matter) is not their content but their 'existentialising function'. Guattari explains:

In studies on new forms of art (like Deleuze's on cinema) we will see, for example, movement image and time images constituting seeds of the production of subjectivity. We are not in the presence of a passively representative image, but of a vector of subjectivity. We are actually confronted by a non-discursive, pathic knowledge.²²

But how do we perceive affect if, by its nature, it evades consciousness? According to Massumi, while emotion may be the capture of affect, affect is necessarily 'perceived alongside the perceptions that are its capture'.²³ Pathic subjectivity continues to self-actualise 'in the world of language and through multiple mediations'.²⁴ This perception may revolve around a particular event, such as the realisation that something is other than what we thought it was (Freud's uncanny) or the interruption of functions of actual and familiar connection — shock. But affect is also a continuous presence, a background trace or echo that accompanies every event or experience. For Massumi, this is a sense of one's own vitality, a non-conscious self-perception, the body perceiving its own power to evade final capture within any structure. It is what we have just characterised as the flash, the overflowing of qualification — the body perceiving that it will never be captured and that it will always surpass the knowledge consciousness has of it.

Massumi goes so far as to argue that images are inherently affective. Images 'speak' to the body first, with consciousness coming into the program quite late as a means of capturing or containing affect. Consequently, qualification can never fully grasp the power of an image. That is, even if we grasp the content of an image, we will never fully be able to account for the image's affect.

²⁰ Deleuze and Guattari (1988), p 356; The catatonic aspect of affect is analogous with Deleuze's characterisation of the image in *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* which is the transitional moment between the movement-image and the time-image: "We hardly believe any longer that a global situation can give rise to an action which is capable of modifying it — no more than we can believe that an action can force a situation to disclose itself, even partially." See p 206.

²¹ Guattari (1995), p 22.

²² Guattari (1995), p 25.

²³ Massumi (1996), p 229.

²⁴ Guattari (1995), p 25.

But what does affect make possible? Why is this irreducible trace so desirable? The qualification of intensity refers to a static state. Affect, on the other hand, is that in which nothing is foretold. Intensity is that which prevents any structure from becoming entirely closed and perfectly stable. Affect is that from which the new emerges. Whereas quality operates according to circumscribed action–reaction circuits, affect suspends these circuits to enable a new connectivity.

Affect comes first. It is the engine which drives the motor of being. Guattari observes that the place of affect in our rationalistic cultures is paradoxical since 'pathic subjectivity tends to be constantly evacuated from relations of discursivity [qualification], although discursive operators are essentially based on it'.²⁵ And again:

This pathic subjectivation, at the root of all modes of subjectivation, is overshadowed in rationalistic, capitalistic subjectivity which tends to circumvent it. Science is constructed by bracketing these factors of subjectification, which achieve expression only when certain discursive links are put outside signification.²⁶

While affect is resistant to structure, the connectivity which actually emerges is not itself necessarily resistant:

The machinic production of subjectivity can work for better or worse ... It's impossible to judge such a machinic evolution either positively or negatively; everything depends on its articulation within collective assemblages of enunciation. At best there is creation, or innovation, of new Universes of reference; at worst there is the deadening influence of the mass media to which millions of individuals are currently condemned.²⁷

Notice that 'at best' we can hope for innovation, not progression or resistance (in the macropolitical sense). There is nothing which can guarantee that the connectivity which emerges along this vector of subjectivation will be 'new' or 'progressive'. You can find yourself — and there is uniform agreement that this is the case for the overwhelming majority — bound by the circumscribed action–reaction circuits more intensely than ever before. This is not, however, a statement of resignation to the way things are, as if to subscribe to this perspective abandons any hope that a 'progressive' politics is possible. The image is capable of a lot less or a lot more, depending on how you look at it: less because it doesn't produce progressive politics or social change directly, but also more because it produces that from which any progressive politics is impossible without it because it is from affect that the new emerges.

²⁵ Guattari (1995), p 26.

²⁶ Guattari (1995), p 25.

²⁷ Guattari (1995), p 5.

All this stresses that affect is not a 'thing'. You cannot watch a scene in a film and isolate a moment or stylistic device which is affective. It is a ghost surplus produced in the particular configuration of elements; indivisible and irreducible.

While quality insists that something must obey the law of non-contradiction, we see affect clearest in the paradox. The paradox is in excess of quality. As Deleuze writes at the beginning of the *Logic of Sense*: 'Good sense [quality] affirms in all things there is a determinable sense or direction; but paradox is the affirmation of both senses or directions at the same time.'²⁸ If we return to *Starship Troopers*, we are in a better position to understand the ambiguity within the film if we examine it from an affective perspective.

Melrose Place Meets Triumph of the Will

On the level of its narrative, *Starship Troopers* is eminently reducible as the simplest of stories. In the far future, Earth is a utopia, unified by a form of government which restricts suffrage and the right to participate in public life to those who have served a term of service in the military. The story follows the progression of Johnny Rico through basic training and his rise up the military ranks as humanity goes to war with immense space bugs called 'Arachnids'. As the story progresses, Johnny learns what it means to be a citizen, as he puts behind petty rivalries to fight for the greater 'good' of the state.

However, the 'film' is infinitely more than the story. As a film, *Starship Troopers* is an irreducible assemblage which serves to mobilise affect as an essential component of the film's reception. It effaces an oppositional relationship between experience as a cognitive process on the one hand, and a bodily process on the other. Rather, the extraction of meaning is a dynamic process where these paradoxical processes participate in one another.

The viability of the alternate ideological readings I noted earlier expressed itself in the critical, academic and popular response to *Starship Troopers* as an overwhelming ambivalence. I am not talking here of whether or not an individual 'liked' the film, but rather what they felt the film was doing, what it meant (although the two can never be entirely separated). The film seemed to elude ready classification, which was all the more galling because everything about the film said that it should be easily classifiable. It was a big-budget Hollywood blockbuster adapted from a juvenile pulp novel. It should have been easy to understand; there shouldn't have been any dispute in its reception. But there was.²⁹ On the one hand, there were those critics who interpreted the film as a reactionary, jingoistic apology for militarism:

There's a lot going on in *Starship Troopers* that's nowhere near as benign as people want to pretend it is, and willfully ignoring it doesn't make watching the film any less demeaning.

²⁸ Deleuze (1990), p 1.

²⁹ For other takes on the ambiguity in *Starship Troopers*, see Enker (1998); Hunter (1999); Telotte (1999–2000); and D'Amato and Rimanelli (2000).

Going in I figured the movie would be idiotic, but I'd be able to enjoy some amazing special effect and get out intact. Well the effects are spectacular ... but I left the theatre dumbstruck and deeply saddened by what I had seen.³⁰

On the other hand, the film was experienced as a slickly ironic satire of the fascist tendencies of Western imperialism.

Many others, however, recognised the ambivalence — even if it is cynically attributed it market forces or a vulgar postmodernism. Richard Schikel in *Time* magazine was uncharacteristically ambivalent (if only a little) in his estimation of *Starship Troopers*:

Pretty funny. But not always very funny. For *Starship Troopers* contains an unexplored premise. There are two classes in this future world: civilians, who have sacrificed voting privileges for material ease, and warriors, who earn the right to rule by their willingness to die for the state. In short, we're looking at a happily fascist world. Maybe that's the movie's final, deadpan joke. Maybe it's saying that war inevitably makes fascists of us all. Or — best guess — maybe the filmmakers are so lost in their slambang visual effects that they don't give a hoot about the movie's scariest implications.³¹

In an article for *Science Fiction Studies*, Steffan Hantke succinctly captures the challenge presented by the film:

It wants to be a straightforward action film, engaging its adolescent target audience in an unproblematic dynamics of identification and pleasure, yet at the same time it employs fascist tropes in an ironic subtext in effect erasing any meaningful distinction between both discursive levels for an audience that lacks the sophistication, both as readers of history and as readers of filmic grammar, to respond properly — that is to say, with a healthy degree of critical distance. In short, American audiences, oblivious to the ironic subtext, will cheer the fascist cause.³²

There is a lot to unpack in Hantke's comment. First, by his reading, the film is problematic in so far as we expect it to conform to the either/or critical categories inherited from the aesthetics of political modernism. Second, the reference to the failure of audiences 'to respond properly' points to the imperative to capture, to qualify a film in order for it to 'make sense'. However, the power of *Starship Troopers* is not to be found in the neutralisation of its paradoxical nature, or by reasserting the 'meaningful distinction' between discursive levels, but in the differential produced by the interaction of these levels.

³⁰ Tataro (1997)

³¹ Schikel (1997).

³² Hantke (1998), pp 497–498.

The film *can* be read as either a straight war film, or as an ironic satire of that same tradition. Neither reading is incorrect — each simply elides the simultaneous presence of its antithesis in each moment of the film. In this way, the film refuses to be made to mean, in the sense of a static state. Rather, the film is what Deleuze and Guattari call an ‘event’. A state privileges a form or a spatialised model of time; the film as a formal object is to be grasped and quantified. On the other hand, the event privileges the temporal dimension, in which identity can never be entirely closed. The ambivalence registered in its reception is precisely a sense of paradox, an incompleteness in an either/or reading that causes the system to move away from either critical pole towards its antithesis. The film exists in a state of suspension. This does not mean that it is passive; rather, it is full of motion but along a different axis — a new connectivity.

This undoubtedly produces, as it does for Hantke, a sense of discomfort. If the identity of *Starship Troopers* is not known, if what it is is undecidable, it cannot be *controlled*, by the left or the right, even if it can be *used* by the left and the right. This does not mean that the system is apolitical. Rather, I would argue it is intensely political, but cares nothing for our established political categories. It is presocial, not asocial. This helps us understand the ambivalence felt on part of the left and the right towards the media. The disquiet that critics like Jameson, Eagleton, Ryan and Kellner feel towards the aesthetic-libidinal, the sin it commits which is ‘unforgivable’ and makes it ‘irredeemable’, is not simply that it is ‘dangerous’ (reason is dangerous too) but that it refuses to declare its allegiances. The dangers of reason result when reason falls into error. However, since reason by right is ‘good’, it has chosen its side by default. The image is neither good nor bad ‘by right’.

By neutralising affect — or attempting to — the left and right have been able to carve for themselves a transcendental comfort zone where qualities become fixed, some defined as ‘progressive’, others as ‘reactionary’. In this way, events can be evaluated from a distance — coolly and dispassionately. What Verhoeven’s film does is reveal that the differential relationship between intensity and its emotional qualification is not all it is cracked up to be. The space between the two poles is a razor’s edge, because affect always accompanies its qualification. Consequently, the opposition between progressive and reactionary politics is not all it is cracked up to be either. The distinction is macropolitical, while ignoring the micropolitical dimension which traverses it.

Foucault asked: ‘How does one keep from being fascist even (especially) when one believes oneself to be a revolutionary militant?’³³ *Starship Troopers* doesn’t answer that question through a qualification; rather, it attempts to *enact* its answer, and its answer is affective. *Starship Troopers* makes you experience the differential between intensity and its qualification, allowing you no comfort in either. Verhoeven strategically wants you to experience the fascist urge. Once you have, the differential between intensity and its qualification is exposed. Neither one can be complete without the other. There

³³ Foucault (1983), p xiii.

is no way to bypass fascism by bypassing affect. As Benjamin's epigram above makes clear, the only way out is through. *Starship Troopers* does not shy away from the dangers inherent in this process, but simultaneously makes the possibility of a progressive politics dependent up on it.

The creation of a space from which law and reason could operate without any risk of sullyng itself, the transcendental comfort zone of political modernism, was illusory, and would leave its criticism incomplete because it only deals in qualifications. *Starship Troopers* is undoubtedly a fascist film, but it is also a critique of fascism. The harnessing of affect gives you a taste of fascism. Tantalising to some, repulsive to some and overwhelming to others, it is undoubtedly dangerous, but also necessary. Affect takes away and destroys. Potentially, all other dangers pale in comparison, but it is also the giver, the creator, that which evades order, law, meaning, that which makes the new possible. By making us participate in affect, we can glimpse both powers. It offers us no reassurances that our choice will be the right one. From a dialectical perspective, the image is the 'enemy' of law, meaning and reason: its opposite. Yet Deleuze and Guattari are not sensualists or hedonists, simply inverting the image-reason dyad and privileging the aesthetic over reason. They are, however, arguing for the rights of the image as a power in and of itself, and not simply as a means of representing reason. It is an invitation for separate spheres to touch, intermingle and impel each other in new directions and new possibilities. Dangerous or not, images aren't going anywhere.

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