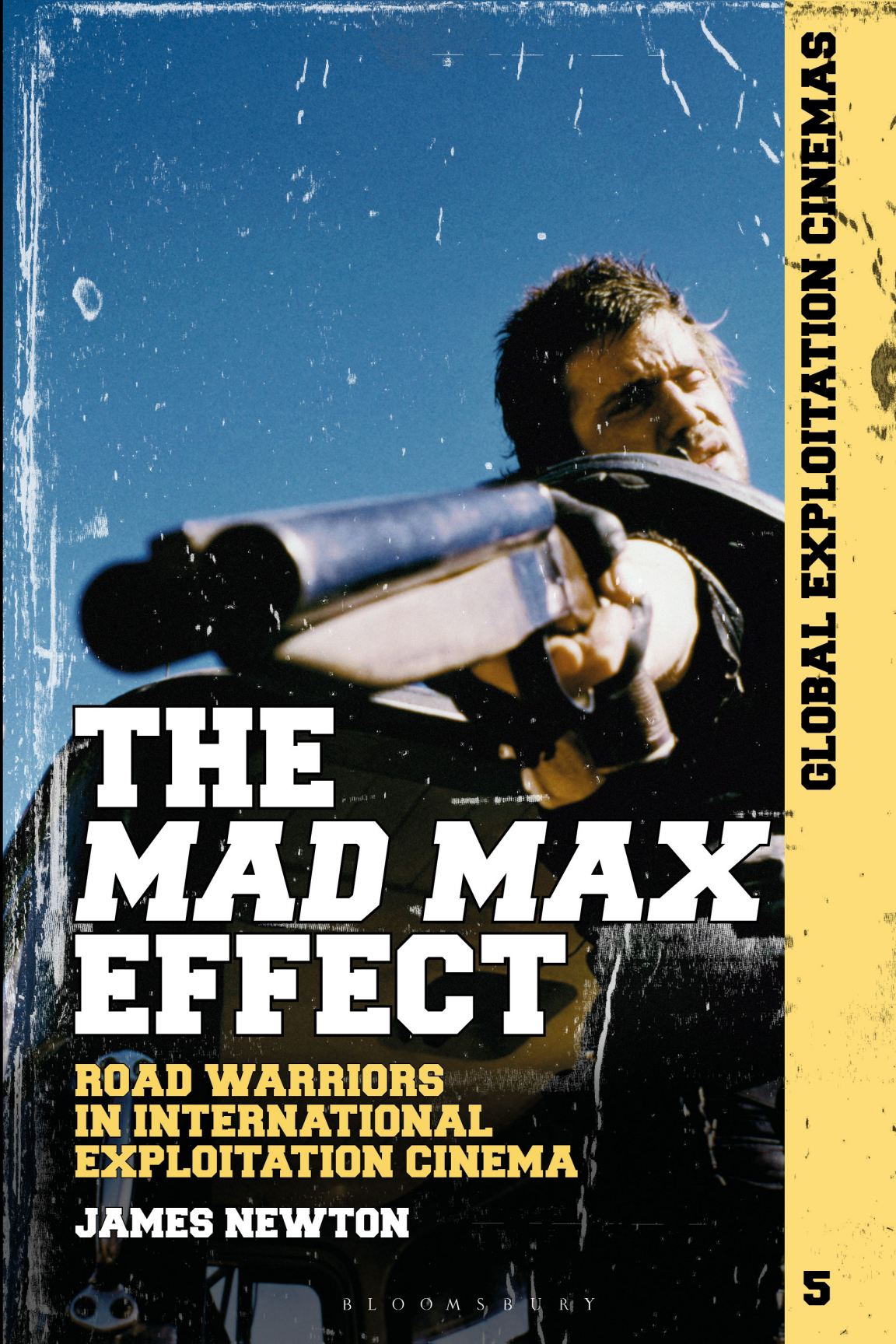




GLOBAL EXPLOITATION CINEMAS

THE MAD MAX EFFECT

**ROAD WARRIORS
IN INTERNATIONAL
EXPLOITATION CINEMA**

JAMES NEWTON

B L O O M S B U R Y

5

The *Mad Max* Effect

Global Exploitation Cinemas

Series Editors

Johnny Walker, Northumbria University, UK

Austin Fisher, Bournemouth University, UK

Editorial Board

Kate Egan (Northumbria University)

Tesjaswini Ganti (New York University)

Joan Hawkins (Indiana University)

Kevin Heffernan (Southern Methodist University)

Ernest Mathijs (University of British Columbia)

Laura Mayne (University of Hull)

Constance Penley (University of California, Santa Barbara)

Eric Schaefer (Emerson College)

Jamie Sexton (Northumbria University)

Iain Robert Smith (King's College, London)

Dolores Tierney (University of Sussex)

Valerie Wee (National University of Singapore)

Also in the Series:

*Disposable Passions: Vintage Pornography and the Material Legacies
of Adult Cinema*, by David Church

Grindhouse: Cultural Exchange on 42nd Street, and Beyond,
edited by Austin Fisher and Johnny Walker

Exploiting East Asian Cinemas: Genre, Circulation, Reception,
edited by Ken Provencher and Mike Dillon

The Politics of Nordsploitation: History, Industry, Audiences,
edited by Pietari Kääpä and Tommy Gustafsson

The *Mad Max* Effect
*Road Warriors in International
Exploitation Cinema*

James Newton

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC
NEW YORK • LONDON • OXFORD • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC
Bloomsbury Publishing Inc
1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

BLOOMSBURY, BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC and the Diana logo are trademarks
of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published in the United States of America 2021

Copyright © James Newton, 2021

For legal purposes the Acknowledgements on p. vi constitute
an extension of this copyright page.

Cover design: Johnny Walker and Eleanor Rose
Cover image: Mel Gibson in *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior*, 1982. Dir. George Miller
© Kennedy Miller Production / RNB / Collection Christophel / ArenaPAL

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted
in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying,
recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior
permission in writing from the publishers.

Bloomsbury Publishing Inc does not have any control over, or responsibility for, any
third-party websites referred to or in this book. All internet addresses given in this
book were correct at the time of going to press. The author and publisher regret any
inconvenience caused if addresses have changed or sites have ceased to exist, but
can accept no responsibility for any such changes.

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-5013-4229-5
ePDF: 978-1-5013-4231-8
eBook: 978-1-5013-4230-1

Series: Global Exploitation Cinemas

Typeset by Newgen KnowledgeWorks Pvt. Ltd., Chennai, India

To find out more about our authors and books visit www.bloomsbury.com
and sign up for our newsletters.

Contents

Acknowledgements	vi
Introduction	1
1 Origins of the road warrior	13
2 The <i>Death Race</i> lineage	35
3 Contextualizing <i>Mad Max</i>	55
4 Post-apocalypse now! The politics of <i>Mad Max</i>	79
5 MadMaxploitation! Transnational road warriors	107
6 <i>Fury Road</i> and the imitation of exploitation	141
7 <i>Mad Max</i> and the metatext: Fan engagement and online culture	159
Conclusion: A few years from now	183
Films Cited	191
References	199
Index	209

Acknowledgements

As with the writing of any book, there are numerous people to thank, including various colleagues who offer help and guidance, publishing staff who assist in the production, as well as friends and family who contribute in less obvious but perhaps equally important ways. If you had knowledge I was writing this book at all then you undoubtedly helped in some small way. More specifically, I would like to thank the following: Chris Pallant, for looking over the proposal in its very early stages; editors of the book and Global Exploitation Cinemas series, Johnny Walker and Austin Fisher; Peter Stanfield, whose advice is always quick and to the point; Xavier Mendik, for pointing me in the direction of a film I wasn't previously aware; Lee Kenny, for his point about the video rental store; Nigel Mather, for sourcing references, often without me asking; Nick Furze, for proofreading the manuscript when it was in a shocking state and correcting my many typos, poor writing and errors and also suggesting some additions. Finally, thanks go to the artists who gave up their time to answer my questions about their work: Brian Trenchard-Smith, Brendan McCarthy, Paul C. Miller and the chaps at Murlyn Films, Stephen Longhurst, Patrick Olliver and Phil Lyndon. It is their creative efforts that inspired me to write the book in the first place.

Introduction

At the 88th Academy Award ceremony in 2016, costume designer Jenny Beavan walked towards the stage dressed in biker jacket and boots to collect an Oscar for her work on *Mad Max: Fury Road* (George Miller, 2015). Within days, a Vine shared millions of times online revealed an assortment of film industry figures, including nominated directors Alejandro G. Iñárritu and Tom McCarthy, watching her walk past, but failing, in the eyes of observers on social media, to afford her an appropriate amount of respect and applause (Wiseman 2016).¹ The case became a cause célèbre for feminist journalists, who used the Vine as evidence of Hollywood's antipathy towards women who fail to meet particularly narrow beauty and grooming standards. The incident came only weeks after Beavan was described as looking like a 'bag lady' by actor and writer Stephen Fry when winning the BAFTA for costume design in London, where she had attended the ceremony in similarly ramshackle and eclectic attire. While admirably playing down both incidents (Fry and Beavan are actually close friends), Beavan explained that her choice of outfit 'was just giving a little wink to *Mad Max*' and pointed out that her leather jacket had the logo of the film's villain emblazoned on the back (Carlson 2016).

The social media furor followed the appraisal in much of the popular press that *Fury Road* was an example of a feminist Hollywood movie, because of its apparently strong female co-lead and its 'call to dismantle patriarchies' (Valenti 2015). The debates surrounding this interpretation, and the subsequent response on social media to Fry's BAFTA joke and the Oscar Vine, briefly placed *Mad Max* at the centre of a cultural battleground: the pawn in a debate about attitudes towards women in the media. This was in addition to the attention it received by being a winner in several other Academy Award categories, including editing, production design and sound mixing.

¹ Vine is a now-defunct social networking app that allowed for the creation and hosting of very short, six-second videos.

The events signalled a new chapter in the journey of the four-film franchise directed by George Miller: from its beginnings as a low-budget Australian action film, through two sequels of increasingly expanding budgets, a thirty-year period of inactivity where it existed as a cinematic memory, to being a critically acclaimed Oscar winner in *Fury Road*, that cost in excess of \$150 million to produce. *Mad Max*, as a brand, had shifted from its cinematic margins in exploitation cinema all the way to Hollywood and the mainstream media.²

Mad Max (1979) featured Mel Gibson in his first starring role. He played Max Rockatansky, a black-leather-clad police pursuit driver for the Main Force Patrol, in a rundown, and energy-depleted, future Australia, who seeks revenge when his wife is left comatose and his baby son killed by a gang of pillaging bikers led by the Toecutter. Aside from its box office success worldwide, where it returned \$100 million from a production budget of \$350,000, its impact was also measurable in that it opened up tax incentives for filmmakers whose movies could demonstrate 'Australian credentials' and be shot and released within a year (Simpson, Marawska and Lambert 2009: 23).

Its international success led to *The Road Warrior* (1981) (simply called *Mad Max 2* in most territories other than the United States – one of the few countries where the original did not have much impact upon initial release), which was set in a post-apocalyptic world of biker gangs scavenging for gasoline in a world of decreasing resources. Max is cajoled into assisting a peaceful community who live within an old oil refinery, whose capacity for gasoline production has forced them under brutal siege by a gang of punk-attired marauders.

Set after an oil war that has destroyed much of the civilized world, *The Road Warrior's* aesthetic clashes tapped into the New Wave music and fashion zeitgeist of 1981, while its narrative was derivative of Hollywood westerns in its structure of a lone gunman protecting a vulnerable rural community. With a reported budget of \$4.5 million, *The Road Warrior* was at the time the most expensive Australian film and meant that the series had quickly transcended its exploitation origins from an economic standpoint, if not in their general tone and effect.

² I am considering 'exploitation cinema' in a similar manner to that of Robin Wood, who writes that he uses the term like he does the phrase 'arthouse cinema', as a signifier 'operating both within the film as "style" and outside ... as publicity, distribution, etc' (1986: 124).

Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome (1985) was set, according to its novelization, fifteen years after the events of *The Road Warrior* and co-starred singer Tina Turner as the matriarch of a brutal desert community built on the trading and bartering of goods.³ It was even bigger in terms of scale, with a self-conscious attempt to edge towards the kind of mainstream action and adventure films produced by Steven Spielberg at the time. The inclusion of soft rock songs on the soundtrack (by Turner herself) and a noticeable reduction in the extremity of its violence helped to distance the film from criticism endured by its predecessors. In *Fury Road*, the series' reboot, Max (this time played by Tom Hardy) assists in the rescue of four reluctant 'wives' of despotic warlord Immortan Joe and his army of devoted, but radiation stricken, 'War Boys'.

The sequels (and to a lesser extent the original 1979 feature) establish a set of conventions and iconography that would come to be closely associated with the 'brand', or idea of, 'Mad Max'. First, there is the trope of Max being a reluctant saviour of a group of innocents who are being terrorized by vastly more aggressive and savage gangs fronted by muscular and dominant tyrants. Second, the backdrop for the narrative conflict is the struggle over vital resources in a world that no longer produces anything on an industrial scale. Third, the physical action in the series predominantly features motorized vehicles; of chases involving cars, trucks, motorcycles and buggies; with frequent spectacular collisions and smashes resulting in injury and death. Miller identifies the inspiration for this aspect as being what he sees as a uniquely Australian car culture, an observation that emerged from his past occupation as a doctor treating road traffic accident victims (Martin 2003: 30). Finally, the general aesthetic of the series is built around a sense of detritus from the twentieth century and the rescuing of discarded material to create vehicles, buildings and costumes. The *mise en scène* is packed with the flotsam and jetsam of twentieth-century life, consisting of reapplied cultural markers, icons and industrial scrap.

Prior to the extraordinary renaissance of *Mad Max* as a franchise (signalled also through the release of a high-profile video game based on the films in 2015), brought about by the critical success of *Fury Road*, the name of 'Mad

³ *Beyond Thunderdome* was co-directed by George Ogilvie, who was brought in to direct dialogue scenes and lessen the workload of Miller due to the death of his producer/collaborator Byron Kennedy in a helicopter accident during pre-production. Though I refer throughout the book to 'Miller's series', I do so mainly for ease and not to downplay the significant creative influence of Kennedy on the first two productions, or indeed any of Miller's other collaborators.

Max' had survived the previous thirty years as only a memory: as an aesthetic and thematic touchstone for an array of post-apocalyptic media. Films like *Waterworld* (1995), video games such as *Fallout* (1997–2015) and *Borderlands* (2009–12), comic books like *Tank Girl* (1988–) and music videos such as Tupac Shakur's *California Love* (1995) and Puretone's *Addicted to Bass* (1998) all use Miller's series as an aesthetic reference point.

'Mad Max' had also become a shorthand way to refer to a violent and chaotic future society, a yardstick that had significance in a number of non-cinematic contexts. For example, in the British sitcom *Peep Show* (Series 3, Episode 1), *Mad Max* is implied to be a more realistic and likely prediction of the future than the 'wandering around in a dressing gown' cosiness depicted in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Likewise, in the political sitcom *The Thick of It* (Series 4, Episode 7) the phrase 'the locals have gone all "Mad Max"' is used in reference to a breakdown of law and order. British boxer James DeGale stated he was proud to be a 'road warrior', referring to his willingness to travel around the world to engage in bouts (Press Association 2019), and Jamaican boxer Glengoffe Johnson used the same phrase as his nickname. More seriously, but equally relevant an indicator of its place in the popular imagination, it has been used as a reference point in several news items regarding the perceived state of violence and looting in the immediate aftermath of disasters such as Hurricane Katrina, from organizations including Fox News (Straka 2005) and the Socialist Alternative (2005). Two years later, Jonah Goldberg of the *LA Times* took a more balanced view and questioned the standard of reporting that referred to 'Mad Max' in such a casual fashion (2007). Yet the casual use of the series as an easy-to-grasp metaphor continued during moments of international conflict and disaster, such as in headlines referring to the 'Mad Max Assault' (Bacchi 2014) of a British suicide bomber using a modified truck during the conflict in Syria. Even more recently, Conservative MP David Davies denied that Britain would become a 'Mad Max' dystopia in the wake of leaving the European Union. Journalist Luke Buckmaster, in writing his story of the making of the series, noted further allusions including the Canadian MP Maxime Bernier self-styling himself as 'Mad', Vivienne Westwood hosting a party devoted to the theme, as well as an Uber promotion and a graduation party in Japan, leading him to declare Miller as 'the most influential Australian artist of the twentieth century' (2017: xi).

Approaching *Mad Max*

What will it be like after the end of the world? Maybe colourful gangs of crazy looters will chase each other in souped – up – ultra – trucks covered in spikes and guns. Or maybe they won't. – from *The Ladybird Book of the Zombie Apocalypse*

In Jason Hazeley and Joel Morris's satirical updating of Ladybird's educational books for children from the 1960s and 1970s, the above quote appears opposite an illustration of a garage forecourt decorated with 'No Petrol' signs (2016: 26). Though converged with the zombie movie, that alternative popular cinematic version of the end of the world, the reference to colourful and crazy looters fighting over whatever gasoline they can find demonstrates the extent to which part of the visual design and imagery of *Mad Max* had entered a collective consciousness. The joke also echoes Kim Newman's comments in *Nightmare Movies*: 'Whatever the shortages that afflict the cinematic future, we can be sure there will be a plentiful supply of Heavy Metal gear, [and] multi-coloured hairspray' (1988: 85).

The critical frameworks that dominate the literature on the *Mad Max* series focus on Max as an embodiment of Joseph Campbell's mythic 'Hero with a Thousand Faces' (1949) (Chute 1982: 27), the series' generic status (as science fiction or quasi-western) and its position within an Australian national cinema. *The Mad Max Effect* instead explores the way it intersects with various traditions of exploitation cinema, with a particular focus on the tropes, arcs and aesthetics that culminated in Miller's series. *Mad Max* subsumed the elements from a range of low cultural exploitation genres of the 1960s and 1970s, and in turn created its own set of narrative and aesthetic iconography from out of what had gone before. The 'look' of the post-apocalypse and the prevalence of futuristic road warrior gangs that has become a standard way of depicting an imagined broken-down post-apocalypse period were originated not only in Miller's visions but also in the spread of influences that came before *Mad Max* and *The Road Warrior*. In turn, the skill and originality in which they combined these elements resulted in critical and box office success and had an aesthetic impact on dozens of imitators in the following decades. Films such as *Exterminators of the Year 3000* (Giuliano Carnimeo, 1983), *The New Barbarians* (Enzo G. Castellari, 1983) and *Warrior of the Lost World* (David Worth, 1983) helped to constitute a new cycle of

transnational exploitation cinema characterized by ‘weird costumes and ultra-violence’ (Newman 1999: 186).

While O’Regan’s claim that *The Road Warrior* ‘changed international filmmaking’ (1996: 56) is a little overblown, it is fair to say that its range of imitators came from a wider spread of countries than many other successful exploitation films, including examples from Europe, the United States, Asia and South America. The effect of its impact was also immediate. By contrast, *Night of the Living Dead* (George A. Romero, 1968) was an immensely successful movie, but the full extent of its influence and the popularity of the zombie genre didn’t happen until the 1980s and reached its apex in the 2000s when literally hundreds of zombie productions were made and released, including high-budget studio versions as well as innumerable backyard borderline-amateur examples shot on digital video and made for virtually nothing. While the films that attempted to replicate core features of *The Road Warrior* are not as plentiful as those of the zombie genre, its imitators also ranged from vastly budgeted studio productions like *Waterworld* down to comparatively threadbare efforts such as *Ultra Warrior* (August Tamayo San Román, Kevin Tent, 1990) and homemade versions like *Death Run* (Michael J. Murphy, 1987).

The Mad Max Effect is concerned with exploring the development of the road warrior cycle that began in the 1970s and has been a feature of various exploitation cycles ever since, with the series as the centre point not only in terms of when it appeared historically but also because it is its most famous and financially successful embodiment. The looking back to exploitation history and the notion of the ‘grindhouse’ has been an increasing feature of both contemporary iterations of exploitation as well as in academic enquiries into the subject. Grindhouse culture is, according to Fisher and Walker, centred around the ‘pervasive image’ of 42nd Street New York and the grindhouse theatres that inhabited the area such as the Globe, Rialto and the Times Square (2016: 1). The academic discourse accompanying this renewed interest of 1970s and 1980s exploitation cinema encompasses a reassessment of the history, as well as the ‘mode of consumption’ (2016: 2) that has been termed ‘paracinema’ by Jeffrey Sconce (1995), and based around the transgressive potential of trash movies (from low-budget horror, through Mondo documentaries, including Stag and Burlesque pictures, among other niche genres). Fisher and Walker note that the sort of films discussed in their edited volume on the subject (such as biker movies, blaxploitation and Danish porn) had generally been ignored in mainstream discussions of cinema or otherwise marginalized entirely due to

their presentation of dubious material and the cheapness of their productions. Also, the renewed interest in them comes, paradoxically, as a celebration of the initial features that originally caused their marginalization (2016: 2). However, as they correctly point out, exploitation cinema was not all marginal or divorced from the mainstream; and that ‘many were made *because* of the mainstream, or *as part of* profitable cycles of films that were popular with theatre going audiences’ (2016: 2). A third category exists where, if one looks at what films were showing in these theatres, a significant portion of the programming was also made up of mainstream Hollywood movies, if only as part of a second run (Filibus 2018).

Where does *Mad Max* fit into this? It played in 42 Street grindhouses, as did the sequels. It also came from the Australian exploitation context. However, *The Road Warrior* was the most expensive film in Australian history at the time, and *Beyond Thunderdome*, produced a mere six years after the first, was a huge production with music videos as part of its promotion. Miller’s skill as a filmmaker was also frequently compared to that of Steven Spielberg, such as in reviews featured in *The Time Out Film Guide* (Pym 2002: 708), and the reboot/sequel thirty years later was a major summer blockbuster starring global household names like Tom Hardy and Charlize Theron. Combined with the usage of its title in broader political and cultural discussions, its visibility meant that it has never completely been situated at the margins like other examples of exploitation cinema. And yet its success created profitable imitative cycles that would contribute to the continued programming that made up the grindhouses and also a number of titles in the burgeoning format of home video in the 1980s. And today, the stamp of *Mad Max*, its *effect*, is visible in straight to DVD movies and those that go direct to streaming platforms, as well as in the fan responses visible on the Web. *Mad Max* has always existed on the border between exploitation and the mainstream, and has always fitted comfortably into the examinations and analysis of either.

The influence of *Mad Max* has been significant and wide reaching, and in straying beyond cinema and into music videos, video games, and political and journalistic discourse, it has entered common verbal and visual language. My purpose is to examine the connecting threads of these influences. From the perspective of global exploitation culture, and the intent of the series of which this book is a part, this process helps us to resituate and explore *Mad Max* within an exploitation context. In doing so, the book intends to highlight the connectivity between marginal film contexts producing exploitation (such as non-English-speaking countries or directors working with very low budgets)

and mainstream cinema. *The Mad Max Effect* is a way of considering the place of exploitation cinema and how far it overlaps with that of 'Hollywood'.

This book is not a linear retelling of how *Mad Max* came to be or a charting of its production history. Luke Buckmaster's journalistic account is the resource for information on the funding, making-of and development of the series, and also functions as a partial biography of Miller. Adrian Martin's short monograph on the series provides a more formal analysis of Miller's style. This book complements these examples of chronicle and analysis and situates the *Mad Max* series within a demarcated 'road warrior' cycle. Inevitably, doing so builds upon the work of Peter Stanfield, who contends that to study cyclical film production means to put the focus on 'patterns of reiteration alongside modifications' (2015: 12), so as to examine the 'play between novelty and repetition' (2015: 1). A study of cycles means 'a history of film understood through its relationship to the topical' (2015: 13) and to examine where the films respond to events or cultural shifts in wider society happening at the time, or to stylistic trends within contemporary cinema. Both the *Mad Max* series and the other films I identify as belonging to the 'road warrior' rubric mix the aesthetically topical in reconstituting a range of stylistic choices around genre, narrative, costume and production design, as well as respond to the thematically topical anxieties relevant to the latter period of the twentieth century of dystopic states and corporations, or societies attempting to rebuild after war, or ecological or environmental catastrophe.

As Stanfield writes, cycles cannot be used as a 'universal model' (2015: 12) of analysis because the longevity and depth of each cycle vary. And so my work also has to account for the messiness of the history of road warrior movies that come from a multitude of countries and eras rather than Stanfield's studies of bikers, Hot Rod movies and 1950s films set in the Korean war, among others, each of which is more clearly contained by country and a time-limited trend of production. The films discussed in this book instead evolve and overlap into different iterations across transnational contexts, but all of which borrow from and depend upon preceding versions.

Chapter 1 is called 'Origins of the road warrior' and attempts to form an identifiable 'pre-history' out of the elements that formed the first *Mad Max*. These elements are wide reaching and diverse, and this is a study of the production contexts that could allow for a film like *Mad Max* to find an audience, rather than an examination of dystopian science fiction themes. It considers the burgeoning Australian exploitation film of the 1970s and explores its links to the biker movie and the revenge narrative that formed other international cinematic trends of the

time. These trends created a recognizable market that *Mad Max* could exploit. Within these three contexts is missing what Robert J. Read calls ‘carsploitation’ (2016), a cycle of otherwise dissimilar 1970s American films based around automobile chases and crashes. Chapter 2 concentrates on *Death Race 2000* (Paul Bartel, 1975), one of the most notable examples of carsploitation. This satirical science fiction action film was produced by Roger Corman and influenced in part by the satire of automobile fetishism in the Australian *The Cars That Ate Paris* (Peter Weir, 1974), as well as containing other thematic threads such as the role of state-sponsored violence and gladiatorial combat sports that would later be reinvestigated by the *Mad Max* series and the films that it inspired in the 1980s. Such is the overlap between them that Jonathan Rayner goes as far as to suggest that ‘*Mad Max* may be the film *Cars* could have been, and [that] Roger Corman wanted to make’ (2000a: 233). To demonstrate how these threads are both continuing and indelible, I also look at what I am calling the lineage of *Death Race 2000* and its multiple remakes and sequels which post-date *Mad Max* and were appearing around the time of the release of *Fury Road*.

Chapter 3 examines ways of considering *Mad Max*’s theoretical connections to exploitation cinema, and using Tom Gunning’s framework of the ‘cinema of attractions’, I explore how these connections link back to depictions of movement, action and the use of the motor car that were a feature of the attractions of the early silent film period. Chapter 4 is titled ‘The politics of *Mad Max*’ and looks closely at the way its stories and representations can be interpreted in relation to a number of political and social topics. In this chapter, I propose that because they are about ways of restructuring society after an apocalyptic breakdown they specifically invite interpretation from audiences, critics and scholars. However, like the way the *mise en scène* is constructed out of an assortment of symbols and fragments making up the vehicles and costumes, so too can the range of political interpretations be understood as a barrage of often conflicting gestures. The series cannot be easily and simply read in a neat and contained manner. Chapter 4 attempts not to prescribe a static reading of the series but instead to navigate the paradoxical ways in which its representations can be understood.

Chapter 5 looks at the cyclical development in exploitation cinema that *Mad Max* prompted and which resulted in scores of post-apocalypse action films that were built around similar narrative scenarios and which reiterated the aesthetic design of the series’ ‘minestrone’ of ‘punk haircuts, gay bondage wear, World Wrestling Federation make-up, Nazi-kitsch hood ornaments, Heavy Metal shoulder pads, [and] spare auto parts for armour’ (Martin 2003: 49). I distinguish

this cycle by adopting the phrase ‘MadMaxploitation’, a term that has floated around fan discussions of the cycle on the Web and one which indicates that although these transnational films took influences from other sources (much like *Mad Max* did itself), they were mostly profiting from the global impact of *The Road Warrior*.⁴ This marks them as distinct from the road warriors populating the *Death Race* lineage, for example. The phrase ‘MadMaxploitation’ also helps to differentiate from other interpretations and definitions of ‘post-apocalypse’ cinema. In *The Encyclopedia of Film Themes, Settings, and Series*, for example, the entry for ‘End of the World/Post Apocalypse’ makes no separation between the numerous divergent films set after some apocalyptic event. In not doing so, films as different as *The War Game* (Peter Watkins, 1966), *On the Beach* (Stanley Kramer, 1959) and *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* (Ted Post, 1970) and the ‘slew of repetitive actions films set in the barren wasteland of the future’ (Armstrong and Armstrong 2009: 70) which form the basis of the chapter, are all a part of the same listing despite having very little in common either thematically or in style. The phrase ‘post-apocalypse cinema’ is therefore too broad for my purposes. A particular focus of this chapter is in how, despite originating from widely different countries, their shared aesthetics and themes indicated that the road warrior archetype and MadMaxploitation had a global relevance during the 1980s, as well as demonstrating the spread of exploitation cinema beyond geographic borders.

Chapter 6 is concerned with the release of *Fury Road* and how its marketing emphasized the ‘reality’ of its production in terms of its staging of action sequences and stunts. This was at the expense of discussions of its digital elements, in a way that recalled a period of production around the time of the original series that is deemed to be edgier, more dangerous and more authentic than twenty-first-century digital filmmaking thought to be overly reliant on visual effects. In doing so, the discussions surrounding *Fury Road* indicate a nostalgia for historical exploitation cinema that is familiar from aspects of culture, arts, movies and fandom today, and which has in part led to the renewal of academic interest in the subject. While Chapter 6 analyses the studio-produced paratexts that create a narrative surrounding the making of *Fury Road*, Chapter 7 switches focus to fan responses in the digital age and which serve as metatexts that comment on the series in inventive ways. The presence of parodic, celebratory

⁴ I feel ‘RoadWarriorsploitation’ would possibly be a more accurate phrase when it comes to describing the films that immediately followed in the early 1980s, but it is far too unwieldy.

and sometimes critical fan-produced videos published mostly on YouTube allows me to explore the move towards the mainstreaming of exploitation films and the culture surrounding them through the shared space of the Web. That so much of exploitation is consumed and discussed on the Web means its fandom is no longer spatially or materially different from other forms of fandom, in that it now takes place online and no longer in the zones of historical exploitation such as grindhouse theatres or through the trading of video cassettes.

The Mad Max Effect does not attempt to make distinctions between these various traditions, from biker movies in the 1960s to fandom since 2000, orderly and confined. Instead, it explores how components of exploitation film culture intersect; where cycles, subgenres, production practices, marketing and fan responses all interweave across transnational boundaries. Among this criss-crossing is the *Mad Max* series, four films which not only borrow production designs, narrative conventions and filmmaking techniques but also combine them in such an influential way that new cycles and conventions emerged from diverse national exploitation cinemas and resonated further into the reaches of popular culture. The following chapters rehouse the *Mad Max* series within the topography of exploitation cinema and tells the story of how the series went from those fringes to be a vital and inspirational landmark in a broader cultural history.

Origins of the road warrior

The roots of the conventions, iconography and industrial machinations that characterize *Mad Max*, and the subsequent worldwide diaspora of MadMaxploitation, stretch back to before the proliferation of exploitation filmmaking that came after the break-up of the Hollywood studios in the 1960s. The elements are present in silent movies, particularly comedies that emphasize inventive stunts and slapstick and featuring stars such as Harold Lloyd and Larry Semon, as well as in Hot Rod movies from the 1950s, and in social problem films dealing with teenage delinquents. Within these three traditions there are themes, sequences and imagery that turn up later in George Miller's series. There are also antecedents to be found in the western and in the broader grouping of the road movie (which themselves share themes).

More directly, the content and contexts associated with the series and those it influenced – warring biker gangs, futuristic dystopic wastelands and exploitation filmmaking from a spread of transnational countries – begin to take shape in the decade or so prior to the release of *Mad Max* in 1979. In the 1970s there was a convergence of exploitation traditions that crossed cultural and national boundaries of production and exhibition. Entire genres as well as individual films from one continent influenced filmmakers from other parts of the world. Films that required dubbing for translation, such as kung fu movies from Hong Kong, played to appreciative international audiences having overcome initial language barriers. Other films, notably those from Australia, would disguise their country of origin by playing down or removing geographical features and peculiarities so as to more readily translate to American audiences.

That this chapter 'breaks out' into a separate case study on the *Death Race* (1975–2017) films in Chapter 2 indicates the difficulty in explaining and containing all the relevant influences resulting in *Mad Max*. My task is a messy one and cannot be completed in a linear manner – such is the dispersal and

spread of all the influences that *Mad Max* subsumed.¹ So, for the purposes of space I have closed down the ‘prehistory’ of the series to three different but overlapping contexts. The first is what has been termed as ‘Ozploitation’, commercial genre filmmaking from Australia in the 1970s and 1980s. The second context is the cycle of biker movies that were principally American productions but whose impact can be seen in Australia and even Great Britain. The third is the prevalence of the revenge narrative in the cinema of the 1970s. There are, of course, multiple books, articles and chapters written about the biker movie and the revenge film, and also an expanding body of scholarship about Ozploitation. This chapter draws on some of these works in an effort to locate and explore the most germane parts for the *Mad Max* series and examines how the familiarity of the revenge story arc, combined with the burgeoning Australian production context and the aesthetic concerns of the biker film, meant that *Mad Max* was a concept that was sellable to international audiences. In part, its impact and global financial success was because it was immediately identifiable in terms of its constituent parts (as well as fitting in with ‘carsploitation’ and general dystopian science fiction of the era). Miller’s film uniquely combined these recognizable elements to create a product that was at once identifiable and yet also alien enough as to appear fresh.

In relation to the low-budget production cycles of the 1950s, Peter Stanfield writes that ‘tracking the dialectic between repetition and innovation across runs of films makes legible changes to cinematic environments and the public sphere within which films are produced and consumed’ (Stanfield 2015: 6). By digging into the ‘prehistory’ of *Mad Max*, this chapter begins a similar process, continued throughout this book, of examining some of the repetitions and innovations that led to Miller’s series and the subsequent cycle it helped to inspire in the 1980s. This chapter begins the process of tracing and identifying some of the through-lines and continuities of exploitation film culture from the 1960s to the present day. It is a process that will be repeated in Chapter 5, where I track the ‘repetitions’ and ‘innovations’ of MadMaxploitation. This chapter begins a

¹ I am aware that this approach leads me to not devote significant space to films such as *A Boy and His Dog* (L. Q. Jones, 1975). This American post-apocalypse narrative is ‘regimented, authoritarian, cemented in the past, dictatorial; in short, it is a perfect dystopia’ (Anderson 1985: 101). This is a contrast to the carnivalesque freedom that is associated with the other films in this book – from outlaw bikers to New York in the future. Had my work focused more closely on the dystopian science fiction elements of *Mad Max*, rather than the road warrior archetype’s place in exploitation cinema, my chosen films would have been significantly different.

methodological journey that will only be completed by the end of the book and addresses the central question: what was the topography of exploitation and genre cinema into which *Mad Max* was born?

The Australian context and 'Ozploitation'

In his *Film News* article from 1979, James Ricketson reflected on the unease that surrounded the notion of 'Ozploitation', the section of the nation's film history that most resembled the supposedly low art exploitation cinemas of other countries. In posing the question as to what was wanted from an Australian Film Industry, he asked whether it should be based on an organic, indigenous or 'authentic' Australia, or to settle for the commercial export model of Ozploitation, which involved producing what he saw as 'second-rate replicas' that mimicked the 'cinematic models and language' of Hollywood (Ricketson 1985: 223).

Stuart Cunningham identifies this as an 'opposition' between culture and industry that parallels the split between art cinema and commercial film production (1985: 235). Australian cinema that sat on the culture/art side of the dividing line 'invited pleasure in the epiphanous moment of the reverently registered gesture, intonation, accent, slang, landscape, décor or attitude that betokened Australian-ness' (1985: 235). They were, he writes, 'quiet films' (1985: 235). The government funding bodies that existed to encourage such productions were the 'Australian equivalent to Hollywood studios' according to Moran and Vieth (2006: 132), because they were the gatekeepers in terms of funding and in the scope of each project.

One consequence of such gatekeeping in the Australian film industry was the 'destructive force' of the documentary unit Film Australia that Stephen Wallace claimed in the mid-1970s was affecting the output of its national cinema and had failed to 'permit the making and releasing of films of any independence of mind or spirit' ([1976] 1985: 122). Among the negative effects of Film Australia's conservatism was the 'stifling' of explicit political or social comment, other than those that endorsed government policy, and the suppression of experimentation, 'personality' or individual bias in the documentaries it was set up to nurture ([1976] 1985: 123). This led to the marginalization of working-class subjects and films reflecting social reality or problems. It was, according to Wallace, 'a middle-class propaganda machine' ([1976] 1985: 126). Such middle-classness was characteristic of the desire for 'respectable' cinematic output in fiction films

of the same period. The move towards the more commercial 'Ozploitation' that was happening around the time of Wallace's lament at least broke down this middle-classness and brought to the fore social concerns, even if it was only in the narratives of biker gangs or 'ockers' – a pejorative term for supposedly uncultured, uncivilized or vulgar working-class Australian men.

Jonathan Rayner writes that the national cinema output of Australia 'epitomises the difficult relationships' that 'smaller film industries enjoy with Hollywood', with which they are inspired by and most often unsuccessfully try to mimic (Rayner 2000b: 3). The commercial films being produced, Ozploitation among them, were an essential part of what is known as the Australian Revival of the 1970s and not only contributed to the increasing opportunities for production but also attained sporadic success abroad. That Australian cinema was seen by the government as a vehicle to help cement a 'national brand' meant that Ozploitation was, by contrast, 'critically dismissed' according to Alexandra Heller-Nicholas (2016: 163) because it was damaging to such branding. Ozploitation was also considered a bastardized cinema through its reliance on influences from America. Characterized by an emphasis on 'excess, spectacle, and sensation' (Heller-Nicholas 2016: 170), Ozploitation comprised of 'influences similar to those that permeated the US grindhouse circuit, from rape-revenge to slasher, martial arts to sexploitation' (2016: 164). It should be emphasized that these influences, which resulted in the disparate waves, cycles and genres playing in US grindhouses, did not always comprise American-made films and instead would have originated in many transnational cinemas. In 42nd Street grindhouse theatres at the time of *Mad Max*'s New York release, for example, over a third of the programming comprised of non-American productions (Filibus 2018). Ozploitation in this regard was influenced by an international cinematic culture, but one that was grouped together into the single environment of US theatrical distribution, rather than by specifically American films.

The term 'Ozploitation' itself is a relatively recent one and originates from Mark Hartley's 2008 movie *Not Quite Hollywood*. This feature-length documentary 'spearheaded' (Heller-Nicholas 2016: 164) the resurgence of attention on genre filmmaking from Australia. *Not Quite Hollywood* is the moment which reconcentrates focus on this neglected area of film history and, as Heller-Nicholas notes, invented the portmanteau term 'Ozploitation' to group together the disparate titles. Like 'Film Noir', then, Ozploitation is a retrofitted body of work, so named many years after it existed. *Not Quite Hollywood* establishes the parameters for the beginning of discussions on what is Ozploitation and what

it means for the history of Australian culture, as well as for exploitation cinema more broadly. Part of the pleasure in Hartley's film is once again enjoying the sensationalism of Ozploitation, and the film reconstitutes the violence, stunts and nudity for a new audience previously unfamiliar with exploitation product from Australia. With this in mind, it works as not only a document of the period, and as a collection of amusing and insightful anecdotes from those responsible for making the movies, but also an example of Australian exploitation itself. It is both a documentary about Ozploitation as well as being a recent example of the tradition.

Heller-Nicholas makes the point that the title of *Not Quite Hollywood* 'speaks to a stream of national production that is defined by the tensions governing transnational flows' (2016: 168). These questions permeate the discourse around international exploitation culture, where there is a continual series of conflicts and tensions between local production and international marketplaces, and where cultural specificities such as Chinese kung fu, American muscle cars or anxieties over the perceived urban hell provoked by New York City's crime rate found popularity with foreign audiences around the world. This popularity would often be reflected by countries producing their own versions of these cycles, resulting in American martial arts pictures or New York urban hell narratives made by European industries, such as Lucio Fulci's *New York Ripper* (1980). Another example of the convergence across the various countries producing exploitation is *Summer City* (Christopher Fraser, 1977), Mel Gibson's first movie, which transplants the brief US-based 1960s fascination with surfing and beach movies to Australia. These tensions are highlighted even further in those cases where there is also an attempt to hide regional production contexts. Films like *Harlequin* (Simon Wincer, 1980) deliberately obscure its Australian origins in a bid to appeal to international markets by depicting on screen 'an Americanized political system, and the inclusions of right-hand-drive cars, American flags at political rallies, and even a Dixie band' (Heller-Nicholas 2016: 175). *Mad Max* suffered a variation of this tendency to avoid seeming Australian, when its US distributors redubbed the cast into American accents. The global exploitation industries relied upon selling similar products to diverse markets, but these often came from dissimilar origins and complicates any attempt at neat categorization. Each cycle or local variation on a genre led to further iterations and variations that crossed multiple national and industrial contexts.

Peter Weir's *The Cars That Ate Paris* (1974) exemplifies this spread beyond its own cultural and geographic origins. Funded by the Australian Development

Corporation, it was an important moment in the history of Australian cinema in general, with Weir later becoming a prominent Hollywood director, as well as having significant relevance in the prehistory of *Mad Max*. The film begins in a whimsical style, with lounge jazz as the score, and a mimicking of advertising of the time, including prominent close-ups of branded cigarettes and cans of Coca-Cola. From then, a horror-style narrative unfolds about the small rural town of Paris that organizes car accidents involving passing motorists so the townspeople can pilfer the remnants and hold any living victims in captivity. The satirical tone of the opening sequence is maintained by the inclusion of several portraits of Queen Elizabeth II in the background, referencing the influence of Britain's colonial past and its impact on Australian life and attitudes. A torn poster for Disneyworld stuck to a wall makes a similar comment about the globalization of American culture. An early scene depicts queues outside the offices for something called the Commonwealth Rural Employment Scheme. The presence of this scene brings to mind Robin Wood's analysis of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Tobe Hooper, 1974) and his suggestion that the murder and cannibalism committed by Leatherface and his family is a comment on the consequences of rural unemployment (specifically slaughterhouse workers) in America (1986). In *The Cars That Ate Paris*, it is the motor vehicles that are cannibalized rather than the interlopers. These satirical touches and social commentary work in support of Don Shiach's assessment from his book on Weir, that it serves as an indictment of a 'materialistic society that had participated in the Vietnam war' (Shiach 1993: 32).

As evidence of diverse production contexts impacting upon the exploitation market, Weir's film was, according to Jonathan Rayner, a 'direct inspiration' (2005: 101) for the Roger Corman produced *Death Race 2000* (Paul Bartel, 1975). The cars on display, driven by hooligan male youths, are heavily modified with crash bumpers and various other adornments, and decorated with graffiti. The inclusion of painted swastikas on one car is a motif familiar in American biker movies, including in the Corman-directed *The Wild Angels* (1965). Such imagery also recurs in *Death Race 2000*. The loutish youths of *The Cars That Ate Paris* are also styled as cowboy outlaws, particularly with their long coats that make them look like Frank's gang in Italian western *Once Upon a Time in the West* (Sergio Leone, 1968), underlined by a harmonica that mimics Ennio Morricone's dominant musical leitmotif from Leone's film. More directly, the car culture on display and its importance to the youth of Australia has a relationship to the origins of *Mad Max*. In one scene, the youths are punished by having

their stolen and modified cars burnt out. Weir captures the blistering of paint in close-up, and such a moment acts as a counterpoint to the fetishistic treatment of motor vehicles by both the characters and by the filmmakers discussed in this book. *Mad Max* also hinges on this line of simultaneously celebrating the construction and subsequent destruction of motor vehicles. As a way of paying homage to this influence, Miller included a spiked vehicle in *Fury Road* that recalled a similar VW Beetle used at the climax of *The Cars That Ate Paris*. In all of these thematic, stylistic and aesthetic convergences, one can see how the threads of exploitation cinema spread out into different territories and circle back upon themselves.

Neil Rattigan writes that Weir's film challenges 'a number of cherished Australian cultural perceptions', such as the rural town being a more moral and enriching place than urban cities and the recent (as of 1974) 'materialistic love affair' with automobiles (Rattigan 1991: 79). Though he also remarks that this may have led to its commercial failure in that it went against the prevailing mood at the time for the 'confirmation', rather than the 'questioning', of Aussie culture. Rattigan's astute comments that the town of Paris is a metaphor for the country as a whole – 'in its insularity, its insistence on community consensus, and its economic well-being' (1991: 81) – also works as a metaphor for the national film industry at the time. The industry was insular in its celebration of Australianness, a 'consensus' was reached through state subsidy gatekeepers who could police what got made, and there was also anxiety about the extent of the reliance on international audiences needed to make the films an economic success.

After the years between 1975 and 1982, which according to Rattigan was the most 'fertile period' where several examples such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (Peter Weir, 1975), *Breaker Morant* (Bruce Beresford, 1980) and *Gallipoli* (Peter Weir, 1981) attained 'classic status' (1991: 8), the mid-1980s returned to the model of aping American/Hollywood genres.

Rattigan writes:

As a result of being and perceiving themselves to be members of a colonized society – and a dispossessed and despised one because of the penal origins of most of the colonists – Australians developed a culture based upon the rejection of much of the dominant colonizing culture of England ... based upon the denial (as much as possible) of class distinction, based around ideas of egalitarianism, collectivism, and the distinctly Australian mythos of mateship. (Rattigan 1991: 12)

These ideas, he remarks, had the potential for radical political currency and organization, in that they developed through marginalized social classes. The failure of these ideas to forge into anything coherent prevented this, not least in how the Aboriginal person and most women were dis-included from this 'mateship'.

This concept of 'mateship' was also quickly satirized with the Ocker archetype: a white, working-class male, who demonstrates an uncouthness accompanied by associated behaviours such as drinking and engaging in vulgarity. Though principally intended to satirize this most boorish of Australian stereotypes, the figure of the Ocker captures a sense of unruliness that had the potential to form a radical opportunity.

Rattigan writes:

The Ocker image celebrates the rejection of many dominant or middle-class values. The emphasis is on vulgarity and philistinism, aggression and latent hostility. Hostility masquerades in the Ocker as mateship, as openness and honesty, for the Ocker attacks anything that is phony. With the Ocker, the maleness, the male dominance, of the other legends becomes licensed male chauvinism. There is, in the ocker image, a great irreverence for everything. (Rattigan 1991: 33)

The Ocker cycle has a minor but indicative place within the history of exploitation cinema. First, the archetype helped to herald a new raft of exploitation films from an under-represented continent, and which paved the way ultimately for *Mad Max*, that would in turn disturb, affect, alter and modulate other strands of exploitation cinema. And second, because the uncouthness, vulgarity and the celebration of the socially frowned upon, that is to say, the unruliness of the Ocker, is also analogous to the primary selling point of exploitation and grindhouse culture today. Both make virtues of the rejected (in attitudes, behaviours and industrial practices) and, within this often reactionary result, hold radical potential for telling us something about orthodoxies of social value or industrial norms. The films themselves, of course, can seldom live up to this potential on their own. Instead, it is how the fan, and latterly how academic interest in this area, uses these productions that bring about the realization of their political possibilities. This can come through unruly fan practices or by making particularly oppositional readings of the films.

The most famous of the Ocker narratives is *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* (Bruce Beresford, 1972), which sets its title character up against the British (or more accurately the English) and their attitudes and attributes by having

him travel overseas to visit London. In doing so, through the maligned figure of Ocker McKenzie, the film critiques and ridicules the traits of Britain, which as a country had held two centuries of colonial dominance over Australia. For example, in one scene an elderly 'war hero' is seen as wanting to re-enact a sexualized version of the corporal punishment of his school days, while dressed in his old schoolboy uniform. Yet an acknowledgement of Australian's own peculiarities is also part of the humour. The title sequence emphasizes the geographical remoteness of the country, where McKenzie and his Aunt Edna Everage (Barry Humphries, who also wrote the screenplay) board a plane to London and stop off for a travelogue sequence of them visiting Hong Kong. In the sequel, *Barry McKenzie Holds His Own* (Bruce Beresford, 1974), it is Australian cultural mores that are more aggressively targeted, as well as those of France. As Rattigan points out (1991: 58), when the satire targets the French it is forced to adopt stereotypes mostly taken from English attitudes towards their near neighbour. The lack of a historical and political relationship between Australia and France, unlike its connections with the former colonial ruling nation of Great Britain, weakens the satire because the creators are a step removed from their own observations. Jonathan Rayner compares the later, and much more successful, *Crocodile Dundee* (Peter Faiman, 1986) as an epitome of Australian machismo and masculinity, unlike the dysfunctional version of masculinity present in McKenzie. At the same time, he writes that it is also a 'sanitized version' of McKenzie, especially in the fish out of water nature of its plot (Rayner 2000b: 19).

Another early Ocker film, *Alvin Purple* (Tim Burstall, 1973), is one of the more 'embarrassing' efforts from the Australian revival of the early 1970s according to Rattigan (1991: 49). Rattigan, however, denies a link to other Ocker narratives and notes that the comedy's prurience towards sexual matters and behaviour is not linked to anything uniquely Australian, and that Alvin himself does not inhabit the anti-heroic qualities of the otherwise imbecilic clown McKenzie (1991: 50). Director Tim Burstall had already made the Ocker comedy *Stork* (1971) starring Bruce Spence, who would later go on to appear in *The Cars That Ate Paris* and *The Road Warrior*. Despite being poorly critically received, the success of *Stork* and *Alvin Purple* resulted in two sequels and a subsequent television series, helping to establish the commercial value of Australian cinema and establish the Ocker figure as a familiar feature in Australian homes through television.

The pervasiveness of the Ocker archetype in Australia is demonstrated by its presence even in more respectable work, such as in Weir's critically

acclaimed anti-war *Gallipoli*. In *Wake in Fright* (Ted Kotcheff, 1971), where a middle-class schoolteacher is introduced into the hard drinking and violent ways of Australian rural life, there is a reversal of the focus of the Ocker film in that it locates the mode of narration with that of the outsider rather than the Ocker himself, whose name typically appeared in the title. The initially refined schoolteacher is immersed into a culture of alcoholism, fighting and kangaroo hunting and is so traumatized by his experiences that it results in a suicide attempt. This is in contrast to Barry McKenzie, who travels outside of the country of his birth *towards* civilization, literally crossing continents to do so. However, both *Wake in Fright* and *Barry McKenzie* hint at the hypocrisy of the refined middle classes by revealing how readily they can be seduced into antisocial behaviours in the former, and at their licentiousness and sometimes barely concealed perversions in the latter. *Wake in Fright*, however, was initially a commercial failure upon its release, and its reputation flourished over time until it was restored and re-released in the 2000s around the time interest in Australian commercial cinema of the 1970s was revived. It is one of the first films discussed in detail early on in *Not Quite Hollywood*, and so its creation and existence has been reimagined as part of the story of Ozploitation, despite not strictly being an Ozploitation film.

Despite the Ocker cycle being one of the most successful of the early films of the revival it was also considered 'an embarrassment to Australia' (O'Regan 1989: 77), to the extent that the issue of whether governments should fund such productions was raised in parliament. It is tempting to make a comparison with the British low-budget *Carry On* comedies or *St Trinian's* films that were popular in the preceding two decades, which also lampooned the establishment and national institutions and were similarly critically reviled despite commercial success. O'Regan writes that in relation to the Ocker cycle, their 'audiences were to be cynical of establishment figures (be they academic, bosses, or artists), cynical of opponents of the establishment (feminists and counter culture figures), and cynical of socially valorised institutions (family, marriage, the church and police)' (O'Regan 1989: 89). By agitating against both conservatism and progressive attitudes the Ocker could maintain an unruly presence.

Though despite the opposition to the low-brow nature of the Ocker film, it was the Arts Council's remit to encourage both low-budget and commercial productions (O'Regan 1989: 89) and so left the door open for an exploitation-style mindset. Though, as O'Regan points out, the success of the Ocker films and the move of the archetype into TV, for example, with the *Alvin Purple* series

(1976), as well as elements of the cycle appearing in *Number 96* (1972–7), meant that government subsidies became less justified because it was commercially viable on its own (O'Regan 1989: 95). This was so much the case that there was 'a reformulation of a film policy along less "commercial" lines with the development of a "quality" film policy for the Australian Film Commission in 1974–1975' (O'Regan 1989: 95), which helped make the cycle redundant.

But before this, the influence of international exploitation films had already shown its presence in the Australian Ocker movie. In *Peterson* (Tim Burstall, 1974), the titular Ocker is an electrician by trade who decides to go to university to study the arts. It contains a scene with party gatecrashing bikers that is according to Rattigan there for reasons of convention, rather than for any significant narrative purpose (1991: 245). In this brief moment, a thread is created between two disparate exploitation traditions, one which placed the figure of the biker as being a greater threat to civilization than the otherwise harmless boorishness of the Ocker.

The biker movie

These Ocker narratives of antisocial behaviour, as well as the way they opened up the possibility of commercially successful Australian cinema, created one of the conditions in which *Mad Max* could not only be made but also be accepted by audiences. The biker movie, however, is the most immediately identifiable aesthetic link to the first *Mad Max*. Max not only battles an outlaw biker gang, whose actions and appearance would have been familiar to grindhouse audiences, but also considerable screen space is afforded to the gang's antisocial behaviour and the image of them riding in formation across a landscape. The Toecutter's gang would have been recognizable from both cinema of the recent past and also from media headlines promoting a moral panic around the threat of gangs such as the Hell's Angels.

The biker movie as a distinct entity begins with *The Wild One* (László Benedek, 1953), and Roger Corman's *The Wild Angels* and Dennis Hopper's *Easy Rider* (1969) feature as some of the most prominent examples of the production cycle that followed. It also incorporates, as evidence of the links between exploitation, underground and art cinema, Kenneth Anger's homoerotic short *Scorpio Rising* (1963). Bill Osgerby writes that the 1960s biker movies had a 'relish for the grotesque, the menacing, and the marginal' (2003a: 98). This spirit echoes into *Mad Max*, which Osgerby writes 'confirmed the persistent cinematic appeal of the outlaw biker as an image of dark menace' (2003a: 107). Such elements

'harked back to the "carnavalesque" aesthetics of what Eric Schaefer terms the "classical exploitation films of the 1930s' (2003a: 98), creating a through-line of continuity from *Mad Max* back to the origins of exploitation as a distinct category of cinema culture. He writes that the biker movie was 'ribald and bawdy', and 'delighted in tweaking the tail of conformist sensibilities' (2003a: 99), and that 'with an appetite for all that was shocking, liminal, and "unacceptable", the 1960s biker films glorified in their full throttle, blood-and-thunder sensationalism' (2003a: 99).

The release of the Peter Fonda starring *The Wild Angels* by American International Pictures (AIP) in 1965, according to Peter Stanfield, helped 'make the break' (2016: 76) from the beach and surfer movies that had been one of the previous dominant cycles exploiting youth interests. This shift from the 'wholesome beach movie to the offensive biker movie' would 'prove to be economically uncanny' (2016: 76) for AIP and was swiftly followed by a raft of pictures cashing in on its success. The transition from beach to bike is summed up by an image from *Men Only* from July 1967 (in Collins et al. 2008). The artwork shows multiple surfers styled as biker types wearing Nazi helmets, leather waistcoats, aviator shades, and brandishing coshes and metal chains. Aside from a smattering of bikini-clad girls joining them, the lead biker/surfer is also drawn to resemble Fonda.

The Wild Angels 'led the way' (Osgerby 2003a: 102) for the demarcation of the 1960s bikers exploitation film in the 'ambivalent' way they depicted the Hell's Angels as neither fully romanticized figures nor full demonized. By contrast, the most famous biker movie, *Easy Rider*, features several clumsy allusions to the mythology and iconography of the western; the lead characters are 'Billy' and 'Wyatt', named after real-life Old West icons, and in one scene an old cowboy changes a horseshoe while the bikers change their tyres. In these instances, the biker is romanticized into the image of cowboy outlaw. In doing so, the film omits the sense of menace brought on by witnessing the violation of a number of social conventions associated with the cycle more generally. Furthermore, it presents Billy and Wyatt not as antisocial menace but as idealists wishing for a quiet life. They sleep away from towns next to campfires and avoid trouble and confrontation when it arises. By switching the threat of violence from biker outlaws to small town bigots, *Easy Rider* aims for respectability, rather than unruliness, and is atypical of the cycle as a whole.

Whereas Osgerby emphasizes the cycle's 'transgressive' elements, Peter Stanfield is principally concerned with the seriality that characterized their production. Stanfield recounts how Joan Didion undertook the task of watching nine biker films in seven days 'in the manner of an anthropologist', 'out to explore a dark continent' (2018: 2), speaking to the way the cycle was territory to understand and study rather than enjoy for more traditional cinematic pleasures. Didion's exploration suggested that only immersion into the world could uncover its secret. The biker movie is hostile in that it features abhorrent behaviours and tribal codes that keep the regular viewer on the outside. Each movie presents a subculture that is not possible to join, unless there is a radical altering of one's behaviours and attitudes. Several biker films hinge on this dynamic and structure their plot around an outsider infiltrating or being adopted into the gang.

Stanfield dismisses the possibility that the cycle shares the progressive or radical politics of the films produced by New World Pictures under Roger Corman and the way they have been interpreted in articles like *Exploitation Films and Feminism* by Pam Cook (1976), which argues for a way of considering feminist approaches to the Women in Prison cycle and the directorial work of Stephanie Rothman. Nor, Stanfield claims, is there 'ugly beauty' in its 'thuggish and ungainly form' (2018: 6). His study, he contends, is instead about 'filmmaker's crass pursuit of the sensational and the exploitable' (2018: 6).

He writes:

Biker films were dramas of hoodlum culture, made for adolescent malcontents. Seen in marginal spaces and exhibited in the out of town drive-ins and dilapidated theaters, the films were about, and watched by, self-obsessed mobile youths going nowhere, cycling back on themselves in endless displays of repetitive inchoate activity. (Stanfield 2018: 6)

Though, if such a state of affairs does not contain an 'ugly beauty' I do not know what does. Nevertheless, there is an accord with how the Ocker film played to the same working-class male audiences as those they were depicting, even if the original intention is to satirize the most loutish habits of those audiences.

The biker cycle's seriality goes beyond form and content and is also 'imbued in their production, distribution, and reception' (2018: 21). Films filled a gap in the market, and when the gap was no longer there, the cycle dried up. Stanfield uses the example of the Hot Rod cycle from 1956 to 1958, which was thought to be a response to the proliferation of drive-in screens across America. Exhibition

was the underpinning reason for the Hot Rod movie, and when there was a decline in audience numbers in the drive-in, the cycle withered out (2018: 25). The exploitation films of the classical period between 1920 and 1959 (Schaefer 1999: 42) differed from those of the 1960s and 1970s because they are not cyclical and their production was not constructed around in-built seriality (Stanfield 2018: 26). The biker film acted as an updating of the 'social problem' film which began in the classical exploitation era. Education films (around sexual health and hygiene), or 'warning' films about drugs, vice and youth behaviours, would present illicit content under the guise of exposing a contemporary cultural anxiety or 'problem', but instead would seek to thrill its audiences with the presentation of a social taboo (Schaefer 1999). The biker movie updated this to concern itself with the 'shrill moral panic' and 'shock value' that accompanied the idea of real-life biker gangs such as the 'Hells Angels' (Osgerby 2003a: 102).

Like in the example from *Peterson*, the figure of the biker as a scourge of modern life ruining civilization would crop up in films otherwise not devoted to depicting their lifestyle or exploits in any detail. Even in the little seen British art film *Requiem for a Village* (David Gladwell, 1975), which meditates on the folksy memories of a rural English village, the film ends when a biker gang shatters the rustic idyll. Their noisy and inconsiderate motorcycle procession causes an elderly parishioner to fall off his push bike and die. The biker, then, stood as a symbol of social decay and a symptom of the malaise of 1960s and 1970s Western life. While much of the negative media attention on bikers amounted to overblown and exaggerated moral panic (Stanfield 2018: 10), the sense of anxiety they provoked was also something that the films needed to sell, and so directors relied upon it as part of their narrative convention.

The cycle devotes significant screen time to the antisocial behaviour of the gangs, and the chaos inflicted by the gangs provides the cycle's most dominant recurring image. But there is also a significant amount of time centred on the simple spectacle of them riding and parading into towns and across country. An early scene in *Born Losers* (Tom Laughlin, 1967) shows the gang arriving in town with the streets lined with scores of people watching. Their arrival is a spectacle in itself and is presented in documentary style, like an anthropological moment. A group of young women speculate on the erotic potential of the biker males, a moment which predates a similar scene in *Easy Rider*, where a group of teenage girls react excitedly to the arrival of Hopper, Peter Fonda and Jack Nicholson into a roadside diner. Such scenes reflect the dual undercurrent of threat and excitement, and the potential for both violent and sexual thrills,

lurking within an outlaw biker gang. The gangs' sexual appeal is accompanied by taunts of 'faggot' by a cop in *Born Losers* and by curious and jealous male observers in *Easy Rider*. This treading on the border between threat and sexual ambivalence is also reminiscent of the leather/gay subculture explored through the iconography of the biker in Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising*, itself born out of the homoerotic possibilities of Brando's image in *The Wild One*.

Among the Ozploitation milieu, the biker movie was represented by Sandy Harbutt's *Stone* (1974) which forms an important part of the story of Australian cinema that Mark Hartley tells in *Not Quite Hollywood*. *Stone* begins with a sequence of unexplained crimes, one of which results in the iconic stunt of a bike and rider plunging off a steep cliff into the sea that forms part of the title sequence of *Not Quite Hollywood*. Like *The Cars That Ate Paris* it was also part funded by the Australian Development Corporation and works as a forerunner of *Mad Max* as well as an important Ozploitation film in its own right. *Stone* is about a policeman going undercover to gather information about murders in a motorcycle gang and becoming immersed into the world of the outlaw bikers. Such a narrative replays Joan Didion's cinematic engagement into the cycle, as an outsider attempting to discover the hidden and the transgressive. It begins with bikers interrupting a 'save the environment' rally, which immediately establishes their nihilistic pretensions. They are presented as being opposed to progress and committed to the destruction of all things bourgeois. The title sequence fetishizes their method of transport, with the credits superimposed over shots of a gleaming motorcycle. It belongs to the fetishistic spectacle of motor vehicles in a number of Ozploitation movies, which Quentin Tarantino in *Not Quite Hollywood* declares 'makes you wanna jerk off'. As in the American biker film, the spectacle of the gang riding is a core feature. This time, however, in shots of a biker funeral and drive-by salute, the framing is tight on the riders (one or two shots of the cavalcade on the freeway notwithstanding), having the effect of privileging them as iconic characters rather than as small figures in a more dominant landscape, in contrast to the American biker film. In *Stone* many of the motorcycle riding scenes take place in suburban or coastal settings, rather than the open road, the wilderness or the mock 'West'. There are, however, wide shots of the gang's revelry, and point of view shots of the road from a motorcycle's perspective, both recurrent tropes of the American version. In another link to *Easy Rider*, Harbutt reverts to using camera tricks to replicate drug trips and the characters getting stoned, a technique familiar from Hopper's movie as well as American counterculture movies. Several motifs in *Stone* also later turn up

in *Mad Max*. These include the Nightrider's coffin paraded on the back of a truck and the use of a double-barrelled sawn-off shotgun that is Max's primary sidearm. Several cast members are present in both films, including Hugh Keays-Byrne, Roger Ward and Vincent Gil. Character names such as the Undertaker and Bad Max meant that the outlandishness of the character names in *Mad Max* would have had some recognizable context for Australian audiences.

Revenge films/revenge cops

Whereas the biker movies were 'ribald and bawdy' and 'delighted in tweaking the tail of conformist sensibilities' (Osgerby 2003a: 99), *Born Losers* presents the biker as a problem to be solved through the use of force, in this case, by another outsider in the character of Billy Jack, who would return in a number of sequels. Similarly, *Mad Max* curbs the excesses of the bikers, and subsequently of the marauding gangs, which populate its sequels, through violent force enacted by the nominally 'good' characters. Rules of behaviour and social niceties are the background on which this conflict takes place. It is here that we can trace a lineage between *Mad Max* and the conventions of the 1970s revenge movie, which itself crossed a variety of genres and production cycles. Revenge is a motive in horror, action and drama and veers out into hybrid forms such as the vigilante film or the rogue cop movie, of which *Mad Max* is arguably a part.

Kevin Grant claims that the line between revenge and vigilantism is blurred, but that onscreen they can be considered as distinct categories. Revenge implies getting even with the victim's attackers, whereas the screen vigilante has a 'wider remit' and after disposing of those who directly attack him or his family, they would also then confront 'surrogates' (2020: 9) who either resemble the initial attackers or who have committed a similar assortment of crimes. The vigilante film in particular responded to topical anxieties over urban crime. Grant writes:

The iconography of the vigilante film at the height of its popularity – authorities overwhelmed, criminals rampant, citizens striking back – is inseparable from the impressions it created, far from inaccurately, of American cities as loci of violent crime and social dislocation. (2020: 9/10)

While this was particularly true of the way American cinema both responded to and articulated these problems, Grant notes that in other countries that

experienced social deprivation and associated increases in crime, such as in Italy of the period, their film industries responded in a likewise manner (2020: 10).

Films such as *Last House on the Left* (Wes Craven, 1972), *Death Wish* (Michael Winner, 1974) and *Rolling Thunder* (John Flynn, 1977) are stylistically disparate, yet all examine the response of those affected by violence enacted by outsider gangs on the family unit. Among this fascination for revenge in the 1970s, there also appeared a cycle of rape-revenge movies, with the most notorious being *I Spit on Your Grave* (Meir Zarchi, 1978).

The western had long been a home for revenge narratives, with the complexities and moral ambiguities suggested by the act of revenge a natural theme for films based largely around the establishing of a young nation's law, order and justice system. As Jacinda Read observes, rape and revenge are 'intimately connected motifs' of the western (Read 2000: 125), albeit with the act of vengeance typically carried out by the male partner of the rape victim, rather than by the woman herself. Such an observation leads to a raft of descriptions of the 1970s revenge narratives as 'urban' or 'updated' westerns. In relation to the rape-revenge cycle, Read notes that it is not 'generically specific' (2000: 24) and instead turns up in multiple different genres. The rape-revenge film, she argues, is when those two counterposing acts form the story's structure, rather than appearing as part of a more expansive narrative. This, she suggests, places the rape-revenge film, and the revenge motif I am identifying as central to the precursory cinematic landscape prior to *Mad Max*, as a narrative structure.

If second-wave feminism ensured the prevalence of a rape-revenge cycle in the post-1970 era (Read 2000: 25), then it is possible to assume that it also accounts for counter narratives of male avengers, depicting stories of previously mild-mannered men such as Paul Kersey in *Death Wish* (Charles Bronson) finding their balls and asserting a more typical and violent masculinity through their vigilantism. This cannot account for much of the cycle, however, because in films such as *Last House on the Left* it is the mild-mannered liberal family that reverts to barbarism, or the meek and genteel black family that fights back against hillbilly racists in *Fight for Your Life* (Robert A. Endleson, 1977). All of these, however, hinge on the anxiety of lawlessness and the fear of their previously secure domestic spaces being transformed in some way by newly abhorrent antisocial behaviours. In *Rolling Thunder* or *The Exterminator* (James Glickenhaus, 1980) it is the societal transformations that take place during the protagonist's hellish experiences in the Vietnam war (nominally and ostensibly

defending the very society that is deteriorating back at home) that sparks the act of violent retribution.

Typically, while revelling in the specific acts of violent revenge by the protagonists, the revenge movie also finishes by considering the long-term effects of such actions on the vigilantes. Those seeking vengeance pay for getting even by experiencing a lack of catharsis, a stripping away of their humanity or even madness. In *Mad Max*, it is not only the desecration of his family that causes Max's breakdown, but his enacting of revenge prompts him to resemble the nomadic, violent and scavenging gangs he once opposed. Max's status as an emotionally disturbed savage remains consistent through the rest of the series.

While its plot means it is broadly a part of the same genre, and despite contemporary critical reviews taking issue with its alleged savagery resembling the overall 'contempt' (2020: 13) mainly liberal film critics held towards the vigilante cycle in general, *Mad Max* does not operate in the same manner as the typical vigilante cop from American cinema, such as *Dirty Harry*. The near future setting removes the necessity for the usual legal restrictions governing law enforcement both in real life and on screen. As Grant notes, in 1970s vigilante films, the law is often frustrated by the 'perceived defects in policing strategies and criminal law that have compelled the vigilante to take action in the first place' (2020: 16). This often highly critical stance towards ineffective criminal justice systems and its bureaucratic failings is 'more pronounced' (2020: 15) when it is a cop who goes beyond his state-sanctioned powers to engage in extrajudicial killing. For Max, such a restrictive legal framework does not exist. His superior officer explicitly tells the Main Force Patrol drivers that they are free to do whatever they like on the roads, 'as long as the paperwork is clean'. The first action we see Max engage with as an officer of the law is a high-speed game of chicken with a suspect – and so Max can hardly claim that petty liberal bureaucracy is holding him back. Max is not (initially) alienated from society or held back by a limp legal and justice system, and Miller goes out of his way to make the point that the MFP and the Toecutter's heavies are two competing gangs. The violence Max metes out is not extrajudicial, it is part of his remit. Unlike how Officer Callaghan in *Dirty Harry* or the civilian vigilante Paul Kersey in *Death Wish* attempt to make citizens safer through their actions, Max's killing of the Toecutter will not change anything because the world and society has spilled over the edge already.

To focus on the prevalence of vigilantism and revenge in 1970s cinema is not about housing *Mad Max* within any particular cycle or genre but to demonstrate once more that it is connected to, and fringe part of, multiple generic and cyclical

trends and threads happening across exploitation cinema at the time. The point is that, like in how it is not really a biker film in the strictest sense, Miller uses the framework and imagery associated with the variations of the revenge cycle to mount the story. In the world of film promotion, it can be marketed as a straightforward revenge film, and vigilante cop movie, despite it only occupying a small portion of the narrative.

There is a dichotomy in the revenge and vigilante narratives, where the perceived attractions of the exploitation film in its illicitness and unruliness are also closed out by acts of violence designed to curb that behaviour. In the rape-revenge film this is arguably not the case. The cycle relies upon the scenes of pushback and acts of empowerment enacted by women against sexual violence. This is a subversive switch of power that is, according to Bev Zalcock, based on the 'foregrounding of the mismatch between the male universe and the female subject' (2001: 8), although, as Pam Cook observes, this is often in the form of a female avenger who is a male fantasy version of an empowered woman. Though rape is clearly a social violation, it is not considered a desirable one and cannot be romanticized by filmmakers in the same way that antisocial behaviour can be in a number of other exploitation cycles, the biker movie included. Criticisms of rape-revenge movies, *I Spit on Your Grave* in particular, has focused on the apparent titillation of the scenes of sexual violence, and that it is not presented as being abhorrent enough. As Zalcock remarks, women in rape-revenge films fight back 'only after a lot of violation' (2001: 5). Roger Ebert's contemporary review of Zarchi's film, for example, dismisses the possibility of it having any artistic merits whatsoever and focuses almost entirely on what he perceives to be the negative reactions of audiences to what was happening on screen, and their shouts of encouragement at both the depictions of sexual assault and the ensuing revenge. So offended is Ebert by the behaviour of those in the auditorium, he goes as far as branding them 'vicarious sex criminals' (Ebert 1980). Nevertheless, because of the act of female revenge against the most extreme enforcement of patriarchal control, the rape-revenge cycle maintains a sense of subversion through its transgression of normal social rules. That it excites such extreme and varying reactions from both audiences and establishment critics is also evidence of its subversiveness, because it goes beyond a cerebral reaction and into the visceral. Similarly, the Ocker comedies' uncouthness is also a consistent challenge to middle-class politeness. They also present an aesthetic challenge to an idea of 'quality' filmmaking, often inadvertently through their poor production values. In the case of biker movies or other exploitation films,

revenge by the nominally ‘good’ characters closes down the radical potential in presenting social disruption and the challenge to bourgeois and middle-class values they contain. In films such as *Born Losers*, and eventually in *Mad Max*, this challenge to civilization is crushed and eradicated by the climax. In killing the transgressors of social rules the previous social and political hegemonies have been maintained and reasserted.²

Conclusion

Rather than considering that *Mad Max* borrows from and replays tropes from the exploitation forebears outlined in this chapter, it is more useful to consider that it is born into these stylistic and industrial conditions. In other words, it is not that *Mad Max* provides a break from the past by self-consciously taking what had gone before and improving it or augmenting it with a new perspective (though that may have been the case). Instead, the circumstances of the previous decade, the stylistic and narrative crossovers and interacting industrial contexts allowed for a film like *Mad Max* to be created – a film that could isolate itself as independent of the drive to promote an Australian national cinema because it was funded privately and without State assistance. It could safely present a version of boorish masculinity alongside violent and sexual excess in the knowledge that audiences and financiers would understand the narrative convention of shutting down those excesses through violent revenge. The films, cycles and movements around exploitation and genre cinema created the conditions by which a film like *Mad Max* could be so successful.

The Australian cinematic context of the 1970s provided not only a unique industrial environment but also a narrative setting that was both common enough to host relocated and established plot lines and exotic enough to provide its own selling point. It was sufficiently unfamiliar to international audiences that it could stand in for an unspecified future, while also being a landscape with such space that it was appropriate for the variations on the ‘carsploitation’ films coming from America. The Ocker archetype which was so familiar to ordinary

² In *The Anarchist Cinema* (2019) I deal with the repercussions of this and argue that there is still potential for radical political readings of these paradoxical moments. In short, by selling a film on its presentation of transgression imagery but also foreclosing those transgressions through violent action, the films resist simple interpretations and remain unruly *precisely* because of their contradictions.

Australians that it formed part of their TV schedules meant that it could be sold back to them as something they were acquainted with, as well as being marketed internationally for its shock value. That it hinged on the celebration, shock and anxiety of antisocial behaviour coincided with the trend for biker films that still had some (if declining) value in exploitation cinema internationally. The vulgarity of the Ocker movie and its level of debasement is visible in some form or the other in the bikers of the *Mad Max* series, modulated through the archetype familiar from American cinema. What results is an artistic and industrial environment that fluctuates between being unique and recognizable. This fluctuation not only was the key component in the success of *Mad Max* but also led to the proliferation of the post-apocalypse road warrior movie that came after.

The *Death Race* lineage

The production of *Death Race 2000* (Paul Bartel, 1975) by Roger Corman and New World Pictures signalled the most immediately identifiable starting moment for the post-apocalypse road warrior cycle. Influenced by the Australian *The Cars That Ate Paris* and made as a possible potential ‘cash-in’ (Whitehead 2003: 93) on the upcoming studio picture *Rollerball* (Norman Jewison, 1975), *Death Race 2000* includes stylistic and narrative conventions that would be reiterated not only through its numerous sequels and remakes but also into the *Mad Max* series and the subsequent transnational cycle of MadMaxploitation that followed. The lineage of the *Death Race* films both predates and postdates the *Mad Max* series and MadMaxploitation and includes a remake simply called *Death Race* (Paul W. S. Anderson, 2008) that spawned three sequels (2010, 2013, 2018) and *Death Race 2050* (G. J. Echternkamp, 2017), a reboot that updated the original. Alongside these descendants is a Corman produced theme-only sequel/spin-off called *Deathsport* (Allan Arkush, Nicholas Niciphor, Roger Corman, 1978). *Death Race 2000*’s commercial success and influence exemplify the spread of exploitation contexts and traditions discussed in the previous chapter and demonstrates the transnational nature of the exploitation film and the way themes and motifs cross continents, in this case from Australia with the influence of *The Cars That Ate Paris*, to the United States and back again. It was also a part of one of the developing exploitation cycles of the 1970s, of what Robert J. Read describes as ‘carsploitation’, adding to other ‘ploitation cycles such as ‘blax’ and ‘nun’ that were also flourishing during the same period.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the car chase had become a recurring feature of action and crime cinema. Police thrillers like *Bullitt* (Peter Yates, 1968) and *The French Connection* (William Friedkin, 1971) contain justly famous car chases, while similar chases in urban centres also featured in the James Bond films *Diamonds Are Forever* (Guy Hamilton, 1971) and *The Man with the Golden Gun* (Guy Hamilton, 1974). Tico Romao identifies films such as *Vanishing Point* (Richard C. Sarafain, 1971), *Dirty Mary*, *Crazy Larry* (John Hough, 1974) and *Smokey and the Bandit*

(Hal Needham, 1977) as an identifiable subgenre distinct from films such as *Bullitt* and *The French Connection*, where car chases are a single part of the plot rather than the basis for the entire narrative (2004). As with other exploitation cycles, the term can be stretched to describe films from an array of different contexts and epochs. 'Carsploitation' can be used to describe drag racing pictures of the 1950s up to the existential road movies of the 1970s like *Vanishing Point* or *Two Lane Blacktop* (Monte Hellman, 1971), as well as non-car-related efforts which happen to include significant automobile action such as the aforementioned cop thrillers or comedies such as *The Blues Brothers* (John Landis, 1980). Peter Stanfield describes carsploitation as an 'aftereffect' of the biker movie (Stanfield 2018: 62) but one which eschewed its typically violent tone in favour of broad comedy, although, as Read notes, off-screen the carsploitation movie was anything but harmless slapstick, proven by the resulting severe injuries and occasional deaths suffered by stuntmen during productions. The majority of carsploitation features the wrecking of cars 'as pure destructive sensation' (Read 2016: 94), exemplified by entries such as *Dirty Mary, Crazy Larry, Cannonball* (Paul Bartel, 1976) and *Grand Theft Auto* (Ron Howard, 1977). The cycle was dependent on an industrial shift towards low-budget productions made in different geographic locations, away from their previous base in Hollywood and into regional, and often more rural, areas for economic reasons. As a result, they were responding to the audiences in the drive-in theatres that were most likely to be located in cities and states where the films projected onto the screens had been shot (Read 2016: 95). This provided landscapes that were far less built up than those of big cities, making it easier for filmmakers to stage larger scale set piece car chases. These backdrops, of 'endless roadways, highways, and freeways' (Read 2016: 97), became part of one of the tropes of the cycle: their non-specific, 'country', setting. *Mad Max* and its sequels would eventually be released during the next iteration of carsploitation in the latter part of the 1970s, during its move to the mainstream with films such as *The Cannonball Run* (Hal Needham, 1981) as well as onto television with *The Dukes of Hazzard* (1979–85). The demise of carsploitation on the big screen was heralded by its turn towards the small screen in the same manner that the 'Ocker' archetype began to appear on Australian television, meaning its presence in theatres became less necessary. Instead, the on-screen danger associated with the car chase was transposed to the international post-apocalypse cycle that began through the worldwide success of *Mad Max* and its sequel.

Death races of the 1970s

Unlike other carsploitation movies that avoided presenting the frightening realities of road traffic collisions, *Death Race 2000* uses the visceral danger of the automobile as part of its commentary on the inherent violence in American politics, society and popular culture. At the centre of *Death Race 2000* is the 'Death Race' itself, a gladiatorial sporting event that situates the elements of spectacle and attraction as an integral part of the narrative. Similar gladiatorial contests are a convention in numerous films of the cycle that concern this book, such as *2019: After the Fall of New York* (Sergio Martino, 1983) and even in *Beyond Thunderdome*. In the *Death Race* films, action is used not just to advance the narrative but is the purpose of the narrative. Across the *Death Race* series, the media used to broadcast the competition is explicitly foregrounded, with much of the exposition being told through monitors and screens, with narration coming directly through the presence of on-screen commentators. By doing so, the films comment on exploitative media and its propagandist possibilities and its role in influencing public interpretations of social and political policy. The series also investigates social class and the boundaries between labour and slavery through proletarian heroes who are variously sporting stars, gladiators and prisoners.

Death Race 2000 is set after a global financial crash that is dated as having occurred in 1979 (coincidentally the same year of the release of *Mad Max*). In response, the US government organizes a violent professional spectator sport called the Transcontinental Road Race to pacify the population and keep them entertained and distracted. Participants race across the country through mostly rural landscapes with barely populated streets. Contestants score points not just for winning but for mowing down any pedestrians they happen across (and receive more points depending on the demographic status of who they kill). The participants are given nicknames and outlandish personas and costumes, and drive vehicles according to their theme. These include Machine Gun Joe, played by Sylvester Stallone, and Mathilda Herman, the 'Swastika Sweetheart' of the Milwaukee Nazis, played by New World Pictures regular Roberta Collins. The central character is Frankenstein (David Carradine), who is both the best driver and the most popular with the public. Frankenstein is first revealed in fractured shots, edited to reveal his body parts: the top of his head, feet and hands, all of

which are clad in black leather.¹ The idea is that he has been involved in multiple crashes during the course of the previous contests, and his fractured body has been stitched back together – hence the ‘Frankenstein’ moniker. His multiple injuries and various body part replacements are later revealed to be a marketing ploy to increase his popularity, when in reality he is actually fully intact and is not comprised of transplanted limbs. During the race, where he is pitted against the other characters, the film cuts back to a ‘resistance’ group who wish to destroy the government by sabotaging the race and killing the drivers. This narrative thread converges with Frankenstein’s own terroristic intentions of assassinating the president once he is declared the eventual victor. After these events play out, the film concludes with Frankenstein becoming a popular and loved president of the United States and announcing his decision to abolish the race for the good of the country.

The most distinctive stylistic technique employed by Bartel is the framing device of faux television coverage of the Death Race. This is accompanied by direct addresses to the audience by the commentators, positioning viewers of the film as also the audience watching the Transcontinental Road Race on television. By happening within the diegesis, the commentary becomes a conspicuous element of ‘attraction’. The race in the diegesis is sold as a spectacle to those in the arena and home viewers within the film, while the construction of the narrative does the same for the actual audience of the film watching in theatres. (For those viewers watching decades later at home, the televisual elements of the stylistic decisions are heightened because their home viewing experience mirrors that of the broadcast within the diegesis.) As we watch, our attention is continually switched between watching the film (with private and behind the scenes moments, plot developments and characters’ interactions that are not part of the fictional race ‘broadcast’) and watching the fictional public television coverage of the events.

The TV broadcast device forms part of the editing rhythm. It continually cuts back to the commentators, whose on-screen commentary fills any narrative gaps. The commentary then becomes part of the satire, as a punchline for the violent slapstick and also as a cheat device for the filmmakers to provide essential exposition. The framing of the TV presentation is also part of the form and

¹ Max Rockatansky is revealed in a similar manner in the original *Mad Max*, where he is introduced in fetishistic detail through close-up shots of his boots, hands, sunglasses-covered eyes and leather outfit.

visual design, including moments where information is revealed through the monitor, such as when the points scoring system of the Death Race is explained to the audience. The formal distinctions between film and television are made immediately apparent because 'lines' roll down the screen on account of the differing frame rate between the two formats. These technical differences form a distancing effect that becomes a part of the construction of Bartel's dystopian world in a similar manner to the use of monitors in George Lucas's *THX 1138* (1971).

As part of *Death Race 2000*'s social commentary, television also stands as a symbol for that which is glib, cheap and throwaway. However, this can only happen if there is an assumption that cinema is instead imbued with rather more classic qualities and is more high-brow than popular television. This cultural commentary is fun and provocative, but because the exploitation movie in general and much of Corman's output specifically also entices criticism for being low-brow, cheap and gaudy, it also reveals either a lack of self-awareness on behalf of the filmmakers or an ironic sense of humour about *Death Race 2000*'s likely place in cultural rankings. The marketing of *Death Race 2000* sells the movie as precisely the same kind of spectacle as the Transcontinental Road Race, with garish colouring on the poster and the promise of seeing violence and 'hit-and-run driving'. The audience for the diegetic chase is also the audience for the fictional representation of it, ensuring that the 'spectacle' of sensation associated with exploitation cinema is foregrounded by the use of the pretend broadcast.

The satirical commentary provided by all this is either contradictory, in that it gets to condemn bloodthirsty sports, the media and their viewers, as well as to revel in its attractions, or a self-reflexive critique of the audiences and producers of low-brow exploitation pictures that would create a story based on such a bloodthirsty idea in the first place. As an extension of this latter interpretation, by focusing on the dangerous implications of reckless and aggressive driving, there is an introduction to the extreme violence which would be the natural consequences of the car mayhem scenes in *Smokey and the Bandit*, James Bond and *Grand Theft Auto* had they been taking place in real life and away from the sanitization of the screen. Rather than following this idea to its absolute conclusion, and presenting a film that is almost unwatchably violent, Bartel instead cuts at the point of impact of car hitting flesh. The result is that the full gruesome aftermath of collisions between machines travelling at speed and vulnerable humans is not revealed in particularly gory detail. This denies the audience the pleasure of watching the gore that they had been tantalized to

expect by the marketing, and which the audience within the film are tuning into the race for. *Death Race 2000*'s focus remains satirical, and while it includes the results of vehicles being used as weapons and implies that American car culture is inherently aggressive, the tone retains a sense of comedic slapstick familiar from other carsploitation efforts.

By keeping this approach, *Death Race 2000* provided what sci-fi writer and film critic Craig W. Anderson called 'the perfect antidote' to the pretensions of the big budget studio produced *Rollerball* (1985: 105). Mark Whitehead takes a more uncharitable view in his short book on Roger Corman, that it was produced only to 'cash-in' (2003: 93) on *Rollerball*, a view echoed by Bradley Schauer, albeit tempered by his assessment of it also being 'campy and exciting' (Schauer 2017: 170). Anderson notes that while it parodies *Rollerball*, it was released three months earlier in April 1975 (1985: 106), and that its satirical tone also undercuts the seriousness and po-facedness of dystopian and post-apocalypse fiction of the period such as Jack Smight's *Damnation Alley* from 1977 (1985: 107).

A critique of how sport, business and state-sponsored patriotism interact, *Rollerball* is about a fictional violent team sport played on a banked track with the players riding on skates and motorbikes. The sport's most popular player is Jonathan E, played by James Caan, who demonstrates an individuality which worries the corporations involved in running the sport, as they fear it will inspire the otherwise pacified public. In response, they begin to eliminate the sport's prohibiting rules in the hope he dies during a game. Jonathan E survives as each game degenerates into nothing more than a pitched battle and emerges as a symbol of individual triumph over the corporations, the final image a freeze-frame close-up of a victorious Jonathan as he skates round an empty track.

While Anderson takes the stance that *Rollerball* 'is against Capitalism' and 'a polemic for socialism as a defense against evil corporations' (1985: 113), Bradley Schauer instead claims that it is 'thematically incoherent and categorically uncertain', and that this tonal failure affected its reception critically and commercially (2017: 165). Such 'incoherence' is apparently based on its combination of violence with political and social themes, alongside what, Schauer contends, is its 'art film' sensibility. But this does not account for the critically positive reception to several low-budget exploitation films of the era that do the same, including *Death Race 2000*. Both films, for example, show a sports hero as a national icon that is supposed to stand as a symbol of that society, but what this symbol signifies is open to interpretation by both the state and the populace.

Rollerball does not contain car- or road-based action, but its shot selections that frame the on-track mobile combat is similar to the shot selection of the collisions in *Mad Max* and its successors and imitators.² Rollerball players get hit by motorbikes and collide with each other at speed. Jewison places the camera on the track with them, moving it at the same speed as the participants, rather than placing the camera in a fixed position and watching the mobile objects move past. The film then builds rhythm during the game sequences by repeated cutting to the crowd reaction after big hits or significant stages of the game. Like *Death Race 2000*, *Rollerball* centres the audience as an integral part of the spectacle. By contrast, this involvement of the crowd within the sequence does not happen in sports films such as *Rocky* (John G. Avildsen, 1976), except to cut to family members, boxing trainers or other characters who have an emotional investment in the story. In the *Rocky* series, the sport of boxing is personal, and we do not see anonymous members of the crowd. In making this decision, the films largely avoid social commentary about boxing and its place in American society and do not comment on the wider issues of sporting spectatorship in the way that *Death Race 2000* and *Rollerball* make their primary focus.

Schauer notes how *Rollerball* drew criticism for its negative representation of violent sporting events and for being hypocritical in condemning the violence and spectacle of Rollerball while simultaneously making it so entertaining and selling the film on the promise of that spectacle. Part of this reaction is down to the way it presents the games as being akin to a 'conventional sports film in which the audience is guided to root for the protagonist' (Schauer 2017: 171). This dichotomy was also present in the marketing campaign, which emphasized its social commentary with the tagline 'in the not too distant future, wars will no longer exist, but there will be Rollerball', while at the same time marketing the film through features in sports magazines and television programmes (Schauer 2017: 172). While *Rollerball* appeared to attract criticism for this approach, *Death Race 2000* avoided such opprobrium, despite taking a similar approach to comparable thematic terrain.

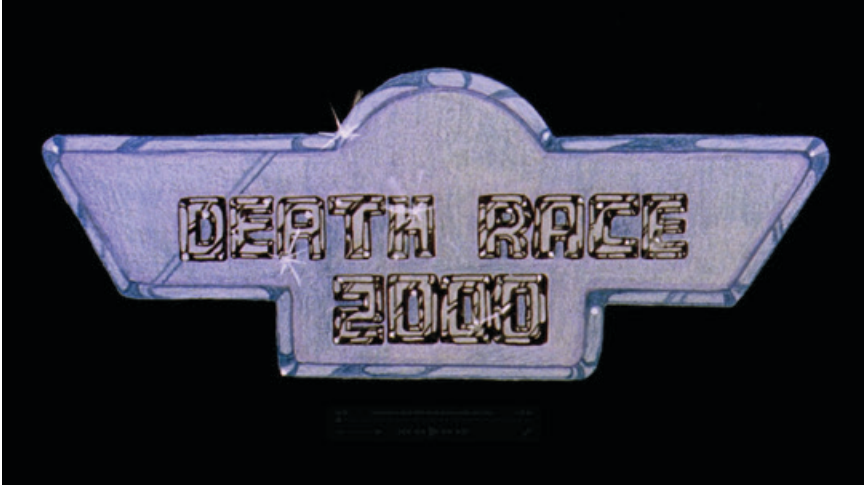
The multiple traditions and motifs that occur in *Death Race 2000* serve as another example of the transnationality of the exploitation movie. The title card

² Rollerball players use roller skates to move around the track. Later, post-apocalypse films like *Prayer of the Rollerboys* (Rick King, 1991) and *Legend of the Rollerblade Seven* (Donald G. Jackson, 1993) used the craze of rollerblading and skating to create a niche subcategory that depicted futuristic warriors on skates, that otherwise largely resembled those inspired by *Mad Max*.

gleams like chrome and resembles those used for *Mad Max* and *The Road Warrior*. It continues the fetishization of the construction of motor vehicles familiar from *The Cars That Ate Paris* and also the less satirical Ozploitation biker movie *Stone*. Its meditation on the moral disparity between state-organized violence in service of war and entertainment and that which is committed by private citizens continues the relevant themes of other Corman produced films from this period such as the Women in Prison cycle and biker movies. Immediately after the opening title, viewers are confronted with unsubtle social satire. A marching band plays the Star-Spangled Banner over images of flags being hoisted. This is followed immediately by a cut to someone in the crowd holding a tiny swastika. This use of Nazi imagery is transposed from its appearance in Corman's *The Wild Angels* and other biker pictures, as well as from *The Cars That Ate Paris*.

Its motley array of motifs, ideas and themes challenge common assumptions over state violence, personal violence and citizen disorder. One of the film's best gags shows Frankenstein choosing to kill the doctors and nurses who have wheeled out elderly and infirm patients as sacrificial victims to the race on 'Euthanasia Day', rather than ploughing into the wheelchair-bound patients who have been left out in the road to die. The humour is unfortunately undermined by cutting to the on-screen commentary team who explain exactly what Frankenstein has done and his reasons for doing so. This commits one of the fundamental sins of comedy by explaining the joke, an error that is compounded by a cut that switches to the resistance group watching the broadcast in a disused factory, who further clarify Frankenstein's heroically ironic murders. At the end, Frankenstein becomes president and unilaterally abolishes the race, after brushing off criticism that this is a hypocritical decision by killing the reporter questioning him, and a sombre voice-over by an unidentified narrator plays over the end credits denouncing mankind's violence. *Death Race 2000* hints at a new form of utopia that replaces the dystopia of old. However, it does this by replacing the old system with what looks like a kind of utopian socialist hell, where a president can make single-handed decisions about what citizens are allowed to watch and consume, and then kill any dissenters with no apparent consequences.

Despite occasional inconsistencies in style and sometimes obvious or botched satirical comment, *Death Race 2000* works because it pursues a clear and uncompromising path towards a left-leaning political commentary. The film has a thesis which the narrative scenario allows it to explore, without sacrificing the type of entertainment that genre fans would have expected. This



Figures 1 (a)–(b) Chrome title cards for *Death Race 2000* and *Mad Max*.

distinguishes it from its immediate follow-up, *Deathsport*. This thematic sequel is not a continuation of the story but instead uses the theme of gladiatorial combat in a state-sanctioned contest to pacify the population, using many of the tropes yet to be refined as MadMaxploitation. These include a desert location, modified vehicles, chase-based motorcycle action and nomadic loan warriors in exotic costumes. So readily does it resemble what would come later in Miller's series that Kim Newman writes, 'Corman, as usual, got in early on the future barbarian cycle, and had *Deathsport* out well before *Mad Max* was even a screen treatment' (Newman 1989: 84). But missing its predecessor's political edge, irony and intelligence, *Deathsport* is, as Chris Nashawaty puts it,

‘a sci-fi satire without the satire’ (2013: 147), leaving only tonal inconsistencies and budgetary limitations that the filmmakers are unable to overcome through creativity.

Deathsport, as the title suggests, carries the ‘sport’ angle over from its predecessor and primes the audience for a narrative based around watching an event. The ‘sport’ of the title is a gladiatorial combat in a desert arena where criminals fight for their freedom against state agents on ‘Death Machine’ motorbikes that are fitted with destructive laser blasters. Unlike *Death Race 2000* where the film begins at the start of the race, or *Rollerball* where the narrative is structured around a series of games at regular intervals throughout, *Deathsport* omits the media broadcast framing device. It lacks the meta-commentary on the role of the media in enforcing hegemonic values that makes its predecessor so impactful. This meta-commentary has since become a convention within dystopic fiction, even occurring in films that do not contain the sporting angle, such as in the Paul Verhoeven films *Robocop* (1987) and *Starship Troopers* (1997), where there are repeated cuts to fake advertisements and government propaganda as a comment on the main action. In these examples, it is the critique of state and private media that implements the satire.

Deathsport’s opening voice-over intones that ‘a few machines remain as a reminder of the past’. With its use of swords for combat and costuming of mediaeval-esque robes, it resembles the quasi-mystical post-apocalyptic films of the 1980s, such as *Steel Dawn* (Lance Hool, 1987). Its swordplay, plus the addition of technology such as lasers and desert locations, hints at an attempt by New World Pictures to cash-in on the success of *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977) as much as its own recent carsploitation output.

Unfortunately, as indicated by the presence of two directors as well as further directing work by an uncredited Corman himself, the production had significant problems that are evident on screen. This led to a regression in quality even compared to some of the more threadbare of New World Pictures’ output. The first thirty minutes are mostly interiors with very little action, belying Kim Newman’s observation that *Deathsport* had already covered the same ground that *Mad Max* and its imitators eventually did. Newman’s assessment here, further compounded in his book *Millennium Movies: End of the World Cinema*, that the 1980s post-apocalypse boom ‘had all been done before’ (Newman 1999: 188) by Corman and *Deathsport* is a slightly glib observation. It is retrofitted thinking based on the film’s synopsis and its use of the most basic tropes of motorcycles, deserts and a futuristic setting. It takes an age for *Deathsport* to get to its action,

and its noticeable weaknesses and its ensuing creative and financial failure undercut any of the possibilities that it would have any meaningful impact on the cycle. The effects are primitive, and the laser blasters, rather than eviscerating opponents, instead cause a ‘vaporizing’ effect, making its victims simply glow red and disappear. This, of course, removes the need for stunt men to fall to hit the ground and risk injury, including all the planning such action would entail, and appears to be a result of limited time and money. Further budgetary limitations are obvious. The ‘Death Machines’ themselves are just white, modernist looking motorbikes. There is no sense of place established in the build-up to some of the action – just bikes crossing indeterminate desert, intercut with people in other generic desert locations that look similar. The film is full of poor, badly lit sets and desert shrub locations, and spectators of the combat are only visible in long shot matte paintings.

While *Death Race 2000* and *Deathsport* fit into carsploitation, and are two of the immediate forebears of *Mad Max* and its derivatives, they are also anomalous to both. They mostly reflect American cultural concerns, such as the role of mass media in enforcing and creating a national mood and the importance of sporting heroes to American national character. They also reflect the good and the bad of exploitation cinema of the time. One demonstrates inventive genre filmmaking that provides genuine and incisive social comment, whereas the other is built out of a shallow repetition of tropes and iconography, and is divorced from the thematic content which provided purpose for the original.³ The reboots and sequels that I turn to next came thirty-five years later, after different iterations of the cycle had flourished and withered away.

Death races of the twenty-first century

In 2008 British director Paul W. S. Anderson made *Death Race*, a remake so successful it prompted a short series of direct-to-home viewing sequels, variously featuring low-budget action stars such as Jason Statham, Ving Rhames, Luke Goss and Danny Trejo. The remake series replays the basic plot of the original, only

³ As a postscript to the 1970s iterations of carsploitation and the ‘Death Race’ lineage, one should mention the passing of Claudia Jennings, star of *Deathsport* and other films released by New World Pictures, in a car accident. This tragedy is barely mentioned in books about Corman, but as it happened in 1979 at the end of the decade, it serves as a reminder of the real-world consequences of road collisions in a cycle that deliberately avoids taking them particularly seriously.

with the action located inside a futuristic private prison rather than one that is run by the state. From inside the prison walls the race is broadcast to the outside world. This corporate control over the Death Race sits against a contemporary backdrop of increasing private control of prisons in the United States (Gotsch and Basti 2018), so that the series continues the social and political commentary that the original was famous for.

Though clearly carrying on the plot and thematic concerns of the original, Anderson shoots the film in desaturated colours, so that it superficially resembles later post-apocalypse films of the noughties such as *The Book of Eli* (Albert Hughes, Aaron Hughes, 2010) and *The Road* (John Hillcoat, 2010). The appearance of the 'dreadnought', a huge armoured articulated truck, recalls *The Road Warrior* in the way it is framed in the centre of the screen, flanked by cars and aiming towards the camera, indicating that *Death Race* is also conspicuously inspired by the success of *Mad Max* and its derivatives such as *Battletruck* (Harley Cokliss, 1982).⁴

Death Race's prison is named Terminal Island, which calls to mind both the actual prison in Los Angeles and also Stephanie Rothman's 1973 *Women in Prison* film of the same name that has attracted critical attention and feminist analysis (Cook 1976, Jenkins 2006). The film plays down the media angle in comparison to Bartel's original but is punctuated throughout by moments where the broadcast of the race becomes visible onscreen. The first race we see ends by cutting to a shot of a monitor as a car comes to a sudden fiery halt. The remake and its sequels switch in and out of the different modes of address, effortlessly moving between the film as narrative with the audience looking in, to the direct address mode, via the diegetic captions and announcer's voice which we hear when we are seeing through the 'lens' of the media footage. Unlike in the original *2000*, with the visible lines of the TV monitor whenever it switches to broadcast mode, effectively always keeping the audience distanced from the media, the remakes feature no such separation. It places us as viewer of the sporting spectacle in a way that is far more immersive, with the film and the coverage becoming one. Part of the reason for this is that the camera and editing techniques that the film uses have become familiar from televised motor

⁴ Also called *Warlords of the 21 Century*, *Battletruck* was American made but shot in New Zealand and distributed by New World Pictures. Whether it is strictly a MadMaxploitation film is debatable, since though it is listed as being from 1982 on IMDB, the BFI states it is from 1981, meaning it would have been in production at the same time as *The Road Warrior*, which it most clearly resembles. Either way, it reveals the way the burgeoning cycle and the road warrior archetype was becoming part of the zeitgeist.

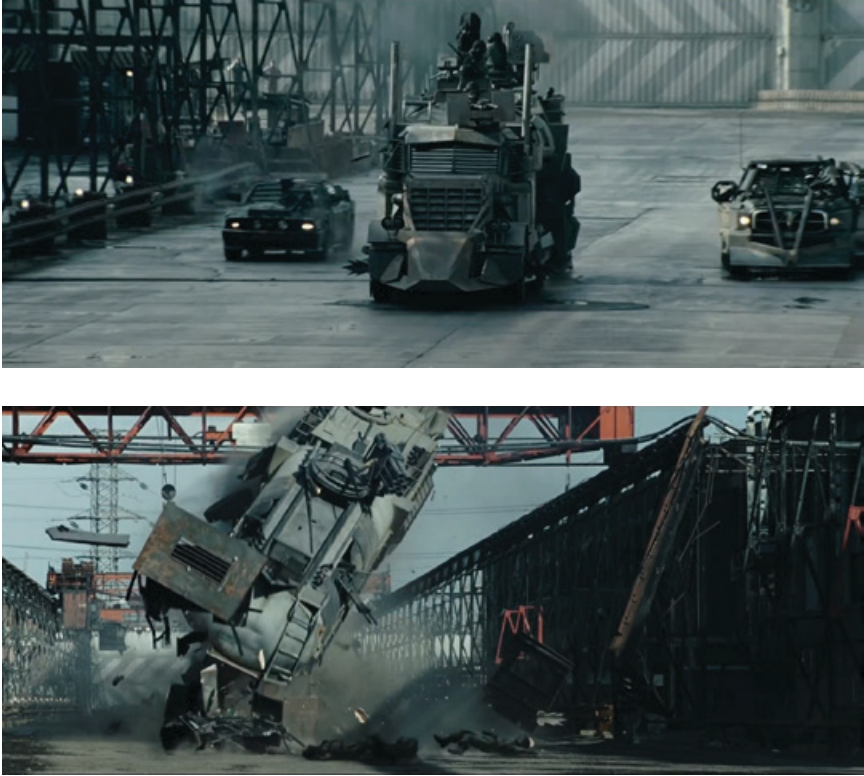


Figure 2 (a)–(b) *Death Race*: The ‘Dreadnought’ and its demise.

sport such as NASCAR and Formula One, where cameras are mounted in cars, drones and jibs. As in the original, however, the media framing device covers narrative gaps. It tells us what is happening and who is winning, or who has completed various race ‘stages’ in the same manner in which a sport broadcaster or commentator would, such as ‘Frankenstein has a clear path to the finish line! He’s about to win.’

In addition, the twenty-first-century *Death Race* films emphasize a more explicit class angle. The hero, initially played by Statham, is solidly proletariat and blue collar. He is a factory worker who in one scene is shown fighting against riot police who are trying to break up a worker-led trade union revolt. This element of class politics is diluted by the introduction of a personal story of him being framed for the murder of his wife. He becomes Frankenstein by replacing the previous incumbent who has died in a recent race. In doing so, he ‘keeps the legend alive,’ implying that the role of the hero can be filled by someone

who is both faceless (literally, given his mask) and anonymous. Frankenstein is aided by a pit team made up of other prisoners that furthers the portrayal of blue-collar characters, as they are utilized because of their working skills as mechanics and electricians. That they also act as a surrogate 'family' also has the effect of emphasizing it as a personal story, again undercutting the class struggle themes at the story's heart.

Death Race 2 repeats the same backstory of the corporate control of prisons and, like in the *Resident Evil* series (sharing producer/director Paul W. S. Anderson), they are equally critical of corporate and capitalist involvement in public service, establishing them as the cause of the social dislocation that forms the backdrop to the story. *Death Race 2* contains material aimed at sophisticated and knowledgeable fans, such as Sean Bean's gangster villain watching the original *Death Race 2000* at home and switching channels to see a real-life (within the diegesis) car chase captured by news cameras (the result of a botched robbery he has masterminded). *Death Race 3: Inferno* reveals more budgetary restrictions and has less car-based action, and it is over thirty minutes into the film before we see any new action involving cars. The motorized action we see in the first act is reused from the first two movies. Once again, the media aspect is foregrounded, and the film opens with an advert for the 'sport' in the form of recycled material from its two predecessors. The plot is about a corporate takeover of the company behind the Death Race and an attempt to franchise the sport around the world. Frankenstein, repeating the trope of the lone warrior standing in the way of such corporatism, fascism and totalitarianism, is all that can derail the plan.

Inferno continues the trend of littering the screen with oblique political and social references that are not necessarily coherent but which are 'readable' by informed audiences. The race takes place in South Africa, with prison guards dressed in red berets and camouflage fatigues resembling the uniform of Saddam Hussein's Iraqi Republican Guard. There is a prisoner who is a member of the IRA, and also includes the race's first female driver. The race location is surrounded by a township who stage a protest by burning metal barrels and waving placards declaring that the street is theirs rather than belonging to the corporation, creating a question over the idea of public and private ownership of public spaces. The incoherence of any message is demonstrated when the crowd lynches the black driver and navigator who crash into the township. It is a sequence that not only simultaneously offers a 'people power' moment of revolutionary revenge (although the drivers are prisoners themselves, of course)

but also reinforces a racist trope of the wild, African mob lynching and beating people.

The central conceit of the remake/sequels is that Frankenstein is a cypher that anyone can be through assumption of the mask, underlined by Jason Statham's non-appearance in the sequels. By the end of *Inferno* Frankenstein is reborn with the body of the villain – burnt beyond recognition and therefore anonymous and is forced to take the place of the previous incumbent, obscuring the line between the 'good' and the 'bad' characters. This thread also comes via *Mad Max*, where Max originally quits his job as a patrol driver because he is starting to resemble one of the gangs he is chasing.

According to Lincoln Geraghty, sport in 1970s American science fiction is 'used to emphasise the futility of existence' (Geraghty 2009: 52), where it functions as a proxy for war or geopolitical conflict. The media, in broadcasting these spectacles, is a 'dangerous instigator of violence' (Geraghty 2009: 53), and therefore a necessary part of the State's exploitation of the citizens' desire to satisfy their blood lust, thus making the media both the recorder and creator of state-sanctioned violence. The remake of *Death Race*, according to Geraghty, deliberately avoids any sort of political or social commentary targeted by Corman and Bartel in their original. Instead, Anderson's version 'aims for the lowest form of entertainment' (2009: 107). The implication is that the remake of *Death Race* resembles the violent media spectacle used to pacify the masses and is just another example of what the original film was critiquing. That the remake does not advertise or foreground its satire might be an arguable point (though even that is highly debatable), but such an interpretation ignores many of the incidental elements of both the film and its sequels, such as the social class of the drivers (criminals and blue-collar workers) which is contrasted by the social class of the oppressors, as well as the continual emphasis on the method by which the race is broadcast and the numerous references to 'political' situations or events. In addition, that they are set in a prison, with the prisoners being exploited by institutions more powerful than them, means that political and social commentary is unavoidable.

Geraghty's interpretation also avoids the question of not knowing what audiences in 1975 (and subsequently viewing on home media) enjoyed about Bartel's original. Maybe, for example, they too were mostly responding to the violence and nudity rather than its more intellectual qualities. Geraghty's view of *Death Race* ignores that science fiction is always a comment on the present and that this is readily understood by fans of the genre. As Mark Jancovich

writes, the cult film fan is 'well educated in academic competences and dispositions' (Jancovich 2008: 151). Many of those who watch *Death Race* will do so in the understanding that it is a remake of a satirical movie and built on the back of a multitude of post-apocalypse and dystopian sci-fi movies, as well as MadMaxploitation that specifically comments on many aspects of society. Indeed, it is impossible for any film set in the future that features variations of recognizable features of the present (such as a sports race and TV coverage) *not* to be a form of commentary or satire. That the *Death Race* remake series includes on-screen captions warning audiences that the stunts it contains are dangerous, performed by trained professionals and should not be duplicated by those at home indicates at least that they have a reflexive sense of humour, especially given the outlandish and spectacular nature of the stunts involved.

The question is whether a remake of *Death Race 2000* could ever deviate from making some form of subtextual comment, regardless of any alleged shallowness of its own aims, especially as it cannot escape the original film, the cycle it comes from or any of its genre forebears. Put simply, *Death Race* can always be interpreted as a critique of contemporary society and the role of the media and sports, even if the said critique was never the intention of the filmmakers. That the film refers to NASCAR racing (however obliquely) means it is indelibly linked to questioning the role of the media within gladiatorial-style sport. That the race takes place in a prison (and through a South African township in *Inferno*) and is streamed via the Web to an outside audience at home is another updating that can be read as a comment on the nature of spectacle and the role of the viewer in the twenty-first century. The connections between events on screen and real life are there to be made by fans and scholars alike. Furthermore, the opening on-screen caption tells us that the 2012 US economy has collapsed, that unemployment is at its highest and that the resulting accelerating crime rate has overloaded the prison system. As a result, private corporations – presented in distinguishing red font – now run the prison system for profit. This is clearly referencing a genuine real-world social and political situation that has accelerated in the years since 2008. Geraghty's claim that it is aiming for pure, and low, entertainment might be a debatable point, but it is simply incorrect to state that *Death Race* 'ignores the politics' (Geraghty 2009: 107). That *Death Race* is reliant on 'blood, boobs and bangs' (2009: 107) as part of its appeal does not mean that it avoids political comment, nor that Bartel's original movie was not also reliant upon the same scopophilic pleasures (the original even contains female nudity which Anderson's film notably does not).

Death Race does, at least on the very surface, appear to be taking itself seriously in a manner the original avoids (though the warning not to repeat the stunts also makes this a slightly dubious argument). By way of contrast, Corman himself returned to the lineage of the series and produced a more identifiable retreading in *Death Race 2050*, a film that makes much the same satirical comments in the same over-the-top manner that *Death Race* circumvents, and which perhaps encouraged Geraghty's criticism. Manu Bennett in the Frankenstein role refers in the 'making of' documentary on the Blu-ray disk to the tone as being '*Mad Max* meets *The Rocky Horror Show*' to recontextualize the story amid more contemporary reference points. The film has a highly colourful and trashy aesthetic, including weak CGI effects and even back-projection in the driving scenes, which has the effect of making the film look both up to date and retro simultaneously.

Death Race 2050 starts in the same place as *2000*, with the crowd waving Stars and Stripes banners and tiny flags and waiting for the race to start. The setting is no longer the United States of America but the United *Corporations* of America (UCoA), and The Chairman – the President played by Malcolm MacDowell – is projected before the masses, introducing the event. The UCoA has taken over the world, and now, as The Chairman puts it, 'the only thing that can kill an American is another American'. As with all of the others in the series the rest of the movie is framed by the TV broadcast of the race, with presenters excitedly providing commentary direct to the screen. But, in an update of the series' iconography the viewers are now able to experience the race through Virtual Reality headsets, via a human proxy in the passenger seat of each car.

The four main drivers are introduced: Frankenstein; Tammy the Terrorist (Anessa Ramsey), a Christian fundamentalist who detonates dynamite into the crowd as she is introduced; Minerva (Folake Olowofoyeku), an African American former hip-hop star, also famous for a sex tape; a car powered by artificial intelligence; and a genetically modified muscle man, Jed (Burt Grinstead). Minerva is prone to speaking the kind of utterances that were typically in the mouth of Pam Grier in the Corman-produced 1970s *Women in Prison* films, such as when Minerva declares, 'Where we come from we battle every day to survive', which pays lip service to civil-rights-era race relations. Jenkins refers to the dialogue in such films, in this case Stephanie Rothman's *Terminal Island*, as 'crude agit-prop' (Jenkins 2006: 108). There, the dialogue was a tokenistic evocation of civil rights and other liberation movements of the 1970s but was mostly spoken earnestly by the characters. In *2050* however,

Minerva's speeches seem more like a mockery of the politicized black woman because she is also clothed in the iconography of 'bling', shallow signifiers of individual economic success and wealth, and not emblematic of a collective class- or race-based struggle.

The resistance gang resembles the marauder types familiar from MadMaxploitation. They are punky, wear leather and hang on the backs of trucks and motorbikes, hollering while brandishing weaponry. The fully committed cast give over-the-top, campy performances, and it has a vulgar, incessantly in your face style, exacerbated by the TV framing device, meaning that much of it is delivered either to camera or as part of an aggressive and ostentatious live broadcast. At the climax, The Chairman is killed, and because of the Virtual Reality device, audiences are put in the role of Frankenstein the hero, assuming responsibility for the overthrowing of the regime. Frankenstein speaks directly to his audience telling them that the 'power' is now in their hands, at which point they rip off their headsets and begin the revolution for real. Over the course of the *Death Race* lineage the character of Frankenstein is constantly shifting; in 2000, Frankenstein is such an individual that he decides to single-handedly abolish the race. In the Anderson derived series, he is endlessly replaceable and an interchangeable cypher acting as a front for the corporation. Finally, in 2050, Frankenstein is a proxy for the watching audience.

Arguably, today television is even more fragmented, trashy and immersive than in 1975, although when it is contrasted with Anderson's update, the satire in 2050 unbalances the film. It becomes a case of spotting the references, with the parodies, metaphors and analogies forming so much of the content that there is little room for anything else. Instead, any viewing pleasure comes in the vulgarity of the form rather than the spectacle of the race or involvement in the narrative itself. That this is so much the case indicates the extent to which *Death Race 2000*'s reputation is largely based upon its social commentary, rather than its action and thrills, and how any attempt at updating its narrative is doing so in the knowledge that audiences would expect this aspect to continue.

Conclusion

Geraghty writes that while 1970s films such as *The Poseidon Adventure* (Ronald Neame, 1972) and *Dawn of the Dead* (George A. Romero, 1978) showed that survivors of disasters could work together with the possibility of hope for the

future, science fiction of the period (in the United States) pushed the idea that 'one man could not make a difference, and society was not worthy of being saved' (2009: 54). But, deeply cynical as they may be, *Death Race 2000* and *Rollerball* do feature narratives dependent on 'one man making a difference.' They are, at least on a superficial level, about the individual defeating the State. 'One man can make a difference' would later become a tagline for posters for *The Road Warrior*, and all the films in this book operate on the border of the conflicts and contradictions between individuality and society, examining the role of both and how they are dependent on each other for different versions of societal structures. This remains the case even if, as with the *Death Race* series, they are sceptical about what society, authority and the State will look like after the triumph of the individual protagonist. The question at the end of all of these films is whether society will eventually reform itself in its previously corrupt image after the initial excitement of the State's defeat has been enjoyed. *Rollerball* and *Death Race 2000* are unequivocal about the individual's role in this defeat. The various sequels, reboots and remakes are less sure-footed. But overall, 'one man' is shown to make a difference to these narratives of (partial) liberation. Whoever or whatever is liberated in these films is a result of one man's sacrifice and willingness to absorb pain and punishment, a willingness that is common to the variations on the road warrior archetype that features throughout post-apocalypse exploitation cinema.

Contextualizing *Mad Max*

Why are our films not selling overseas? Could it be because they are second-rate copies of films that are made overseas? Which foreign films are successful in Australia? I would hazard a guess that they are not those that copy film models of other countries but those that are distinctly French, German, Scandinavian, English ... whether they be thrillers, love stories, soft-core pornography, avant-garde or art house films. Likewise, our own films would, I believe, be more successful overseas if we imbued them with qualities that identify them as part of an Australian film culture as opposed to an imported film culture. (James Ricketson in Film News 1979)

The Australian government's subsidy on film production in the 1970s had, according to James Ricketson, too often been spent on productions that had subsequently struggled to recoup their costs. The Hollywood-style industrial model that looked to make commercially successful exports, modelled on what was already selling internationally, was proving unsustainable. He predicted that the year of 1979 would prove to be a crucial turning point for the Australian industry, and decisions were needed as to whether to continue the failing attempt to be outward facing and contribute to international trends or to begin to finance and produce a more inward, self-sustaining and what he saw as a more culturally enriching, national cinema. His prediction that the final year of the decade would be an important one was, in part, proven true by *Mad Max*, but only because it appeared outside of the paradigm he had considered as essential for moving forward the development of Australian cinema. By being privately funded, George Miller's film was produced independently of State support, circumventing the need to provide any sort of cultural significance other than a

financial return to its investors. It was subsequently a huge commercial success both in Australia and more significantly around the world. It also straddled both potential avenues Ricketson lays out in his article by being uniquely Australian while also recycling familiar material from the previous ten years of transnational exploitation product.

In Buckmaster's account of *Mad Max*'s critical reception, he highlights a moralistic review written by the Australian social commentator Philip Adams, who eviscerates the film for its violence. Adams writes that if *Mad Max* falls short of actually encouraging violence, it is 'only because its thousand predecessors have dulled the sensibilities, desensitising the social conscience' (Adams, in Buckmaster 2017: 93). Such a reaction was not uncommon. Respected critic Leslie Halliwell's assessment of it was as a 'violent extravaganza with no real merit' (1995: 709).¹ For all of its hysterical tone and hyperbole around the violence, Adams's review acknowledges a dichotomy in how *Mad Max* was both original and yet built upon innumerable iterations ('thousands' of them according to Adams) of its themes and cinematic forms. It could be sold as a continuation of the biker movie, a carsploitation film, a rogue cop movie, as part of the popular revenge and vigilante cycle, or as a dystopian science fiction fable that reflected a decade of political and social upheaval.

Its huge international box office success was also a result of visceral cinematic pleasures based principally on the emphasis of movement and action. Such attractions created a continuity through the film's immediate exploitation forebears and back to early silent cinema's obsession with action, alongside the filmic possibilities of motion created by the modernist inventions of the automobile and railway. In the simultaneous way that we understand *Mad Max* as being original as well as highly derivative, we can also contextualize it by the duality of the local and the international. It was, of course, a key film in the emerging and developing national cinema of Australia. This, combined with the cross-cultural origins of its forebears, meant *Mad Max* was at once a film of interest for both Antipodean and international audiences and scholars.

¹ Leslie Halliwell appeared to have a bigger issue with the tone of the series than most other critics. His reviews of the trilogy in his *Film Guide* total only fifty-five words, with three mentions of their violence. He sums up *Beyond Thunderdome*, which was rated only PG-13 in the United States and a 15 certificate in the UK, as 'violent futuristic rubbish in a similar vein as its predecessors' (1995: 709).

Mad Max as Australian national cinema

Stuart Cunningham suggests that the *Mad Max* series exists outside of the dynamic that so concerned Ricketson, that of the opposition between art/cultural production and the noisy excesses of the commercial Ozploitation product. Cunningham makes the point that not only does the series draw upon Australian road movies such as *Stone* but that Miller's 'sheer technical virtuosity and aggressively decadent vitalism ... outdoes Hollywood' (Cunningham 1985: 237). That it does so, he writes, 'opens a range of further generic transformation' akin to the Italian western (1985: 237). He suggests that this would be such a 'cinematic coup' that it 'must widen the potential resources of Australian film production' (1985: 237). Tom O'Regan goes as far as to suggest that *Mad Max* was so successful in adopting American influences that it went beyond beating Hollywood at its own game but also 'perhaps provides original structural models' for a new genre. This ensures that *Mad Max* 'is no longer a copy' (1996: 221), in the same way that Australian TV soap operas came to be seen as an established form of their own, rather than as a replication of the structural model of British or US versions. As I explore in Chapter 5, the cycle that followed *Mad Max* that Cunningham predicted was in fact mostly generated outside of Australia, rather than within its own geographical borders. This is in contrast to the Italian westerns of the 1960s and 1970s, which were internationally successful but were identified with a single country of origin (though many were also European co-productions that had an aesthetic influence on westerns and genre filmmaking around the world). This is not the case for any 'genre' inspired by *Mad Max*.

In *Australian National Cinema*, O'Regan points out that *Mad Max* was, upon first release, considered part of Australia's 'crassly commercial cinema, recycling possibly regressive notions and ideas' (1996: 54), along the lines of the Ocker films like *Alvin Purple*. Echoing some of Ricketson's observations, O'Regan lays out the systemic problems faced by Australian cinema and its place in relation to the international marketplace:

Australian cinema is not large enough to support an extensive film production industry, nor the scale of local production in higher budgeted movie and limited episode serial television. As a medium-sized producer, it cannot as easily differentiate itself through either, producing a sufficient volume of suitable product or readily occupying a market niche as can the larger French, Italian or British cinemas (these are readily known in their own right). In part because

of the difficulties of delivering a 'brand name', diverse Australian product circulates locally and internationally.

Medium-sized cinemas do not have as extensive or valuable export markets as do larger cinemas. They have difficulty holding their best and brightest in front of the camera because of the limited professional options available. Their local product is not as critically valued in itself but is evaluated – often pejoratively – with respect to imports. When exported, their features are rarely as popular or as critically respected internationally as are those of the USA and the major European cinemas (also available in those markets). (O'Regan 1996: 90)

The trajectory of *Mad Max* challenges this model, or at least stands outside of it, because of Miller's insistence on maintaining it as a recognizably Australian product. The first two sequels are made in Australia, and *Fury Road*, though shot in Namibia, is culturally and geographically Australian as indicated by the accents of much of the cast. O'Regan points out the near impossibility and futility of determining that which is authentically Australian and that which 'belongs' to other cinemas from abroad. Miller himself concurs: 'Even though our culture reproduces to some degree the American, British, European and, in a little way, Asian culture, I think that makes us even in a very subtle way peculiarly Australian' (Miller in White 1984: 96).

O'Regan writes that 'the coming together of these diverse cultural accents constitutes the inescapably Australian and relational character of these films' (O'Regan 1996: 102). Australian directors, he writes, 'find it easy to work within American film-making and cultural norms' (1996: 102). Within this context, the way *Mad Max* not only crosses exploitation contexts but also inspired new exploitation cycles seems more inevitable. It also tells us something of the increasing homogeneity between mainstream and exploitation that is part of the exploration of this book. Australian filmmaking, he writes, is a 'space that constitutively includes both the options of Australianization and de-Australianization – separately and singly and sometimes in the same film' (O'Regan 1996: 105). But this goes further when considering the success of *Mad Max* and its spread beyond the US/Aussie cinematic borders. Exploitation cinema is *international* cinema. This book adds to the evidence for this claim – I am a British author, with a US publisher, writing about a spread of international films. *Mad Max* is at the centre of these associations.

Neil Rattigan in *Images of Australia* poses the question as to whether the location of *Mad Max* is even Australia at all, observing that 'most of the action

could have taken place in any American Midwestern prairie state' (1991: 192). This is an odd comment, because while it might look like the American Midwest, nothing has been altered during production to make this the case. If the Australia of *Mad Max* looks like parts of the United States, then it is because that's just the way it is. Rattigan makes no such comment about Peter Weir's incarnation of rural Australia in *The Cars That Ate Paris*, despite its visual similarity to the locations in *Mad Max*. Rattigan also takes the time to acknowledge the ubiquity of Australian accents on display throughout, as well as the clearly identifiable landmarks such as Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Opera House in *Beyond Thunderdome*. A sign by the wrecked truck in *The Road Warrior* reading 4,500 miles to London (presumably the London in the Christmas Islands) provides more evidence that the sequels are visibly locating themselves in Australia.

While it might be the case that the first *Mad Max*'s Australian-ness was obscured by its Midwest-looking landscapes, and its setting in the near future, its biggest attempt to conceal its regional origins was an afterthought. In the US release the Australian accents of the cast were dubbed into American-sounding English, but using the same dialogue. This version was also used for the home video release in the UK. There is some attempt at hiding the Australian origins, but unlike in *Harlequin* (1980), where the story is explicitly set in America and reinforced through a number of signifiers, the disguise was prompted by the international distributors rather than the filmmakers.

Dan Hassler-Forest refers to the dubbing into American accents to make it sound more palatable to international audiences as being 'rather hilarious' (2017: 302). But to US audiences, and those in the grindhouses in particular, who Hassler-Forest suggests would have found the emptiness of the outback locations to be the most futuristic element (2017: 302), such dubbing would not have been unusual. In fact, watching dubbed English would have been a familiar experience to regular audiences at the US grindhouses in the late 1970s and early 1980s, who would have been presented with dubbed versions of Italian westerns, kung fu pictures from Hong Kong and European horror films. That the dubbing was at least in sync due to the original actors speaking in English would also mean that it was far less conspicuous than many other films playing in theatres at the time. It also needs to be remembered that accent dubbing was also at the time a relatively common practice in mainstream films and was a feature of several James Bond movies, including the overlaying of 007 himself when George Lazenby's voice was replaced for part of *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (Peter Hunt, 1969), as well as the regular dubbing into clearer English

of 'Bond Girl' actors who were typically from Europe and whose accents were deemed too strong.

Luke Buckmaster reports that Miller was apparently 'appalled' by the dubbing, and in particular that the peculiar vocal delivery of Hugh Keays-Byrne as Toecutter had been completely lost (2017: 143). However, the dubbing of American accents, rather than diminishing the experience, actually contributes to the overall mood of the international version and is in keeping with the strategic aims of the rest of the soundtrack. The sound effects were created in post-production (Buckmaster 2017: 131) and are very loud in the mix. This gives them an over-the-top, almost cartoonish feel and is a feature of Miller's style that has rarely been discussed. The moments of sensation or shock are accompanied by loud and overemphasized musical cues, and similarly the score by composer Brian May is grandiose and lacking in subtlety throughout. The exaggerated soundtrack is particularly emphasized during the reveal of the Nightrider's coffin on the railway platform and when Max peels back the Goose's hospital bed sheets to find him horribly disfigured, both of which are accompanied by sudden and alarming non-diegetic screeching sounds. Other moments throughout the series follow this pattern, such as when the Feral Kid's metal boomerang eviscerates the head of Wez's lover in *The Road Warrior*. The American dubbing accentuates this effect by making the dialogue another part of the sound design, rather than the more naturalistic effect of the original Australian soundtrack. For example, consider the two versions of the final line delivered by the Toecutter's chief henchman, Bubba Zanetti. Bubba is about to finish off an injured Max, who lies helpless on the asphalt, by riding over him on his motorbike. The full exchange between him and his leader reads:

Toecutter: Quit toying, Bubba.

Zanetti: (pulling his helmet visor down) Easy, I know what I'm doing.

Bubba Zanetti revs up his engine and heads for Max, who manages to aim and fire his shotgun just in time to kill his oncoming assailant. In the original Australian version, Zanetti sounds hesitant, unsure of himself. He appears wary of what he is about to do and wants to prove himself to the Toecutter. In the US dub, the line is delivered in a more grandiose and imposing manner, like a comic book villain. The original is in keeping with the mood of low-key dread perpetuated by much of the rest of the film. The US version has a sense of flamboyance that is also synonymous with the mood of the series in general. Miller may have

been 'appalled' by the dubbing, but in the sequels it must be noted that the vocal delivery, of the villains especially, is far closer in timbre and tone to that of the US international dubbed version than the more naturalistic Australian originally recorded.

The Australian-ness of the series was also a talking point in other territories. Peter Ackroyd's otherwise positive review of *Beyond Thunderdome* in the British conservative periodical *The Spectator* includes eight uses of the word 'Australia', not including the headline, in its six hundred words and seven paragraphs. The film's country of derivation frames the entire review, as if this factor superseded any other; Gibson as an 'Australian athlete'; the 'cartoon imagery' having a 'peculiarly exotic quality ... derived from its Australian origin'; and making the point that Tina Turner is *not* Australian but is 'the next best thing', imbued with enough theatricality as to be referred to as 'Dame Edna Everage with a voice, and a black or at least beige skin' (Ackroyd 1985: 37). The supposed campness of its *mise en scène* is, Ackroyd claims, a recurring feature of Australian movies. The review is accompanied by a cartoon that caricatures the main performers playing Max, Auntie, MasterBlaster and Ironbar, with a speech bubble emanating from Max's mouth proclaiming 'STRIPE, MATEY! [ENG. TRANS. "Oh, gosh"]'. So conspicuous is the perceived exoticism and foreignness of *Beyond Thunderdome* that it is deemed to require a form of translation. Confusion over the contexts from which *Mad Max* originated is also reflected in the comparisons it makes to the character of John Rambo, the nearest series with which Ackroyd can find common ground. This is despite *First Blood* (Ted Kotcheff, 1982) and *Rambo: First Blood Part Two* (George P. Cosmatos, 1985) sharing nothing with *Beyond Thunderdome* other than they both belong to a generically vague notion of 'action cinema'. The review is desperately searching for an identifiable reference point, in action, adventure or character goal, however inadequate the comparison may be.

O'Regan also suggests a comparison to Rambo but argues that Max is different because he is 'emotionally and physically vulnerable' (1996: 104). Again, the language being used to understand the character is insufficient, because to make such a comment about Max requires a shallow and inaccurate assessment of Rambo. John Rambo is particularly prone to PTSD-inspired emotional meltdowns as well as having to endure a tremendous amount of physical punishment – he is, if anything, shown to be more physically and psychologically vulnerable than Max. The casualness of these comments by O'Regan and Ackroyd in comparing the characters reveals two things: that *Mad Max* is difficult to accurately and

succinctly categorize; and that genre pictures, particularly action films, attract substandard analysis reliant on shallow assessments that are lacking in nuance.

Genre, action and spectacle

Alongside the recurrent attempts to search for a context to understand the impact and idiosyncrasies that *Mad Max* had in relation to character, another issue revolved around its place within genre. Moran and Vieth comment that *Mad Max* was ‘unlike those that had come before in the Australian industry, and was more in tune with these films of the same genre being released in the United States’ (2009: 183). This statement, however, does not indicate exactly which genre it belongs to and also ignores the distinction between films being made in America and those being released there, which could have originated from anywhere. They also write that ‘the world of *Mad Max* was recognizably Hollywood’ (2009: 195). It is difficult to determine what is meant by this comment given, as we have seen that its aesthetic, narrative and industrial influences do not come from mainstream Hollywood. ‘Hollywood’ in this context is presumably shorthand for any film that comes from the United States and which fits into an immediately identifiable genre.

The difficulty of *Mad Max*’s position in relation to genre perhaps accounts for its relatively marginal position in Moran and Vieth’s book entitled *Film in Australia*, where it is only mentioned on a handful of pages in a book *specifically about* genre in Australian cinema. They align it to a broad action adventure rubric of the ‘lone hero’ and ‘survival narrative’ (2006: 18), as well as to the broader category of science fiction. Yet references to it in the sci-fi section of the book are there primarily because it demonstrated an ability to succeed despite not receiving government funding, as well as the way it attracted sometimes savagely negative critical reviews (2006: 133).

Other scholars demonstrate a similar struggle to comfortably contextualize it by using familiar genres as a framework. Barry Keith Grant, in *100 Science Fiction Films*, calls *Mad Max* ‘a striking original generic hybrid’ in the same review in which he describes it as being ‘hardly above the clichés of *Dirty Harry* vigilante movies’ (2013: 101). Aside from the simplistic conflation of *Dirty Harry* Callaghan with a vigilante – ignoring that Harry is a police officer and therefore not strictly a vigilante in the civilian mode of Paul Kersey in *Death Wish* or John Eastland in *The Exterminator*, his retrospective review signals the confusion over

Mad Max's place within genre cinema. David Chute in his contemporaneous article on *The Road Warrior*, which includes an accompanying interview with Miller, refers to them as rock 'n' roll films with a 'punkish beat' and as fairy tales, albeit ones that are 'violent and hallucinatory' (Chute 1982: 27), as well as making multiple references to the samurai as an attempt to explain its lead character and his motivations. Martyn Conterio also uses a rock 'n' roll metaphor to describe Miller's shooting and cutting style (2019: 56). Danny Peary acknowledges that part of the 'cult fascination' of *Mad Max* comes from 'its apartness from other contemporary films' (1982: 216), yet he also points out the debt to prototypes such as *A Boy and His Dog*, *The Wild One*, *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick, 1971) and even *Quadrophenia* (Franc Roddam, 1979). Adrian Martin even refers to *Beyond Thunderdome* as an 'art' film (2003: 67), based on its 'resolute dreaminess' and its structure as a 'series of passages between worlds, marked at crucial points by bouts of unconsciousness' (2003: 67). As a change from *The Road Warrior*, which attempted a version of the classical Hollywood model, Martin identifies the art movie structure in how the story 'displaces' Max, sending him 'from one strange environment to another' (2003: 69), a process over which he has little control. This 'displacement' of the main character recurs in *Fury Road*, where Max is in bondage for much of the movie, remains an observer of events rather than a goal-driven character, and narrative developments and shifts in time are signalled by Max slipping into unconsciousness. These attempts to explain the shifts in tone from straightforward action cinema to the category of 'art' also prove inadequate, because Max is also an observer through much of *The Road Warrior*. He sits and watches an attack and rape on an escaping vehicle and its occupants, an extended siege on the oil-producing compound and the dialogue negotiation about whether to leave the compound between Papagello and his followers.

Martin describes *The Road Warrior* as being far less of a 'generic jumble' than the first film and instead focuses on recreating a futuristic version of the standard western (Martin 2003: 39). There are a number of ways in which it can be read as an updated version of a western. Bill Osgerby writes that 'the immersion in Western myth and frontier ideals explains why the biker flick was a peculiarly America phenomenon' (Osgerby 2003b: 106), and because *Mad Max* was steeped in biker movie iconography the connection to the western naturally carried across continents. *The Road Warrior's* western allusions were also readily translatable to Australia due to the country possessing a similarly wild, untameable terrain. The Australian outback resembles the western frontier

not only in terms of its look but also with its many threats and dangers. The climax to three of the films, where a convoy repels attacks by numerous savages, recreates various iconic sequences across westerns where Native Americans attack a stagecoach or wagon train. And like many westerns, its central character is a former lawman turned drifter and gun for hire.

Kim Newman refers to both *Mad Max* and the post-apocalypse road warrior cycle as a minor subcategory of the western. In a chapter entitled 'Diversions' from his book *Wild West Movies* (1990), referring to variations on the themes and settings of the classic western, he calls *Mad Max 2* (sic) 'an explicit post-apocalypse reworking of a John Ford western' and writes that Max vanishes 'into desert obscurity' at the end because he is too much of a 'psychopath' (Newman 1990: 188) to rejoin civilization like Wyatt Earp in *My Darling Clementine* (John Ford, 1946), and presumably also like Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956). In *Millennium Movies*, Newman notes the shift from Max's depiction as a Clint Eastwood-style rogue cop to a version of the 'doomed western hero played by John Wayne' in the sequel (1999: 185). In an article in the British film magazine *Empire*, Gibson is instead referred to as 'the Man With No Name squeezed into carnal leathers' (Nathan 2000), referring to the character Eastwood portrays in Sergio Leone's spaghetti variations on the American western. Again, a sense of confusion about how to categorize remains; *The Road Warrior* is interpreted as a traditional John Ford picture but with a cynical Man with No Name figure at its centre (though Max demonstrates none of the latter's insouciance).

Moran and Vieth's observation that *Mad Max* 'documented the transition from the world of innocence and beauty to [an] amoral and violent outlaw world' (2009: 183–4) is also inaccurate, in that there is hardly a world of innocence presented at all. There is no state of balance that is disrupted by malign external forces; it is corrupt from the very start of the first film. If this is followed through to its conclusion, it might hint that it shares an overall tone with the Italian western, more so than that of the John Ford films referenced by Newman. In Austin Fisher's reading of the politics of the spaghetti western (2011), he identifies two particular strands. One is films that deal with political insurgency and use the Mexican revolution as a backdrop to stand in for liberation struggles happening around the world. The other is what he calls the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) strand. In the RSA westerns, exemplified by complex and offbeat entries in the cycle such as *Django Kill* (Giulio Questi, 1967) and *The Great Silence* (Sergio Corbucci, 1968), society is depicted as inherently corrupt and structured to suit the avarice of corrupt bankers, politicians and law enforcers whose

nefarious actions impact on the innocent and weak. If *Mad Max* is a form of a western, it would be this type. The first film in particular conforms to this strand, but there are also elements visible in *Beyond Thunderdome* and *Fury Road*, where a debased and corrupt system of law, order and 'civilization' is being established.

Danny Peary's analysis also points out several conspicuous moments of horror, such as when Max approaches Goose's burnt body in the hospital bed and the stalking through the woods of Max's wife Jessie (1982: 217). The latter is accompanied by a musical score that sounds very much like a Bernard Herrmann score from a Hitchcock movie. Added to this is the moment where Toecutter's gang chases down and sexually violates a young couple driving a Cadillac, a scene shot with a sense of horror style foreboding. The VHS cover for the 1988 UK Warner Home Video release confirms these interpretations, describing it as 'A gothic horror story set in Australia – in the near future'.

Writing in *Contemporary Australian Cinema*, Jonathan Rayner asserts that the trilogy epitomized the Australian Gothic through 'their generic hybridisation, their parodic and black comedy approach, and their subversion of authority and heroism' (2000b: 43). He suggests that the peculiarly Australian-ness of this 'gothic' resembles Film Noir in that it 'represents a mode, a stance, and an atmosphere' (2000b: 25) rather than a genre. Yet he also establishes three factors indicating the Australian Gothic:

A questioning of established authority; a disillusionment with the social reality that that authority maintains; and the protagonist's search for a valid and tenable identity once the true nature of the human environment has been revealed. (2000b: 25)

If these are indicative of a peculiarly Australian 'gothic', they are also character motivations and themes common to the American biker and science fiction movies that provided much of the original inspiration and generic context for *Mad Max*. The prevalence of antisocial behaviour of on-screen bikers, involving fighting, aggression towards bystanders, vandalism, sexual impropriety and vulgar rudeness, equally characterizes the Toecutter's gang. The claim that the biker cycle ultimately 'rode roughshod over intellectual subtleties' and traded on 'fast-paced thrills' (Osgerby 2003a: 105) also applies to how *Mad Max* presents its dissection of societal structure mostly as a series of spectacular and very violent chases. But also, many of the activities of the gangs themselves provide much of the appeal and sense of 'thrill'. Peter Stanfield's assessment of the biker

film, that it was about (and watched by) 'self-obsessed mobile youths going nowhere, cycling back on themselves in endless displays of repetitive inchoate activity' (2018: 6), works equally as a description of the activities of the followers of the Toecutter and the Lord Humungus. Significant amounts of screen time are afforded to sequences of biker and road gangs riding and moving in convoy. One sequence in *Mad Max* echoes that of a moment in *Born Losers* when the biker gang ride into town, and the residents line the streets to watch the show. The Toecutter makes his gang's arrival into a small town a theatrical performance by orchestrating their movements and conducting the roar of their engines. This sense of theatricality is continued in the sequels. In *The Road Warrior* Humungus's troops have a 'barker' to announce their arrival, and Immortan Joe's War Boys are accompanied into battle with heavy metal music played by a character called the Doof Warrior, whose guitar shoots flames. During these moments, the film suspends its narrative development to allow for the spectacle to take place. This doubles for what it means within the diegesis; Toecutter, Humungus and Immortan Joe all manufacture these moments as performances to ferment fear or intimidation, while Miller allows screen time for audiences to enjoy those same theatrical exhibitions.

The theatricality of the biker movie inspired Kenneth Anger to consider such displays as having a fundamentally homoerotic potential, explored through his influential short *Scorpio Rising* (1963). The fetishistic use of leather clothing and its links to gay subcultures, the feminine appearance of possessing long hair and the contiguity of the almost exclusively male gangs meant that the biker movie treaded on the borders of a range of sexual and gender roles. Miller's villains take this further by several steps. The fetishism of the bikes and clothes is made even more explicit, as is the depiction of them as being sexually indiscriminate; Toecutter's gang rape one man and fondle another, and Wez in *The Road Warrior* has a regular male lover.

These mediations around the possible 'meanings' and interpretations of the figure of the biker evoke how *Mad Max* plays into the social problem strand in many exploitation cycles. When Ian Nathan in *Empire* refers to the 'skinhead biker gang' in *The Road Warrior*, despite none of them actually being skinheads (Nathan 2000), it speaks to the idea of the marauding, uncontrollable savage on two wheels archetype as a group that creates social anxiety. None of the gang are skinheads in any real sense of them having completely shaven heads, and indeed most have Mohawk-styled hair. None of them resemble anything to do with skinhead subcultures of the 1960s or the 1970s and their associated fashions,

music choices or varying political edicts and alliances. The phrase 'skinhead' here is being used as a shorthand to refer to an unruly type, rather than an accurate descriptor.

While Bill Osgerby refers to the transgressive spectacle of the biker film (2003a: 99), Miller always pulls back from allowing the audience to fully enjoy these elements. The transgressive behaviour is undoubtedly presented to viewers, but they are never placed with the bikers, and the spectacle is never allowed to be enjoyed for its own sake; instead, it is about presenting the crimes for which the transgressors will be rewarded with a violent comeuppance. Whereas *Stone* details the travails of an outsider joining a biker gang, *Mad Max* follows *Born Losers* by placing the audience with ostensibly responsible members of society in opposition to the bikers who respond only to violence. This revenge is enacted against the behaviours that the film itself takes pleasure in depicting.

The convention of revenge is so blatant that Max does not even possess proof that Johnny the Boy is responsible for burning his friend the Goose. The conventions here allow for assumptions of guilt by the hero towards those they believe are responsible. As Nathan Holmes notes in reference to *Death Wish*, the assumed guilt of the muggers and the ease with which they are encountered and taken down by the Paul Kersey character were criticized by contemporary reviewers. Director Michael Winner accounted for this by shooting these scenes of vengeance under bright street lights. Holmes writes that 'Kersey is offered unobstructed sight of his targets, eliminating for the audience any sense that the vigilante could misconstrue or miscomprehend his nocturnal predators – that is, catch innocent civilians by mistake' (Holmes 2018: 175). He continues: 'To be labelled by Kersey is to be labelled correctly, since Kersey's point-of-view is always furnished by superabundant street lighting' (2018: 175). If this was not the case, and a more naturalistic lighting strategy adopted, it would allow for the possibility that Kersey had misidentified muggers and their crimes. At the climax of *Mad Max*, Johnny the Boy's guilt is assumed because we, the audience, have seen him throw the match that burns the Goose. But we also have the extra story information that he has been violently coerced by Toecutter into doing so. Max, however, does not know either of these pieces of information. After Max cuffs Johnny to a burning car rigged up to explode, he offers him the potential get out clause of sawing through his own ankle to safety. We accept this as a fair offer because we know the truth of the situation, and Max is acting on our behalf. Why would he offer him even this excruciatingly painful and unlikely opportunity to save himself if he is

not aware of Johnny's diminished responsibility? That the audience is given the privilege of all the story information is sufficient motivation and context for depicting such a horrible act of revenge and for the justification of giving Johnny a chance to avoid certain death. It is not necessary for Max to witness the sponsoring crime himself, because genre convention fills in the narrative gaps.

In their respective books, both Adrian Martin and Martyn Conterio focus on the formal aspects of Miller's organization of the action sequences. Miller's encouragement that production designers be included in the writer's rooms while generating ideas and crafting the screenplay indicates the extent to which the visual elements are as important as the structure and dialogue (Buckmaster 2017, Bernstein 2015). This bases the storyline around the movement through locations, ensuring that this detail is as important to the narrative as the dialogue. Kim Newman's claim, echoed in the aforementioned article in *Empire*, that *The Road Warrior* 'is actually a ninety minute action sequence' (Newman 1999: 185) reveals the reputation that it has for emphasizing movement, despite the observation being blatantly untrue. There is plenty of screen time afforded to moments where characters are watching and waiting. The phrase 'ninety minute chase' offers not an accurate description of the film but implies an impressionistic overall view.

The first *Mad Max* was assembled silently in its initial cut (Buckmaster 2017: 7), thus minimizing the dialogue's importance in developing the narrative. One can see in this a similarity with silent cinema's inventive use of camera, movement and action; in these films exposition is created through movement rather than non-existent dialogue. Jennifer M. Bean notes that this continuity between the motivations of much of silent cinema and the modern action genre ensures that 'the body takes primacy over voice in the genre, that the action film "speaks" through visual spectacle, that spectacle, in fact takes precedence over narrative meaning' (2004: 17). She continues: 'The most notable characteristic of the action cinema is its dynamic tempo: rapid editing at once articulates and accelerates the breathtaking pace of the stunting human body' (Bean 2004: 17).

Of the silent film series *The Hazards of Helen* (1914–17), which throughout over one hundred short episodes features an eponymous telegrapher saving the railroad she works for by way of elaborate stunts, Bean writes that 'the length and incredible pace of these sequences privilege action as the series' organizing principle, action pitched to a degree that movement becomes sensate, visible' (2004: 20). Across this series Helen performs stunts such as climbing onto a

moving train, lowering herself from a bridge onto a moving carriage, fighting a man atop a carriage, swinging from a water tower and, perhaps most impressively, riding a motorcycle off a railway bridge down twenty feet into water. This sort of stunt would become familiar to fans of the male-oriented action cinema which came later, with variations appearing in films such as *Silver Streak* (Arthur Hiller, 1976), *Octopussy* (John Glen, 1983) and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (Steven Spielberg, 1989).

Bean continues:

The aggressively repetitive posture of the plot warrants comment as well, for it indicates the degree to which these films displace narrative hermeneutic – the what does it mean? – onto the *how*, onto the velocities and vicissitudes of the moving image. Indeed the runaway engine which provides the series' most emblematic icon may also be seen as the *mise-en-abyme* of its narrative system. (2004: 20)

Scrolling through multiple episodes of *The Hazards of Helen* on YouTube is a testament to this sort of repetition, where it can be difficult to distinguish between each individual episode due to the close recurrence of detail and event. The *Mad Max* series features a comparable convergence of spectacle into plot, based on similar repetition. Furthermore, the sort of action sequences that it features repeats many of the tropes that originated in cinema's silent era. As a climax to three of the four films in the series there is a truck/convoy/rig hurtling along a highway or tracks, with a phalanx of pursuers and bodies jumping onto and falling from vehicles.

Alongside *The Hazards of Helen's* use of the train as its central vehicle for action, there are multiple examples of silent cinema's inventive use of the (then) new modernist transport as a trigger for slapstick action sequences. In *The Show* (Larry Semon, Norman Taurog, 1922) starring Larry Semon, there is a scene where a mobile home gets stranded on a railway line only for a steam train to crash through, passing close by the camera positioned just to the right of the point of impact. This is replicated at an early point in *Mad Max*, where an out of control police car smashes through a caravan stranded in the middle of a street. The stunt is captured on a telephoto lens to make it look as if what is happening is close to the camera and is similar to the placement of camera in relation to subject as in *The Show*.

In *Beyond Thunderdome*, Miller creates a moment where Ironbar is forced to hang off one of the train's steam pipes that has disconnected and swung out to



Figures 3 (a)–(b) *The Show* (1922) and *Mad Max* (1979).

the side. This moment is reminiscent of a scene in *Girl Shy* (Fred C. Newmeyer, Sam Taylor, 1924), where Harold Lloyd clings off an electrical signal bar of a runaway tram.

Charles Musser identifies that ‘the chase’ became a staple of cinema by 1903, after the success of early story films such as *The Great Train Robbery* (Edwin S. Porter, 1903) and *The Escaped Lunatic* (Wallace McCutcheon, 1904) incorporated the device into their narratives. Furthermore, while the former features the chase for a solitary shot (however important the process of chasing is for the story), the latter uses the chase as its central premise and attraction. Musser writes that the cinematic chase renders both narrative and narration



Figures 4 (a)–(b) *Girl Shy* (1924) and *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (1985).

unnecessary through its ‘simplification of storyline and linear progression’ (Musser 2004: 92). The repetition and familiarity of the act of pursuit made the narrative ‘self-sufficient’, with the viewing pleasure coming from the ‘experience of information’ (Musser 2004: 92), that is to say, the effect and impact of the action being screened. One factor accounting for the international success of Miller’s films is in their adaptability to different exhibition contexts because the

relative lack of dialogue and focus on action means that there is no language barrier to overcome. The focus on chase and pursuit makes them 'self-sufficient'.

The 'chase' began to slot into the other films around the silent era that existed as primarily as, according to Tom Gunning, attractions. These 'attractions' foregrounded the act of display over the telling of stories, later to 'find their place within' the development of the classical narrative model (Gunning 2004: 43). Gunning's silent 'Cinema of Attractions' is built around the 'act of display' and acknowledgement of the viewer's gaze. Quoting the content of Gunning's examples of early cinema 'attractions' at length reveals their similarity to later exploitation traditions:

A fascination with visual experiences that seem to fold back on the very pleasure of looking (colors, forms of motions – the very phenomenon of motion itself in cinema's earliest projections); an interest in novelty (ranging from actual current events to physical freaks and oddities); an often sexualized fascination with socially taboo subject matter dealing with the body (female nudity or revealing clothing, decay, and death); a peculiarly modern obsession with violent and aggressive sensations (such as speed or the threat of injury). (Gunning 2004: 44)

The artistic and technical deficiencies of the exploitation film came as a result of not only their mode of production, of quick schedules, low budgets and limited or underdeveloped skills of their cast and crew but also their 'reliance on spectacle as organizing principle forged their squalid style' (Schaefer 1999: 43). The importance of spectacle to exploitation is 'rooted' (Schaefer 1999: 77) in the cinema of attractions and this was a necessary practice for producers to be able to offer something to audiences that was not available in the mainstream. Some exploitation films, such as the shot in a single day burlesque movies, are predicated entirely on the inherent exhibitionism of the spectacle (Schaefer 1999: 79).

Mad Max, however, more subtly integrates its spectacle into the plot through the chase scenes which are necessary to narrative development, unlike the practice of the classical exploitation period which would include 'discrete segments' or 'inserts' of spectacle that halted or caused a disruption of cause and effect progression (Schaefer 1999: 80). The 'attractions' of *Mad Max*, that give it its status as the touchstone reference for the exotic depiction of a post-society breakdown, are seamlessly integrated into the plot. The narrative does not stop for the attractions to be displayed, because the narrative is about moving to the next place; therefore, the violent chase action is part of the story development,

rather than being extraneous or excessive. Martin notes that Miller almost exclusively avoids the subplot or fleshing out of background and supporting characters, and instead 'follows one particular narrative thread through from start to end and arranges the story around a single focus' (Martin 2003: 41). Miller himself says of *Fury Road* that the 'talky bits and the action bits ... are happening together' (Miller 2017). In the same 'making of' featurette, 2nd unit director Guy Norris describes the plot as an 'enormous chase' in the first half, with the second half being a 'race'. The visceral 'sense' of the series is one of exotic display, its narrative effect is one of conciseness, lean and direct with no plot twists or character reveals. Miller's series combines the 'temporal irruption' of the cinema of attractions with the 'temporal development' (Martin 2003: 46) of the narrative.

Bruce Isaacs calls images of 'action', which he links to Gunning's notion of attraction, 'as an *intrusion* into a dominant narrative cinema of action' (2013: 75). He argues that 'Action Cinema' is neither a genre nor a narrative form (2013: 71) and instead 'represents a particular approach to rendering images through composition and cutting' (2013: 71). These intrusions work to shock the viewer out of the engagement with narrative and into an engagement with action. Isaacs uses a cut at the beginning of *The Road Warrior* to exemplify this intrusion. The shot of Max standing on the road at the start, in black and white, accompanying the opening montage and voice-over narration, is, according to Isaacs, a 'narrative image'. This image is familiar from other hero narratives of the 1970s and 1980s which depend on an understanding of myth and archetype (such as *Star Wars*). This then switches abruptly to an 'action image' with the black of the Interceptor's engine and accompanying diegetic sound of its roar. This cut 'pulls the spectator out of the meditative, trance-like exegesis' (2013: 77) of the voice-over and images. Miller then cuts to a shot of the road, with the camera skimming the asphalt giving the 'direct experience of speed' (2013: 77). The proximity of the camera to the road rids the image of 'its capacity to reveal more than what is contained in the energy of movement' (2013: 77). It becomes an action image, an abstraction of speed. That this is then followed by a medium close-up of Max at the wheel of the interceptor, and reveals via a pan to the left the bikers giving chase, makes the images fetishized, causing the viewer to 'detach from the formulaic narrative structure' (2013: 78) set up in the opening shot. Isaacs reinforces this by pointing out that such shots, cuts, editing and events are also regular ways of rendering particular forms of motor sport such as NASCAR. Such a connection is made explicit in *Death Race 2000*, and its

various sequels and remakes, because it uses the device of presenting its action as if viewers are watching television coverage of the event. In making this point through close analysis, Isaacs demonstrates that the attractions of *Mad Max* happen on a formal level, as well as through its mise en scène.

He writes:

Action cinema is an experience of the image composed of the energy of movement. This is surely what accounts for the transformation from an action cinema that affirms continuity through progression (epitomized in the classical era by the western) – and an action cinema of attraction, which renders movement as affective image-in-itself. (Isaacs 2013: 72–3)

Mad Max, I would argue, straddles both of these possibilities. It has been likened to the classic stories and themes (hero's journey, western, etc.), but the series is also a set of films characterized by sensational attractions. So, the series' focus on motion as its primary principle and function harks back to the attraction of silent cinema and also some of its earliest developments around narrative. These attractions are what Adrian Martin describes as its 'bloodcurdling violence, sensorial engulfment, burlesque vulgarity and liberating laughter' (2003: 8). The series' overall design aesthetic is built around the colours of its costumes, the exoticism of its vehicles, the presentation of 'freakish' body types including the use of actors with disabilities, violent action resulting in desecration and deformation of the body, and the spectacle of high-speed and destructive motor crashes.

These elements of attraction are part of an overarching story that extends from the first film and into the sequels. Gunning posits that there is a clash between the purpose and structure of narrative and that of 'attraction'. Cinematic narratives do not 'build up incidents into the configuration with which a story makes its individual moments cohere' (Gunning 2004: 44). Instead, the sequential build-up of scenes creates 'a pattern, a trajectory, a sense' (Gunning 2004: 44). This sense of trajectory is important to the effect Miller creates. Time and again in reviews and analysis they are referred to as variations of 'one long chase', where the plot develops a direct course in a way that reflects the characters chasing each other along straight, unbending roads. The chases in *Mad Max* are not based on battling against the locale, as occurs in *The French Connection* (William Friedkin, 1971), *Goldeneye* (Martin Campbell, 1995), *Bullitt* or *Ronin* (John Frankenheimer, 1998), where the characters are as much in danger of crashing into urban architecture as they are into other antagonistic vehicles

piloted by their enemies. In *Mad Max*, the roads are, with the exception of the opening of the first film, devoid of anyone not directly involved in the chase. These chases, Martin suggests, provide a viewing satisfaction that 'is as old as cinema itself', where audiences can experience the 'thrill of seeing different lines of action finally converge, after much frenetic intercutting, in a collision as unfailingly erotic as it is apocalyptic' (2003: 29). The chase sequences are structured like self-contained narratives in themselves, building and developing to their own mini climax, typically the act of motion coming to a sudden and devastating halt in the form of a collision. And, like the chase, the car crash was a regular occurrence in the period of early cinema.

According to Karen Beckman, cinema was the most effective method of depicting the automobile crash not only because it could record and then replay the collision as if it was happening in real time but also because the shocking effect of experiencing a crash was effectively rendered by cinema's propensity to very rapidly alter our perceptions of 'distance and proximity' (Beckman 2010: 26). This is achieved through techniques such as camera placement, editing to collapse time and also the ability to alter the size of objects through projection during exhibition. She writes that the car crash trope of the period can be used to explore 'the aesthetic, philosophical, and ideological limits of cinema, for testing, representing, and shaping the emerging space of the frame, the experience of the screen surface, the relationship between moving objects and the camera, and the axis between spectators and the moving image' (2010: 28). This is due to the relevant infancy of the developing technology of both film and the motor car around this time. Early cinema reflected a view of the automobile as an object fraught with 'risk, surprise, and potential disaster' (2010: 28). Miller extended this view to include the automobile as an object through which characters interact and as tools of personal expression and identity, eventually building to the iconography of the gasoline fuelled vehicle as an essential part of Immortan Joe's death cult in *Fury Road*. This builds upon his view of the empty miles of Australian roads in the first film, which are a playground for aimless and feckless youth.

If the cinema is indebted to the car and the chase, then the use of rail tracks to stage the climax of *Beyond Thunderdome* hints at cinema's other 'love affair' (Kirby 1997: 1). As Lynne Kirby points out, 'film might be said to owe one of its hallmark techniques, the tracking shot, to the train', and that the train is a 'ready-made site of crime, disaster, and romance' (1997: 1). The train, like Beckman's depiction of the car, is 'cinema's double' (1997: 2). Kirby observes that the train

and the journeys it provides ape cinema's ability to collapse time and space, the linearity of the journey and also how in its simultaneous motion and stillness, analogue film projection creates the impression of fluid motion (1997: 2). Of course, like the automobile, they are also two institutions with overlapping and similar histories, time frames and cultures. The train in *Beyond Thunderdome* is the cab of a truck mounted onto tracks and with a cabin containing Master's things, presumably a place where he can relax and take time out from his role as factory owner. These modernist symbols of twentieth-century industry (the train and haulage lorries) are combined and reappropriated for different purposes. The train, presumably powered via methane like the other vehicles, emerges from the pig factory with a destructive rumble, and its appearance and the structural damage it causes precipitate Bartertown's collapse.

Kirby writes of the instability of the train as a place which could alter and affect the identities of its passengers, as well as in the inherent disrupting effect of moving at high speeds and the potential for shock of not arriving at your destination. Such instability is given a literal rendering in *Beyond Thunderdome*. The train is a space that allows the lost children to work out their identities (they use redundant gramophone technology to play a record that teaches them to say the poignant phrase 'I'm going home' in French), but they are attacked by the sudden intrusion of assailants and are shocked by the emergency stop Max instigates to avoid derailment. Crucially, unlike nearly all other vehicles at some point in the series, it does not crash but comes to a safe halt when Max applies the breaks once he sees that the track is running out. It is at this point that the children, and the adult characters of Master, the Pig Killer and Max switch to Jedediah's plane. The escape is undertaken using a vehicle that originated prior to the invention of the automobile (the train/tracks), and the escape is completed through the use of a vehicle invented afterwards (the plane).

Kirby calls the train a 'defining vehicle of urban or interurban experience' (1997: 135), but the Bartertown train subverts this idea. The track it uses is from the twentieth century but is definitely not urban. It can be argued that Bartertown is a new urban environment, or at least a parody of industrial centres of the past, but we do not know exactly what it was built upon, and it now resembles an American Wild West town out in the desert. Perhaps the track once ran through an old rural outback station upon which Bartertown is built, but in the film the track runs from a centre of population out into nowhere. What would have been the track's original purpose, to link populations and industry or to carry materials in the pre-apocalypse society, is now defunct. Like the other icons,

tools and adornments across the series, it is merely a symbol of the past, one that is divorced from its original meaning.

In *Mad Max*, all the automobile journeys are abandoned, thwarted or given up. While the convoy at the end of *The Road Warrior* reaches its destination (so we are told through voice-over), we are not presented with the visual evidence. Miller is not interested in showing the journey reaching its end. The Nightrider's flight from the cops, the Cadillac couple's escape from the Toecutter and Goose's return home after sleeping with the nightclub singer are all examples of truncated and interrupted journeys in *Mad Max*. In *Beyond Thunderdome*, the train escape from Bartertown is brought to a halt by a dead end. And in *Fury Road*, the escaping convoy made up of Furiosa, the Wives, Max and the Vuvulani arrives at its target of the Citadel at the end, but this is after its initial destination, the green place, is shown not to exist and the alternative option (heading further into the salt flat desert) has to be given up. The final option is to head to the Citadel, which is of course from where they originated; their journey, which results in so much death, destruction and presumably also injuries and resulting deformities and disabilities, has not taken them anywhere geographically.

The only journey that we see in some detail which is completed satisfactorily is during the final images of *Beyond Thunderdome*, where the children make it to the ruins of Sydney. The difference is that this is undertaken in an aeroplane rather than by automobile or by rail. Delia Falconer points out that the road gradually disappears between *Mad Max* and *Beyond Thunderdome*, and that this 'represents both the road's liberation from colonial narratives of empire and its absorption into deregulated postcolonial spatiality' (Falconer 1997: 249). Not only does the road run out to be replaced by rail and plane, but also the landscape runs out; the escape in the plane only happens after they reach the end of the desert and the children and Max find themselves at a cliff edge.

But perhaps the clearest example of the truncated journey is exemplified through Max himself, who never finishes his journey and at the end of each film is still travelling, either walking or driving away to the wasteland.

Conclusion

One can understand the impact of *Mad Max* and its sequels by highlighting its originality in combining the recognizable with the original. However, its success is down to its execution. These films transcend their exploitation cinema

origins by exhibiting filmmaking technique superior to many of the films that they mimic. The series successfully adopts cyclical trends such as bikers and carsploitation, while drawing on commercial cinema's obsession with an attractions model through repetitions, and variations, on the chase and crash narrative. This chapter has provided an overview of how to begin to uncover and understand the different levels of its generic and industrial complexity. The next chapter will look in more detail at the way we can understand these various generic inflections and, by doing so, provide a model for a number of political interpretations.

Post-apocalypse now! The politics of *Mad Max*

Mad Max was, from its very origins, created out of an engagement with political, economic and social dynamics. James McCausland, co-author of the original screenplay, was inspired by the 1973 embargo by oil-producing Middle Eastern countries (Buckmaster 2017: 26). This backdrop was combined with George Miller's intention of commenting on the social problem of Australian youths' desensitization to the threat of being involved in road traffic accidents. Across the series, this probing of politics and society takes the form of a number of binaries which hinge on disparities in power and means: between those living nomadically and those in fixed accommodation; between the security forces and outlaws; between the individual and the collective; between wealth and poverty, the weak and the strong, the urban and rural; and between those who produce goods and resources and those who consume and pillage. Furthermore, these topics work in conjunction with the kinetic binaries of the films' formal structures: between the moving and the static, and the industrialized road and the pre-modern outback. This dynamic between binary of subject and binary of action reaches its zenith in *Fury Road*, which Hassler-Forest notes attracted critical and fan appreciation precisely because of both its 'political agenda' and its 'formalist ingenuity' (2017: 301). In reality, a strong symbiosis between form and content had been in place since the 1979 original.

With its depiction of a future steeped in conflict about how to organize and rebuild a society out of the rubble of a decaying, and eventually completely decimated world, plus a *mise en scène* awash with a multitude of symbols and signifiers from twentieth-century labour and leisure, the *Mad Max* series invites political readings and interpretations from fans and scholars alike. The most recent of these interpretations is the ideological link between *Fury Road* and feminism that became a dominant way of understanding the film by scholars, mainstream cultural commentators and fans. Writing in British

liberal newspaper *The Guardian*, Jessica Valenti claimed that it was ‘forward thinking’ and a ‘call to dismantle patriarchies’ (Valenti 2015). The fan response was summed up by a Tumblr blog called ‘feministmadmax’, which included various memes depicting stills of Tom Hardy espousing progressive feminist slogans inspired by the script, such as ‘toxic masculinity killed the world’ (2015). Later, a Tumblr page appeared called ‘immortandon’ that contained memes of quotes by US president Donald Trump emblazoned over gifs of Immortan Joe.

These readings were supported by Miller’s own statements of intention. He brought in Eve Ensler, feminist and author of *The Vagina Monologues* (1996), to read the script and talk to the actors playing Immortan Joe’s wives. Ensler was reported as being ‘thrilled to see somebody taking on what sex slavery is’ and that she ‘felt there was a huge connection between’ her own work and what Miller was attempting (Ensler, in Buckmaster 2017: 235). *Fury Road* was also noted for centralizing its female characters, in particular the lead figure of Furiosa (Charlize Theron). Not only is Furiosa protecting vulnerable women from Immortan Joe’s designation of them as his wives to be used for breeding, but by having an augmented and robotic arm she moves some way towards embodying a version of Donna Haraway’s postmodern feminist cyborg. In her famous article *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1991), Haraway suggests that by embracing a sense of identity common with both machines and animals, women can transcend the notion of a ‘natural’ state of womanhood. This would enable them to forge a revamped identity unlinked to any idea of essentialism, one that is uncoupled from patriarchal influence. By having a shaven head, a missing limb and being part cyborg, Furiosa has escaped Immortan Joe’s sexual attention because she does not conform to his patriarchal view of women as ‘goddess’ that the younger and more conventionally beautiful (that is to say, physically intact) wives embody.

Yet these interpretations were somewhat brought into question in my email conversation with *Fury Road* co-writer Brendan McCarthy. When I asked about the political intentions behind the story he responded that

Of course there is a political subtext in the movie. That said, I think the ‘feminist’ ideology was a bit too remarked on in the reviews and overstated ... *Fury Road* was never a feminist-fantasy movie, only concerned about ‘overthrowing the patriarchy’. (Just think, the mission of Furiosa is predicated on a nostalgic fantasy – which turns out not to be true – there is no green place. She’s bought the girls to their deaths or at least to join a barren, childless tribe of old women,

dying out.) But Furiosa's mission, although a failure, starts a chain of events which leads to something even greater.

The male energy of Max intervenes, and offers a solution – and TOGETHER they take ownership of the actual green place, the one at the Citadel. (McCarthy 2018)

While this does not invalidate Miller's intentions of bringing a feminist focus to the script, the difference of opinion on its significance does limit the extent to which allegorical narratives and interpretations can ever be static and uncontradictable. Jeff Smith addressed the limits of critical interpretations and their relevance to a filmmaker's intentions in his analysis of how the historical biblical epic *The Robe* (Henry Coster, 1953) had attracted various allegorical interpretations linking it to the Hollywood blacklist period. In his article, Smith posed the following questions: 'What is the place for authorial intention [and] audience reception? What does [the] reading strategy tell us about the politics of the film's makers? Does [the] reading strategy privilege certain meanings of the text over others of equal significance?' (2005: 1). Casting *The Robe* as an allegorical critique of Senator McCarthy witch-hunts and Hollywood blacklisting, despite its outward appearance as one of several conservative biblical epics, caused critics to align a series of simple binary oppositions onto the known political leanings of its creators (in this case one of the film's screenwriters, Philip Dunne). But, as Smith points out, Albert Matz, one of the Hollywood Ten, had written an early draft of the screenplay over a year prior to the HUAC trials. This fact 'turns common sense causation on its head insofar as it places the imputed effect of the blacklist' (2005: 3). The conflicting readings lead to 'another layer of interpretation resting atop the others,' with any particular interpretation 'no more right or wrong than the others' (2005: 12). But, as Smith questions, what is the role of new information that questions the veracity of a certain interpretation if it then leads to the possibility of a different reading? McCarthy's statement that the 'feminist' analysis of *Fury Road* is overplayed, plus a series of his Tweets that appear to criticize modern culture wars and what he perceives to be liberal media bias, does at least question the certainty that the film is unproblematically 'feminist'. It is difficult to pin any single ideological interpretation onto the *Mad Max* series. While Martyn Conterio suggests that Miller is in fact 'taking the piss,' rather than treating the ramifications of his story(ies) seriously (2019: 41), this does not account for Miller's claims of sincerity regarding his introduction of feminist ideas into *Fury Road* or for the way that the other films in his series have been understood and written about in relation to a number of sociopolitical topics.

In *Images of Australia*, Neil Rattigan echoes Peter Ackroyd's review in *The Spectator* of *Beyond Thunderdome* and its claims that Max as a character is 'related' to both Clint Eastwood's Dirty Harry Callaghan and Sylvester Stallone's John Rambo. This is because, despite Max being a hero of the future, he is 'not created out of a social/cultural void' (1991: 198). However, Rattigan does not outline exactly what this means or if this means Max is as reactionary a figure as that of the common perception of Callaghan or Rambo. After all, Miller's evocation of Joseph Campbell's 'Hero with a Thousand Faces' implies Max has a mythical status (Chute 1982: 27), meaning he crosses cultural, temporal and spatial contexts. If *Mad Max* is not explicitly set in Australia, a suggestion Rattigan also makes (1991: 192), then what is the social context in which the character is created? If the setting of *Mad Max* is not Australia, then it implies that the films are indeed created out of a social void and more influenced by Hollywood genres than actual events and situations. The real-world references in the Rambo and Dirty Harry series are apparent; Rambo is a psychologically damaged veteran of the unpopular Vietnam war, and Callaghan faces a number of foes based on real-life figures – such as the serial killing sniper Scorpio, who resembles the Zodiac Killer, or the Symbionese Liberation Army styled figures he battles in *The Enforcer* (James Fargo, 1976). Such real-world references are harder to detect and much less explicit in *Mad Max*. Notably, for example, none of the literature I have read about the film mentions Australia's involvement in the Vietnam war and how this may have influenced either Miller's approach or the way it could be viewed in relation to Australian society. This contrasts with Don Shiach's analysis of how the conflict informs the backdrop of *The Cars That Ate Paris* (Shiach 1993: 32). One wonders why such a backdrop might be missing from the original *Mad Max*, given it was made in the same decade as Weir's film, is set in similar locations and shares a number of themes.

What is *Mad Max*'s context if the social reality is made more obscure by the futuristic setting and the suggestion it is not even located in Australia? The original film's connection to the revenge movie suggests a framework of the anxieties around violent crime and ensuing social controls. John Cline (2010) writes that the vigilante movie of the 1970s is transgressive in one sense because it subverts the state's use of violence to maintain social order and hierarchy, but that in the context of 1970s New York (during the period and place where the grindhouses were popular), revenge and taking the law into one's hands were not transgressive according to the social attitudes of the time. While the vigilante revenge movie presented a (nominally right wing) challenge to the state's

control over law and order, it also conformed to dominant contemporary social attitudes that appeared to condone violent suppression of street criminality even if undertaken by civilians. Max Rockatansky in *Mad Max* oscillates along these lines. While he takes revenge on the gang responsible for the death and hospitalization of his family, he is also supported by the law and is himself an administrator of state violence. This contrasts with the vigilantes in *Death Wish* and *The Exterminator*, who are themselves outside of the law and hunted by the cops while they attempt to purge the streets of the criminals they deem undesirable. Martyn Conterio disavows the possibility that there is anything reactionary in this and doubts that Miller intended for there to be any serious analysis of Max's position as an embodiment of a (supposedly) right-wing position. If this is the case, however, it hardly impinges on film studies' attempts to analyse cinema. After all, much of today's culture around cinema relies upon debates about interpretation of a film and its creator's intentions. Also, Miller himself eventually requests that viewers understand the politics of *Fury Road* in the way he intended by revealing what his creative objectives were and by bringing in Ensler to oversee certain parts of the script. In doing so, Miller demonstrates a sophisticated grasp on how his moving images might eventually be interpreted. The enormous amounts of signifiers contained across the series, and the reliance on action rather than dialogue, also demand interpretation for us to be able to make sense of it. Filmmaker testimony can go some way to guiding the viewer in their interpretation.

Eventually across the series, Rockatansky shifts out of his position as an agent of the state to being one of the vermin who he previously would have been hunting down (though we never see him commit violence against innocents). Likewise, the films shift from being a valorization of state control through what is presented as a benevolent police force (albeit a failing and flawed one) to examining a number of alternative social structures that are in opposition to dysfunctional versions of the state, such as the emergent attempts at a reformed system of capitalism in Bartertown in *Beyond Thunderdome*, and the dictatorship of Immortan Joe's regime in *Fury Road*. Whereas the biker film meditates on the nature of liberty and what it means to be free in a capitalist society, *Mad Max* (and much other post-apocalyptic cinema) explores the problems and prospects of unrestrained freedom and the opportunities of living in a world with no laws and a completely restructured system of work, leisure and exchange value. What we see in *The Road Warrior*, for example, is two units of people, Pappagello's group which produces and capitalizes on a commodity (gasoline)

and another group, led by Lord Humungus, that has no opportunity to access this commodity, no ability to produce it and only with a desire to consume. The struggle is between those who have means and purpose, but severely restricted freedoms, and those with virtually unlimited freedoms but few means.

This poses a central thematic question: what do people do for pleasure when that pleasure can no longer be commodified and when there is no contrasting period set aside for work? As a character, Max resigns from the Main Force Patrol because he is beginning to 'enjoy' his work of chasing down bikers on the roads, and so the balance between work and leisure is challenged. In the sequels there is hardly a distinction made between his actions outside of the law, those he performed when employed by the MFP and the antagonists he battles against. There is little leisure time presented in the series after the first film, where we see Goose in a nightclub and Max taking a rural family holiday. Only once in *Beyond Thunderdome* do we see a brief moment of leisure time, when we are presented with the nightlife of Bartertown, which also includes the entertainment happening inside the Thunderdome. In *Fury Road*, leisure seems to be the exclusive privilege of Immortan Joe, yet we do not see this happening on screen.

One of the difficulties surrounding the concept of 'pleasure' is, according to Frederic Jameson, how to determine that which is pleasure and that which is diversion; that 'degradation of free time into that very different commodity called "leisure"'. Leisure time, in this context, is the 'form of commodity consumption stamped on the most intimate former pleasures' (Jameson 1983: 3). Influenced by the Frankfurt School, Jameson's line of thinking presents the following central problem: 'who is to break the news to them that their [the people's] conscious experience of leisure products – their conscious 'pleasure' in consumption – is in reality nothing but false consciousness?' (1983: 3), and that their enjoyment is commodified and therefore not 'genuine' freedom. This issue is largely averted in the series because commodification – production, consumption and advertising to encourage that consumption – no longer happens (though in the first film we see the dying embers of this process). However, commodification, materialism and fetishism, all integral to the development and expansion of twentieth-century capitalism, continue to exist in the world of *Mad Max*. It is central to the overarching narratives, drives and goals of the characters; they variously hunt for gasoline, commodify junk, produce goods and exhibit a fetishism for motor vehicles and items of clothing. But this materialism and associated terms and behaviours are divorced from capitalism as we know it because mass

production and mass media are now defunct. So, interpreting all this tells us that the consumption we witness is either natural human behaviour (which leads to a rather nihilistic view of humanity) or a residue of life under the material conditions – the base and superstructure in a Marxist way of thinking – of twentieth-century Western capitalism, and that the characters are acting out the final stages of materialism before some other economic system emerges.¹

The politics of the series, however, is more than that which is steeped in allegory. Instead, one needs to look at the events of the films in conjunction with their erratic iconography. The mood of *Mad Max* is generated by the look of the film as well as its content, and the two cannot be separated. The overwhelming visual design is one of bricolage; costumes that are a motley of rags, leather and tribal adornments, all combining in a punkish style, in addition to architecture and vehicles composed of materials made from reconstituted scrap. As Colin Mercer observes in his essay *A Poverty of Desire: Pleasure and Popular Politics* (1983), the technique of bricolage took on a political purpose in the late 1970s and early 1980s radical movements such as the Anti-Nazi League, Rock Against Racism and in the Women's Movement, all of which emerged at the same time as *Mad Max* was being formed and continued throughout the period covered by the other films in this book. Their use of collage and bricolage creates a 'repertoire' of 'not just different social forces but of different styles' (1983: 87). Analysing their messages and the tactics they employed was 'a means of grasping not the singular meanings (a revolt against capitalism!) but the pluralism of the play of styles, codes and languages' (1983: 88) that could help to assess and critically analyse this sort of politics: popular political and social movements 'which signals a break from the duffle-coated days of existential affirmation' (1983: 87).

While this is a relatively minor point for Mercer in the context of his essay, it is useful for me to help think about the way this sort of bricolage can be political in its own right, building upon the ideologies, themes and prejudices contained in the narrative content. As David Chute points out in his article on *The Road Warrior* from 1982, Miller demonstrates a lack of interest in the 'blue eyed idealists of the colony, in their interchangeable burlap robes' (Chute 1982: 28), in contrast to the detail afforded Lord Humungus and his gang. The gangs, with

¹ This automatic replaying of learned behaviour under capitalism is reminiscent of the zombies in George A. Romero's *Living Dead* series, where even after death the zombie re-enacts behaviours that were important to them while alive: mindlessly returning to the shopping mall in *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), or in *Land of the Dead* (2005) performing pointless work, such as endlessly attempting to pump gas when there is none left to pump.

their array of motley styles, have far greater depth if we are to analyse their costuming and weapons they carry.

Dealing with all of this sees me moving through a number of interpretive methodologies. In *Making Meaning*, David Bordwell addresses some of these processes and writes of a distinction between ‘explicatory’ and ‘symptomatic’ film criticism. Explicatory criticism comes most often from a place of exploring the depth and value of a film, to find the ‘implicit meanings’ (Bordwell 1989: 43) which the critic finds favourable. Symptomatic criticism by contrast frequently comes from a place in conflict with the film. The critic will look for the bad, or that which is absent, and mount a political reading that exposes the limitations or outright prejudices assumed in the text. As scholars of the subject, academics move through these modes of criticism and analysis one at a time. My own work as a cult critic is often explicatory.² But in this chapter, in responding to *Fury Road*’s status as ‘feminist’, my work turns symptomatic. This is not with the intention of disparaging the text, but only to highlight the complexity of George Miller’s world building and to draw attention to these critical practices and how they can reveal the dearth of subtlety, nuance and contradictions in modern film criticism and analysis. My work in this chapter is to combine both of Bordwell’s modes of criticism simultaneously, which I believe is necessary to handle the range of contradictions and paradoxes contained in *Mad Max*.

Mad Max and class hierarchy

Xavier Mendik, in his book on Italian cult cinema (2015), describes the basic plot of the series (and the Italian films it eventually inspired) as being about a ‘lone hero who has to deliver an endangered desert-bound community from lawless futuristic oppressors’ (2015: 211). This quote, from an otherwise excellent and informed chapter, inadvertently reveals two things. First, by highlighting the ‘futuristic’ disposition of the oppressors it implies that the oppressed are not also ‘futuristic’. It is a casual descriptor of the plot that actually reveals something about how we can politically situate the sort of characters who populate these films. It implies that we think of the oppressors as futuristic because they are other-worldly in attitude as well as in the way they present, and therefore stand

² See *The Anarchist Cinema* (Intellect, 2019) as an example of me working through these modes of criticism to make political and ‘anarchist’ readings of the *Women in Prison* cycle.

for all that is unfamiliar or that which is ideologically wrong. Why is it not the oppressed who are the 'futuristic' ones and those who want to attack them who belong to some outdated notion of 'might is right' that existed in some static (and mythical) past?³

Second, the quote is technically inaccurate because throughout the series, with the exception of the first instalment, both groups of the oppressed and the oppressor are lawless. Because they are set in the future, the dividing line between the socially acceptable and the distasteful is not as clear. The gangs in *The Road Warrior*, *Beyond Thunderdome* and *Fury Road* do not transgress any rules because there are no longer any laws left to break; they exist in a world free from legal restrictions. In *The Road Warrior*, Papagello's peaceful tribe cannot turn to the law to help them, nor can Humungus and his thugs rely on Papagello to share his resources. Their shared post-apocalyptic milieu does not have a system in place to allow people to buy or access resources, or a system in which Papagello can sell them (not that the Humungus would be likely to fairly honour such an economic system if it existed).

In *Beyond Thunderdome* and *Fury Road*, the oppressors are also those who have created the new laws and the social and geographic infrastructure in which the oppressed live. It is in fact the oppressed group who are the transgressors of the law. Auntie Entity and Immortan Joe are indeed oppressive leaders, but they also built the towns over which they rule. Without their work and vision there would be nothing, just holes in the desert. Their biggest error, rather than their own personal moral failings, is to attempt a rebuilding of society according to the economic and structural models that dominated prior to the apocalyptic events and which were two of the reasons for the apocalypse occurring in the first place.

Both Bartertown and The Citadel are hierarchical and top-down societies, and Miller reflects this by using what Donato Totaro terms the 'Vertical Topography of science fiction' (Totaro 2010), the trope of having the leaders/rich live high in the sky, with the poor and desperate masses living below. Immortan Joe attempts to set himself up as a benevolent dictator. He addresses his subjects and workers in the manner of a political speech, using empowering words, designed to keep them focused on the promise of never-ending paradise in the afterlife through

³ I may well be reaching too far or delving too deep here, but the quote suggests an interesting interpretation of the events of the films that I want to pursue because of what it tells us about the potentials for interpreting films politically, even if it is something Mendik did not intend.

service to him and the communities he is trying to build. Living at the bottom of the Citadel, outside of the security of the battlements and rock formations, are a poor and severely impoverished group on the brink of starvation. They are overwhelmingly suffering from disability, are old, diseased, mostly female and dirty. Their status is even reflected in their title, as they are referred to not as serfs or peasants but as 'The Wretched'.

Joe rations their water, pouring it from the huge pipes onto them as they wait below and turning off the flow before they can get an adequate supply. He refers to the water as 'Aqua Cola' and warns them of its addictive qualities. So, while the impression he intends to give is of a leader sacrificing himself, building the community and infrastructure for the sake of the people, because he is in a land of scarcity, to maintain himself and his family he needs to look after his own needs first. This, naturally, leaves less for anyone else.

Furthermore, it is unclear to what degree Joe's empire building is either useful or necessary. It is clearly self-servicing and is primarily used to buffer himself and his family. It is also incredibly impressive given the ecological and economic state of the world in which he is living, especially as it has the potential to house and help thousands (as is implied will happen after his death). The Citadel has manufacturing, gardens and crops, internal housing and rooming, and significant fortifications. It is also made clear how significant the role of the workforce is in building and maintaining the Citadel (as well as those who inhabit and work at Gastown and the Bullet Farm). The workforce is unfailingly loyal and strive very hard and are benefitting from the system in so far as they have a supply of essential resources. The Wretched peasant masses, however, who are somewhat pacified with droplets of water, have a far less clear role in the system. They do not work for the Citadel and do not contribute economically or physically. Nor do they demonstrate much of a desire or ability to do so. In a deleted scene called 'I'm a Milker' there is an indication that some of them can be of use, where a woman advertises her services as being able to produce breast milk and is taken up to the top levels and saved from her life with the rest of the Wretched, even if this results in her having to leave her sick baby behind. But these people are not in sufficient numbers, nor crucially in enough health, to provide a threat of violently overthrowing Joe.

In the real world of geopolitics, the masses living in a nation state have the potential to work, and if they do not want to still have to be kept placid to avoid civil unrest. These masses also cannot be easily killed, deported or imprisoned without attracting huge negative attention from other nation states who could

then turn hostile and threaten the health and economic status of the country through vetoes, trade embargoes or war. But the Citadel is not a nation state. The masses at the foot of the cliff provide no electoral support or financial contribution through taxation. They cannot labour because they are too weak. They cannot fight for the same reason. And because of this they are no threat to Joe. It is unclear why Joe provides even the inadequate support for them that he does, except for the possibility that his ego demands that they exist so that he can look benign. He could, should he wish to, kill them all off by letting them die of thirst with little consequence to himself, his family, followers or the economic prosperity of the Citadel, because he is not dependent upon the support of the populace, only the support of his workers, who he keeps loyal through payment in resources and the propaganda reinforcing the idea that he is a demigod. He resembles, then, a caricature of a dictator, gilding his own nest while his people live in poverty. He needs the Wretched to be able to live out this fantasy. Without them, he is a military leader with nobody to rule over. The peasants give the impression of power but they are ultimately an empty symbol.

Bartertown has a veneer of fairness with a bartering economic system and arguments settled by fair and equal combat. But this just results in the 'haves' maintaining their position in society because they already have more to trade, and the strong and violent being able to dominate through aggressive validation of their ideas in the Thunderdome (i.e. until they meet someone stronger than them, of course). The populace of Bartertown is seemingly content with this structure. There is also a nightlife with bars and entertainments such as the Thunderdome itself. There are resources to trade for and work available in the pig factory that produces methane. It is unclear what people get in return for working in the factory, since it also utilizes forced labour (the character of Pig Killer is imprisoned there for life for the crime of slaughtering a pig to feed his family). The presence of a town brothel also provides the opportunity for both labour and entertainment.

The Citadel and Bartertown are societies operating on 'might is right' policies, but a closer inspection reveals that they don't really hold together or operate logically, especially if we apply what we know of economic systems from the real world. Similarly, I would argue that the discussions surrounding the supposed 'feminism' of *Fury Road* often rely on quite shallow interpretations of the material. As stated earlier, contradiction is a part of film interpretation, and this is why I am not disputing the possibility that *Fury Road* can be interpreted as a 'feminist' film. But to rely on this interpretation means ignoring the other

‘evidence’ that can lead to a deeper, and to my mind more satisfying, class-based analysis.

While this is not to imply that I have uncovered hidden depths that other scholars are missing, a ‘feminist’ reading of *Fury Road* does rely on surface-level interpretations, and even then only by noticing particular signs, symbols and events. In Michelle Yates’s in-depth analysis of the film, for example, she notes how Furiosa’s hope for ‘redemption’ refers to the idea of being ‘saved from evil’, as well as ‘reclaiming one’s freedom’ (Yates 2017: 358). Such an interpretation is accurate on one level, in that it is certainly what the film is implying in part. But it also ignores the possibility that Furiosa recognizes her own complicity in Immortan Joe’s regime. She has, after all, been an Emperor, an enforcer of the Citadel, and been actively involved in maintaining his order and participating in the oppression of the Wretched masses through her strength and capabilities in a fight. When Joe announces the supply run to Gastown as part of his oratory to the crowd, the starving and thirsty masses already know of her reputation and cheer as he salutes her. Furiosa has profited from her association with Joe’s regime, even if she ultimately rejects it. Yates continues to claim that upon returning victoriously to the Citadel at the climax of the film – having killed Joe and many of his War Boys – Furiosa, the Wives and Vuvalini (mistakenly spelt as *Vulvalini* in her article) ‘represent a possible communal future’ (2017: 362). The soundtrack of rhythmic drumming that resembles indigenous folk music from aboriginal cultures underscores this idea. While this works as a ‘visual depiction’ of ‘communitisation’ (Yates 2017: 362), it is undermined by their actions when they get the lift to the top of the Citadel to assume rulership, leaving nearly all of the oppressed Wretched masses down at the bottom and taking only a handful of the luckiest with them. It is the milk maids who open up the valves and pumps to allow water to descend onto the rocks below, but because the film ends we don’t know for how long. There is unlikely to be so much water that the taps can continue to run indefinitely, and so either some form of rationing would have to take place or resources will have to be distributed according to reward for labour. This would leave the peasants in the same relationship to the means of production as under Joe’s regime, even if they are now treated more humanely. What will they do if they cannot work, which we know they cannot? Who will do the huge amounts of manual labour needed to keep the Citadel thriving, and will whoever does it be rewarded for their endeavours more than the Wretched underclass? Surely they have to be given access to more food, at least to the level of their energy requirements, which will be higher than that of non-workers?

This is unless they are slaves being worked to death, in which case Joe's regime is by any measure much better. Another example is Joe's Milk Maids, who can no longer be kept as slaves to pump out breast milk, and so will either have to volunteer to do so or be paid with more resources, leaving fewer resources for others. They could refuse to work entirely, in which case there will be no milk for the populace, and an alternative would have to be found. The answer then, to the question of who will do all the work in the Citadel once Furiosa is established as its leader, is the very same people who did it before, ensuring that the previous structure and hierarchy will remain in place.

Because, by the climax, women have assumed control over the means of production, the Citadel has, in Yates's view, been 'transformed into a vehicle for female leadership and female economic independence as well as social change and communisation' (2017: 366). While the question of specific women's economic independence, namely the featured characters (the wives will no longer be sex slaves, Furiosa will no longer be a worker, the Vuvalini will have access to abundant resources), is true, the same cannot necessarily be stated for any other women in the film or for the transformation of the Citadel into a vehicle for a utopian socialist or feminist Eden. It is only an assumption, based in them being women, that their rulership would be any fairer than that of Immortan Joe because there is no discussion within the film of how they would change things. The assumption that Furiosa's gang will be benevolent is a result of another of the film's binaries. If Joe is a cypher for everything bad, then those in opposition to him must then be good. By the climax, Furiosa has succeeded in her goals and defeated a patriarchal warlord, but in assuming control of his citadel she is continuing the preservation of the hierarchical structure that gave him power in the first place.

Furthermore, Furiosa demonstrates no intention to save the Wretched and instead only shows a need to liberate the Five Wives. Returning to take control of Joe's empire is not on her agenda even after it is established that The Green Place no longer exists. Instead, it is Max's suggestion that returning to the Citadel is the correct course of action, and only then because a slow starvation death in the barren desert would be the alternative. The redemption achieved by Furiosa comes only through saving the wives rather than the other more oppressed figures that populate the film.

As Bonnie McLean points out, it is violence, conflict and lots of brutal deaths that have resulted in Furiosa et al. taking over the Citadel. In reference to the moment at the end when the Wretched tear apart Joe's corpse in a symbol of

the transference of power/regime change, McLean writes that ‘if the people can dismember Immortan Joe, they can overtake the diminished band of the Vuvalini, as well’ (2017: 388). If the film can be ‘claimed’ as being supportive of feminist theory, as countless press pieces as well as academic articles have maintained, its class politics could be read as being distinctly conservative. If its feminism is radical, then its class politics is reformist rather than revolutionary.

Frederic Jameson’s questions about the role of pleasure in society provide a way of understanding the feminism in *Fury Road*. His idea of how to resolve the problems of pleasure so that it can be politically useful, or even radical, is to see the uses of pleasure as allegorical. He writes:

The thematising of a particular ‘pleasure’ as a political issue (to fight for example on the terrain of the aesthetics of the *city*; or for certain forms of sexual liberation; or for access to certain kinds of cultural activities; or for an aesthetic transformation of social relations or a politics of the body) must involve a dual focus, in which the local issue is meaningful and desirable in and of itself, but is also *at one and the same time* taken as the *figure* for Utopia in general, and for the systemic revolutionary transformation of society as a whole. (Jameson 1983: 13)

If we take Jameson’s suggestion as reliable and useful, then the idea of *Fury Road* as a feminist film begins to break down in terms of its perceived radicalism. It is focused on the local – the status of women, and very specific women who have some form of privilege and status (albeit as the non-consensual wives of a dictator) due to their youth and beauty, or in their ability to fight – rather than with a significantly widespread indication of how society as a whole will transform for the better. *Fury Road* polemically stands for transformation and Utopia, but actually ends up endorsing an economic status quo. Or more charitably, Miller presents a world that is incredibly detailed and complex, so much so that it is beyond simple fixes. He has created a fictional society so dense and nuanced that its problems are unresolvable. It would take another apocalypse of sorts to dismantle what he, or Immortan Joe, has built.

To resolve the problems, the radicalism of *Mad Max* comes not from any allegory about quasi-revolutionary turnarounds in the society but from the minor details and tiny fragments, from the costumes and props to small fleeting moments, festooned throughout the series. Evan Calder Williams finds a way of politicizing these details by referring to its aesthetic as ‘salvagepunk’, a term he has coined to offer an alternative to ‘steampunk’. Salvagepunk is ‘the work of salvage and montage, of the work of construction in the age of wreckage’

(2011: 30). Steampunk, by contrast, is an ‘aesthetic that rewrites the outcome of late capitalism according to a different, kinder industrial trajectory’ (2011: 16). It is a ‘romanticized do-over, a setting of the clock back to a time of craftsmanship and real (fetishized) objects, remaking the world, not in the mode of the ceaseless sprawl of cheap oil, but in the Victorian self-aware world making spirit’ (2011: 19). Steampunk, then, is a ‘weak handmaiden of Obama-era capitalism’ (2011: 19). Salvagepunk, on the other hand, is ‘the post-apocalyptic vision of a broken and dead world, strewn with both the dream residues and real junk of the world that was, and shot through with the hard work of salvaging, repurposing, detouring, and scrapping’ (2011: 19–20). It is, he continues, ‘a radical principle of recuperation and construction, a certain relation to how we think those dregs of history we inherit against our will, a return of the repressed idiosyncrasy of outmoded things’ (2011: 31). Understandably, then, Williams describes *Mad Max* as ‘the most recognisable example of the “look” of a mass cultural approximation of salvagepunk’ (2011: 21). This ‘look’ is an adoption of a version of the aesthetics of ‘punk’. The look, however, is only ‘a buffer for the broader conservative condemnation of what the films convincingly show to be a lot of posturing and petty nihilism’ (2011: 21). When Danny Peary notes how Miller has ‘incorporated punk into his pop art’ (Peary 1982: 217), he does so after describing how the film, in the way it distinguishes Toecutter’s motorcyclists and the Bronze as rival gangs, establishes their identities through their costumes. The ‘punkness’ of *Mad Max* stands in for a form of social dislocation rather than as something progressive.

As Williams points out, the opening narration in the prologue to *The Road Warrior* takes place over archival images from some of the twentieth century’s most vital conflicts and political struggles. Miller takes footage from events such as the Second World War D-Day landings and from the French May 1968 protests ‘and uses them otherwise’ (2011: 23), in a way that alters their original contexts. Audiences at the time of its release would recognize this archive material and understand its very specific historical and social contexts. The film ‘salvages’ these images and by doing so ‘inscribe[s] an anti-modernization polemic in which all roads end in gasoline-obsessed hoodlums prowling the post-oil desert’. The D-Day landings become about how ‘black fuel’ is drying up; the May 1968 demonstrations, strikes and riots, inspired and fuelled by situationist and anarchist impulses, become a “firestorm of fear” – what Williams describes as ‘the frantic clawing of the masses in the “nothing” that follows the end of affordable oil’ (2011: 23). Because the sequence tells a distorted history of the twentieth

century, it places the events of the film in an alternative 1981, rather than an imagined future. And across the three films we see the further breakdown of this world – including the aftermath of the use of nuclear weapons. However, we also see societies begin to emerge and a ‘slow and inevitable march towards a recreation of contemporary capitalism’ (2011: 24). *Beyond Thunderdome* repurposes Sydney as the place for the restoring of civilization, and the end of the journey for the Lost Children, the Pig Killer and a humbled Master. This desecrated but recognizable city stands in for the future, as if one way to imagine progress is to take the structures of twentieth-century capitalism and strip away their original purposes. The depiction of the rebirth of capitalism that initially explored through Bartertown reaches its crescendo in *Fury Road*, with the Citadel, Bullet Farm and Gastown recreating a version of the modern metropolis and the two foremost industries of capitalist destruction: arms and gasoline.

The sequence of apocalyptic events that form the backdrop to the series also allows for a class-based usurping of the old order, of what Williams calls a ‘sudden emergence of men who are good at violence and finally getting to show just how good’ (2011: 24). If the thugs who work for Immortan Joe and Auntie Entity are descended from the same sort of people who make up Toecutter’s gang and Lord Humungus, then that is the first stage of the revolution. Before the breakdown of society and the apocalyptic events, these men were the working classes, discarded, marginalized and uneducated. Unlike in the revenge film, these men are not responsible for the breakdown of society, as they are shown to be in films such as *The Exterminator*, where society is deteriorating due to the moral failings and degeneracy of the criminal gangs roaming the city. Indeed, these men are powerless in the face of the events leading to the apocalypse. Their recourse to using violence, pillaging and roaming with a gang is their response and is their best chance for survival against global events that are out of their control. By being able to be violent and finally assuming a powerful status they move, within the world of the films, from marginal positions – as being working class or uneducated men with little or no meaningful work due to the problems of geopolitics and the way the Old World was organized – to the position of being the most likely to thrive in a world suffering a deprivation of resources. Now that the economic systems that kept them at the margins are no longer in place, they are free to fulfil their potential, however limited or violent that potential may be. And, as Williams puts it, ‘it isn’t that they “have” to live’ by riding around, looting and pillaging, ‘but rather that they quite enjoy it’ (2011: 25). They do not

see the results of these actions – the crashes, injuries, devastations and deaths – as tragedies. They are, like the Aussie youths who Miller originally wished to comment upon, blasé about their own vulnerability.

What, then, happens after the crashes, those apocalyptic moments when all comes to a sudden halt and the previous state of affairs no longer exists? Aside from the acts of salvage that we witness the results of, there is also plenty of evidence throughout the series of the aftermath of wreckage. There are numerous unexplained car wrecks, such as at the end of the first film when Johnny is caught in the act of stealing the boots of a dead driver from the remaining debris of an unseen accident. At times, the landscape resembles that of Jean Luc Godard's *Pierrot le Fou* (1965) and *Weekend* (1967), in which he depicts a rural France littered with smashed cars and bloody corpses. In film of the series there are also plenty of henchmen and women alive after the deaths of their leaders. Max does not kill all of Toecutter's gang, the Humungus's marauders give up their attack once they see there is no oil in the tanker and their leader is dead, and Auntie Entity allows Max to live once she realizes that Master has escaped her clutches forever. It is as if there is a recognition that the chase and the exhilaration of combat at high speed is the real reason for the chaos. Once that's over, signalled by the final devastating collisions that climax each instalment, then there is not much point in carrying on the conflict. The costumes and adornments the characters wear resemble party clothes, and once the chase is over, it is a signal that the party is over and it is time to go home.

Karen Beckman writes that *Weekend's* association with 'auto-stasis and collision' goes beyond 'nihilistic spectacles of disaster' to present ways we can begin to exist after the crash signals the end (Beckman 2010: 205). The final moments of impact from *The Road Warrior* to *Fury Road* suggest a moment of radical change. What happens after the final collision is that peace finds a way, and humanity reorganizes. The still living casualty in all this, in contrast to the numerous deceased, is Max. He is the sacrifice that allows the new, more humane state of balance. This peace will only happen after the fun stops and old leaders give way (or are killed off) in favour of new ways of thinking. But crucially, if we are to attempt some overarching way of reconciling all the threads of this chapter, Miller's series, with each new instalment, signals an anarchistic belief that the new leaders and ways of living will be prone to hierarchy and domination. We are unlikely to ever see a sequel to *Fury Road* where Furiosa's regime, like the 1917 Russian Revolution, has caused even more instability and oppression than Immortan Joe's and now has to also be smashed and ruined in order for a better world to materialize. However, it

would be the natural next step if Miller wanted to continue that particular story.

Value, fetishism and exchange

Salvagepunk, Evan Calder Williams writes, is

fundamentally opposed to pastiche, salvagepunk realizes the eccentricity of discarded, outmoded, and forgotten things still marked by the peculiar imprint of their time of production and store of labor and energy frozen in their form. A form from which all value has supposedly been lost. Above all, it is that work of construction, not simply gutting to see what can be sold back to the industrial suppliers, but a production of ‘valueless times’ to see what values might emerge outside of the loops of accumulation. (2011: 41)

A number of moments across the series exemplify these ideas around what is pastiche and what has value. In *Beyond Thunderdome*, Master Blaster and Auntie Entity’s work has real value, despite the strong arm they wield. Ultimately, by the end, we see that Auntie and Master, and especially Blaster, are not uncaring brutes. One might even ask, what right do Max and the Lost Children have to come and destroy Bartertown? Immortan Joe is brutal and oppressive because he is a pastiche of a husband, father, demi-god and ruler. He even wears clothing to make himself appear physically larger than he is. There is little value in what he does (wasting water, for example). He is a valueless version of a real-life dictator, who, for all their faults, do actually serve and benefit at least some part of their populace. In *The Road Warrior*, Papagello and his tribe produce gasoline, but for whom? They produce, but not to feed many people, not to expand production, not to grow, but only to hold onto what once was. They have no vision beyond continuing producing oil and to not be like Humungus’s goons.

The actions of the characters, the communities they build and the recurring images and iconography are continually being tested in terms of their use value. The array of symbols and iconography on display demonstrates a world of commodity fetishism, depicted through the combination of both fictional and real-life brands. Miller even invented a fictional oil company in *The Road Warrior* called The Seven Sisters, named after the cartel which controlled the flow of petroleum in the middle part of the twentieth century. This merges with actual brands such as the British Petroleum signs visible in the pre-apocalypse *Mad*

Max or the partially obscured Goodyear sign in *The Road Warrior*. Toecutter's gang ride recognizable Honda and Kawasaki motorcycles. There are numerous billboards and adverts, including one for Foster's lager. And on the back seat of the Cadillac before the couple are attacked by Toecutter's gang, a can of Coca Cola is clearly visible. Across the series we see the detritus of modernization and modernity, as well as of religion and the British Empire. In other moments we can see a picture of Queen Elizabeth II hanging at an angle on the wall of the dilapidated police station, and close inspection shows the image is stuck over that of another portrait of someone unidentified. In *Mad Max* we see a crucifix from the rear-view mirror of a patrol car, in *The Road Warrior* a fictional brand of dog food (Dinki-Di). These fragments of the twentieth century are mostly divorced from their origins as items of use. In *Beyond Thunderdome* and *Fury Road*, as civilization is being rebuilt, the distinction between art and functionality has collapsed. Work and leisure are merged into one, in the way items are repurposed to give them functionality or the way previously functional artefacts are used for decorative purposes.

Barry Keith Grant refers to Miller's style as 'transgressive' (Grant 2008: 178). This works in conjunction with what Chute describes as 'eroticised nightmare imagery' (Chute 1982: 27): the images of sex, sexuality, fetishism and disability, which litter the *mise en scène*. Included in this are Wez's homosexuality, Humungus's leather fetish outfit and the presence of disabled actors such as Paul Larsson and Quentin Kenihan in prominent roles. Angelo Rossitto, who plays Master, is an actor of restricted growth, and his presence in Tod Browning's *Freaks* (1932) also links the series to notable historical representations of the disabled.

But in the same manner in which the films are not exclusively satires about oil production, or about Australian society, or about personal revenge narratives, and can be difficult to categorize as a result, they are also not about disability or BDSM. Instead, the images of both are used to paint a picture of a world where what is normally hidden is instead revealed to create the effect of shock. Tanya Krzywinska in *Sex and the Cinema* writes that images of BDSM

have been used in some films and in various ways to explore evil and the darker aspects of desire, sexuality, power and relationships. Sometimes BDSM imagery is used for comic value, either through bawdiness or parody, or to demonstrate and make capital from the playful and performance elements of sexuality...the most extreme use of all is found in those films that address sexualised violence with serious intent. (2006: 186)

Miller denied that the S/M and punk imagery was an affectation and used as a short hand for 'dark' expressions of sexuality. In his interview with David Chute he states that 'we don't sit down and say, in typical Hollywood producer fashion, "we'll have a bit of punk because punk is big in Los Angeles or England." If you did that it wouldn't have any organic genesis' (Miller, in Chute 1982: 28). Instead, Miller claims, the costuming came out of the necessity of the characters, with punkish splashes of colour adding to the practicalities of wearing body armour and leathers, and as a method for characters such as Wez to extenuate their intimidating aura. But this ignores that some youths were dressing in this manner around the same time in real life in Western countries where the apocalypse had not taken place. There is an inference here that such an affectation among punk youth of the time had a practical purpose, as a way of expressing oneself as a postmodern reaction to a world collapsing in upon itself.

Mad Max, then, does 'make capital' from those elements of BDSM imagery. The films certainly do not focus on lifestyles, and a closer understanding would be to locate its usage to the zeitgeist of punk which is contemporaneous to the period of production. This is not to doubt the intentions of the characters, but we do not see how they use their sexuality, but only their display of costume associated with particular non-traditional forms of sexual expression.

Krzywinska notes that films which are built around investigations of sex and sexuality 'tend to put social and sexual ideals and norms under pressure' (2006: 108), and that 'BDSM endangers the boundaries that secure identity and society ... and foreground[s] the performative, role-playing aspects of sexual relations' (2006: 186). Miller uses the idea of sexual 'norms' as part of a broader focus on how societies are structured; that once people are forced to renegotiate their relationships to hierarchy, power, class and the geography of society, thanks to apocalyptic events, they will also reconfigure their relationships to their bodies and this can alter sexual expression. In *Mad Max*, this is mostly done obliquely through the presentation of various fetishistic details such as the appropriation of leather wear and body modifications, as well as the adoption of homosexuality and acts of sexual violation (from the spontaneous rapes in *The Road Warrior* to the formalized sexual slavery in *Fury Road*). Krzywinska notes that horror films of the Hays Code period would 'often twist the gender alignments of sadistic villains, with perversions of every kind being deployed to signify "evil"' (2006: 193). Toecutter's gang, the Humungus, Wez, Immortan Joe and the People Eater all exhibit such 'perverse' traits and ill-defined sexual tastes.

In this sense, the sex across *Mad Max* is seen exclusively in terms of performance or extreme power imbalances. And yet, while this would be seen as transgressive in the age I am writing this, these displays and actions are only barely transgressive or shocking within the context of the worlds in which they are being presented. Krzywinska continues to note that 'legitimate cinema' (the mainstream) has always had 'some licence to go off limits if certain reverences are observed' (2006: 108). These reverences are the inclusion of transgressive material as 'the other' to contrast with the state of sexual normalcy, that is to say, straight and/or mostly white. So, while outrageous displays of personal expression as regards sexualized dress, body modification, homosexuality or violence are not punished within the diegesis directly (e.g. Wez is not a villain or punished *because* he has a male lover), it still positions the 'straight' and the 'white' as the norm. For all of the 'crazyness' of the series, all of this is contrasted to the supposed 'normalcy' of the watching audience, told through the conduct of Max, a handsome heterosexual driven mad by the desecration of his traditional family unit. This also happens in the first movie through combat with a group that is characterized by sexual sadism, and which is quite explicitly either homosexual or their actions are being performed as homosexual. There is one strongly hinted at rape of a man, and another is forcibly kissed and has milkshake spat into his face before being assaulted. There is also a distinct lack of sympathy in the film towards the raped man. He runs away while terrified, is called a 'turkey' by the Goose and the emphasis is on the aftermath of the victimization of his girlfriend, which is depicted as the greater crime.

No matter how 'mad' Rockatansky is, the whole enjoyment of these films is in how he encounters far more unhinged and unstable groups and individuals during his wanderings through the wasteland. He is always renegotiating himself to combat or align with people either more mentally unbalanced or ideologically motivated than he demonstrates himself. The series, much like other exploitation films, hang off of this dynamic of sexual openness and conservatism. There is very little sex in the series, but the acts of sexual expression we see are either exotic or abhorrent (such as spontaneous or structural acts of violence). Max might be portrayed by handsome movie stars in tight black leather, but his manner of dress is justified by its functionality rather than it being a personal fetishistic expression (or at least any possibility that he dresses in leather for fetishistic purposes is never discussed openly).

This conservative attitude is exemplified by the two acts of consensual sex that happen across the four films. The first is right at the start of *Mad Max*,

where Main Force Patrolman Roop is using the scope of his rifle to spy on a couple in a field. The second is from *The Road Warrior*, when during the first truck chase a stray vehicle rips off a tent uncovering a male and female member of Humungus's gang in the act. The gag is that the accident reveals the couple's bashful, embarrassed reactions, as well as the joke of them having sex in the first place. It resembles the sort of coyness and sniggering around sex that is associated with British seaside postcard humour, and both scenes involve nameless extras rather than characters from the narrative. The rape scene in *The Road Warrior* is also presented via a telescope, distancing the characters and the audience from the act in the same manner as the consensual sex we see through Roop's scope. By shooting these moments in a similar way, Miller frames both consenting sex and sexual violence at a voyeuristic, but safe, distance.

Stallybrass and White assert that transgression comes from the low cultures, that then mocks or parodies high-culture values, and that 'low cultural people' are transgressive in ways those on high cannot be (1986). Sexual expression in *Mad Max* works in the absence of a traditional hierarchy and could be said to be part of a carnivalesque inversion of the hierarchies and structures of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Indeed, the political interpretations of the series seem to make this claim. But, if we take a character like Immortan Joe to be a figure resembling Donald Trump (as a number of memes suggest) or if we look at what Joe represents, we can see that the filmmakers are critical of him, but *within the diegesis* there is a transgressive reversal of this in that he is celebrated in spite of and *also because of* his non-conforming body. Joe makes a fetish of his illnesses and deformities and those of his workers and family members. They dress themselves in a manner to foreground their physical 'flaws'. So, the film holds contradictory impulses and alternative polarities. A single interpretation cannot hold these contradictions in place. The BDSM/fetish wear is an expression of individuality, but by working as soldiers and enforcers in the Citadel and Bartertown, these marauding hordes/bikers are subsumed back into an economic system.

Both *Beyond Thunderdome* and *Fury Road* show signs of a re-modernization and reindustrialization process: with factories, workers (literal cogs in the machine in the case of the machinery of the Citadel) and also places of entertainment and leisure. The climax of *Beyond Thunderdome* shows the repurposing of the train, the ultimate symbol of modernity, back to its original use. And within these new attempts at modernization and the transforming of the desert back to a replica of the twentieth century we start to shift away from the individualization

that characterizes the villainous gangs of the first two stories. Instead of wearing motley arrangements of different clothing and adornments, there is more conformity. Auntie Entity's guards are like for like in their costumes, so much so that the male and female guards look alike, and Immortan Joe's War Boys are identikit in body type and costume. They exist to serve the state machine, not as individualized expressions of an outlaw ethos or lifestyle.

Max is separated from these dynamics because he is outside of the communities he happens across and is himself a consumer. He leeches off those characters who stick to some degraded version of capitalism. Because at the beginning of each sequel he exists outside of the work/leisure/production paradigm, he finds himself captured, controlled and co-opted. He is put to use by forces greater than himself and has to trade his labour at various points across the series. His disinterest in the social/political/economic quandary at the heart of Pappagello's dilemma in *The Road Warrior* (whether to accept the Humungus's conditions, stay in perpetual siege or try to escape) is presented via a lowering of the voices in the debate. The moment where Pappagello's followers argue about whether to acquiesce to Humungus's demands begins like a scene in Ken Loach's *Land and Freedom* (1995) or *The Wind That Shakes the Barley* (2006) where the narrative development stops to allow the audience to hear and consider an in-depth debate between two opposing sides. As we cut to a distracted Max, even though his distance from the discussion remains the same, the volume of the argument decreases, making the terms and points inaudible. This positions Max as not being able to dictate terms. He can only readjust his relationship to the new economic reality. He is not an owner of any capital, and notably loses his vehicle, his only asset other than himself, near the beginning of all three sequels. As a result, his labour is the only thing he has of value in the new economic and political order.

Jerome F. Shapiro makes the startling claim that Max is a 'middle-class hero' (2002: 177), in part because he believes in redemption. But Max is middle class only in comparison to the nomadic gang belonging to the Toecutter in the first film. Given he is more nomadic than his enemies in the sequels it is difficult to see how an accusation that he is middle class is sustainable. If all it takes is to have a family and a job then that is a very low bar to achieve middle-class status. In the first film, Max's job is shown to be distinctly blue collar. He is first introduced servicing his own vehicle and spends much of the rest of the film fixing cars, using manual tools and generally getting his hands dirty. Max's use of tools and him undertaking manual work is a feature of the rest of the series. A tool belt

also makes up part of his continuing costume, and his companion is even an Australian Cattle Dog, the most working class of canines. The iconography of manual labour remains present, even if this labour is divorced from organized capitalism.

Because, Peter Stanfield writes, bikers ‘represented a stark and frightening affront to middle-class respectability, mores, and values’ (Stanfield 2018: 10), this could be why Shapiro deems Rockatansky to be middle class. It is a reading of one of the binaries which *Mad Max* hinges on. But such an interpretation ignores the extent to which Max is presented as firmly blue collar. Stanfield writes that ‘working class youths may have been unseen in the films of New Hollywood, but they were highly visible in hoodlum biker pictures’ (2018: 101). So, one reading is that because Max is against such displays of working class or underclass youth, he must represent the middle classes.

To claim that Max is middle class is an inaccurate interpretation that does not take into consideration the full extent of what we are shown him doing. In *The Road Warrior* he trades his labour as a driver and a fighter in exchange for resources. In *Beyond Thunderdome* he is an agent of the State (doing Auntie’s dirty work in conspiring to murder Blaster inside the Thunderdome), and at one point literally works shovelling pig shit in a factory. In *Fury Road* he is not even allowed to just be a wanderer and has to be given some exchange value through the use of his body and blood. After that, he is used by Furiosa in furtherance of her cause. Throughout the franchise he is not allowed to have zero material value and has instead to give back to the system that he initially does not want to be a part of, whether that be when he works for Papagello, or serves Auntie Entity’s corruption, or provides blood for Immortan Joe’s exploitative empire. Nor is Max allowed to be nihilistic, and across the series he is repeatedly admonished: for being ideologically neutral by Papagello, for not believing in the Lost Children’s non-existent tomorrow-morrow land and for not initially wanting to aid Furiosa’s moral crusade to save herself and four very specific women at the expense of possibly thousands of others in more need.

Max is working class because he can only trade his labour, but also he is punk because he stands outside of the production and consumption cycle of society, and outside of any form of moral judgement. Max, after all, takes no moral stance against the Humungus, Auntie or Immortan Joe. He only fights against them for practical purposes, because he wants to avoid being owned and tied down. They want him to work for them or to be used by them, and so for that reason only the

moral crusades of Papagello, the Lost Children and Furiosa are preferable. Max, in line with the series' dominant aesthetic, is a punk, working-class hero despite his contradictory origins in the police force.

Conclusion

Mad Max sits on the operating line between what Anne Cranny-Francis describes as soft and hard science fiction. 'Soft' science fiction can also be thought of as sociological sci-fi, where 'scientific discourse may be inflected in the cause of social criticism' (1990: 221). 'Hard' sci-fi on the other hand is more concerned with eulogizing the power of technology. In the example of *Mad Max*, this is of old and defunct mechanical technology rather than any new innovations. Feminist sci-fi, she claims, is more typically of the 'soft' variety. Clearly, when examining *Mad Max*, this distinction becomes confused. It is 'soft' in that it depicts alternative societal formations and cannot help but work as a form of social criticism of the now. But it is also awash with images of powerful machines, highly fetishized by characters and the filmmakers, and the narratives invariably end with an assertion of violent force. *Mad Max* does not fit either 'soft' or 'hard' positions very comfortably, and in using this framework the solid and unambiguous interpretations of the 'feminism' of *Fury Road* in particular are challengeable. She writes:

Science fiction, then, embodies a number of generic conventions which may be drawn upon in the construction of a feminist text: a text that is, which makes sense only when read from a feminist perspective, which positions the reader as a feminist. (Cranny-Francis 1990: 224)

So, unsurprisingly, given the turn towards identity politics in cultural criticism, *Fury Road* is constructed as a feminist text (including by Miller's comments himself), as well as received that way by cultural commentators. But by accepting this interpretation and statement we are being conservative in the understanding of the film by accepting skin-deep interpretations and by failing to investigate the filmmaker's claims and creative choices.

According to Cranny-Francis, the orthodox science fiction text, that is, one that conforms to conventions established over time and does not attempt to transgress those conventions or problematize them, tends to be politically conservative as well as being generically conservative (1990: 219). To alternate

away from this and mount a rendering of genre in a way that is not politically conservative, the creator must go through one of three iterations. She writes:

A particular convention may be deployed slightly differently from the way it is traditionally or ordinarily used, with a number of possible consequences. First, such a practice may de-naturalize that convention, making visible its discursive operation. Secondly, it may *confront* readers with their own expectations, revealing these as discursively constructed and motivated. Thirdly, as a negotiation of signifying practices and meanings, it may produce wholly new meanings, new knowledge. (Cranny-Francis 1990: 219)

The politically transgressive aspect of *Mad Max* is in how it thoroughly disturbs the conventions of several exploitation genres by placing them into generally unexplored contexts – such as the near future. But it is also politically conservative in a number of ways or could be interpreted as such according to standard methods of symptomatic analysis.

Contradictions are inherent within the cult film ‘text’ and so have to be accepted as part of the political discourse surrounding any film. That is to say, it is the contradictions that make a film political, when they create discussions around political ideas and encourage viewers and critics to think and write politically. The politics of *Mad Max* is only partly in its potential for allegory, and mapping allegorical readings onto it throws up multiple, often contradictory, interpretations. By embracing the motley, salvagepunk and anarchic methods of interpretation, and by looking at the formal construct, a better sense of the politics comes through. It is clear that the contrariness and the inconsistencies are utterly relevant to the ethos of *Mad Max*, and these aspects define its ‘politics’. In the diegesis, everything on screen, from the space, vehicles, clothes and bodies, is available to be bartered or stolen. The range of political interpretations which the events and images suggest are also up for grabs; for example, at various times throughout the series we see a state agent acting as a vigilante, but with a range of transgressive representations; and it could be argued there is a demonization of homosexuality, at the same times as it depicts a communitarian ethos and equal gender roles. *Fury Road* not only has use as a feminist allegory but also works as a critique of feminism and its sometimes difficult and antagonistic relationship to class politics, especially if we look at the whole picture and all the signs and signifiers on display. The contradictions present in all of these interpretations cannot be bridged but instead have to be seen as indicative of the position the films take in relation to political and social organization. The contradictions

and avenues of opportunity (opportunities that are most often pursued through violence) that Miller and his collaborators present in the story world across the four movies *are* their politics.

None of the interpretations I provide here are intended to categorically usurp the ones made by previous scholars, and I am certainly not making the claim that I have provided any sort of definitive interpretation. Pam Cook, when discussing Stephanie Rothman's films for Corman in the 1970s, writes that they have a 'polemical value' for feminism, even if they contain imagery and events that appear to stand in opposition to many feminist arguments. Clearly, given the attention that has been paid upon it, *Fury Road* has a similarly 'polemical value' for feminism today. The point I am making is that to see only the progressive and optimistic in *Mad Max* is to ignore the vast majority of what each film provides in terms of events and *mise en scène*. That the series is in conflict with itself is highly appropriate because the world of *Mad Max* is equally unsure and uncertain. These contradictions are important to identify because it further helps me to recontextualize *Mad Max* within an exploitation film tradition. Drugs, teenage hellcats, bikers, the sexually licentious, the violent (and many more, of course) are all celebrated and condemned within the history of exploitation cinema. *Mad Max* begins out of, and continues, this tradition.

This is the politics of *Mad Max*. The films are against despotism, even if the hero is not moved to actively oppose it. They are on the side of idealism, but with a hero who remains sceptical. They are for community, but against the necessary procedures for building that community and for achieving economic progress. The films look 'punk', but they are categorically not punk films. They do not fully inhabit any particular understanding or interpretation. Like the symbols and worn-out tools festooned across the *mise en scène*, the meaning and value of *Mad Max* is fluid. And to read this, one has to allow for a lack of a proscribed interpretation and not attempt to foreclose paradoxical alternatives. The traditional interpretive practices of film studies struggle to fully handle this process. *Mad Max*, as a series of individual films, cannot be easily 'contained'; and to read the politics of the films one must be fluid and willing to adopt these different stances as much as Max does himself.

MadMaxploitation! Transnational road warriors

In *Cult Movies*, Danny Peary prophesized that *Mad Max* had the potential for inspiring a multitude of imitators that could grow to be as popular as spaghetti westerns and kung fu movies had been during the previous decade and a half (Peary 1982: 215). Within two years this prediction had manifested. *The Road Warrior* was, according to the Science Fiction edition of the *Aurum Film Encyclopaedia*, 'the most influential genre movie in recent years' (Hardy 1984: 369). From 1982 onwards, exploitation films appeared from multiple countries that adopted the narrative of a lone and taciturn hero wandering a post-apocalyptic world and battling violent cultish gangs.

This cycle of MadMaxploitation was truly transnational in the way it combined influences from a spread of different national production contexts. As Kim Newman notes, variations of what he calls the 'future violence cycle' (1988: 85) originated from places as diverse as New Zealand, Great Britain, Hong Kong, South Africa, Denmark, Canada, Poland, France and the Philippines. This is in addition to those entries that came from the United States and Italy, as well as Australian films such as *Dead End Drive-In* (Brian Trenchard-Smith, 1986). While not all of those mentioned by Newman are solely derivative of *Mad Max*, most of them adopted its punk, leather and salvage aesthetic and frequently featured convoys of modified vehicles chasing each other and crashing.

Like other international variations of successful genres that originated in English-speaking countries, the cycle was poorly received by critics. Phil Hardy's assessment of *The Road Warrior*'s influence was only in relation to the raw data and the number of 'cheap rip-offs' (1984: 369) that it had inspired in such a short time. Most of these, he writes, 'over-invest in replicating its spare narrative form while (in)conveniently ignoring the consummate skill with which Miller animates his cockeyed mythological resonances' (Hardy 1984: 369). Hardy's prose here is far more gentle than descriptions by other writers, even by critics

and historians of cult cinema. Newman's disdain for the cycle is so great that when listing some of the titles he prefaces each one with its own descriptor: 'adequate', 'lightweight', 'mind-numbing', 'initially promising', 'dreary', 'silly', 'boring', 'best-of-a-bad-lot', 'ghastly', 'endearingly ropy', 'dull' and 'negligible' (1999: 188). Even in his book *Delirium: The Essential Guide to Bizarre Italian Exploitation*, dedicated to celebrating such low cultural product, Steven Thrower refers to the cycle as the 'most destitute' of Italian genres (Thrower, in Mendik 2015: 209). Brendan McCarthy, comic book artist and co-writer of *Fury Road*, claimed in an email exchange with me that he had avoided watching any of them because they 'looked so awful' (McCarthy 2018).¹

Mostly, the cycle has escaped detailed critical attention, even in the expanding list of publications charting exploitation film history. *The Art of the B-Movie Poster* (Newell 2016), for instance, includes over a thousand illustrations of posters from exploitation cycles that range from 1930s drug movies to Naziploitation, but not a single one can be described as MadMaxploitation or even as part of post-apocalypse cinema more broadly. Unlike the spaghetti western or the polizioschetti, for example, it has yet to receive significant critical reappraisal. This is because, as Hardy contends, they are thought to have slavishly copied the conventions and iconography of their progenitors without sufficient additions, variations or commentary on the originals.

The most notable of the Italian variants were directed by the established, and occasionally acclaimed, stylists of European genre cinema: Enzo G. Castellari, Sergio Martino, Lucio Fulci and Aristide Massaccesi (Joe D'Amato). And yet their post-apocalypse works are among their least famous and rarely get mentioned alongside their more acclaimed efforts such as *Keoma* (Castellari, 1976), *The Case of the Scorpion's Tail* (Martino, 1971), *The Beyond* (Fulci, 1981) and *Anthropophagus: The Beast* (Massaccesi, 1980).

Whereas Italian westerns featured multiple recurrent characters such as Ringo, Django, Sartana and Sabata, there are very few sequels within MadMaxploitation. One possible reason is that the formula of *The Road Warrior* was often so closely

¹ It is perhaps worth noting that despite its typically highly valued reputation, there are some critics who have reappraised *The Road Warrior* in a negative light. The *TV Times Film and Video Guide* calls it 'utter rubbish, done without style or polish' (1996: 446). Karl and Philip French, in *Cult Movies*, write that 'less than twenty years after its release it is hard to see exactly why *The Road Warrior* caused such a stir', and that 'it is no better than many of the films it influenced' (1999: 134). Even speaking as a fan of MadMaxploitation, to the point that I wanted to write this book, the French's assessment here is patently absurd.

imitated that sequels were simply unnecessary. As long as the conventions and iconography were present, a film could be sold without any other familiar elements such as a star or an 'iconic' character. For example, the Filipino director Cirio H. Santiago made nine films within the cycle featuring interchangeable details, none of which are sequels. Also, as we shall see in this chapter, the male heroes were often featureless or sidelined from the main narrative action, and so there was little in their character arc on which a sequel could be based.

To approach the study of cyclical production as this chapter attempts, Peter Stanfield urges that the typical film scholar shifts their practice, refocusing it away from looking at individual texts and towards production trends. He writes that 'American film producers and exhibitors used cycles, however equivocally or intuitively, as a way of understanding, predicting, and managing change' (Stanfield 2015: 5). This was achieved through a process of standardization in production wherein films were made to look like other popular films, and in exhibition by grouping them together and marketing them using similar imagery on the poster designs. The movies referred to in this chapter are standardized in that they reflect an industrial response to a developing trend. However, they do not fit the exact model Stanfield refers to because they are geographically dispersed and do not come from a single country of origin. Instead, the cycle was a response by international producers to make a product that fitted a yardstick developed in the *transnational* exploitation marketplace. If, traditionally, cycles are characterized by their topicality and 'nowness' (Stanfield 2015: 1), then it raises the question as to what contemporaneous subject matter they reflect. Where *Mad Max* emerged out of the dystopian 1970s, against a backdrop of environmental alarm, political corruption and Vietnam-era anxieties, the cycle it inspired was happening at the same time as the 1980s Cold War machinations between the United States and the Soviet Union. MadMaxploitation can be understood as the punk cousin of the Hollywood films of the 1980s that dealt with the dual threats of nuclear devastation and invading Commies in films such as *Wargames* (John Badham, 1983), *Red Dawn* (John Milius, 1984) and *Invasion USA* (Joseph Zito, 1985). These topics also informed TV movies and miniseries of the period such as *World War Three* (NBC, 1982), *The Day After* (Nicholas Meyer, 1983) and *Amerika* (ABC, 1987), as well as *Threads* (Mick Jackson, 1984) from the UK. Yet only some of the films discussed in this chapter depict a post-nuclear holocaust, with many being set after an unspecified environmental disaster. Are they then merely 'exploiting' the cinematic potential of a broken-down world? As Newman points out, 'any territory that could boast a rubbish

strewn desert or a couple of rustily abandoned factories was also likely to find a band of leather clad extras to run around' (1999: 189). The cycle did, after all, feature a porn version called *Mad Jack Beyond Thunderbone* (Bruce Seven, 1986) that exploited the original title and staged its action and sex scenes in a junky wasteland locale. Access to a suitable location was, as much as anything else, the inspiration for many of these movies. Sergio Martino's *2019: After the Fall of New York* (1983), for example, was partially shot in the ruins of the recently burnt out De Paolis studios in Rome (Martino 2017), and being able to acquire access to the John Pounds Scrapyard in the UK meant that the genre 'was a natural one to explore' (Lyndon 2018) for the ultra-low-budget *Death Run* (Michael J. Murphy, 1987).

While Robert J. Read considers *The Road Warrior* as a part of his 'elastic' (2016: 93) definition of carsploitation, some films in the cycle do not foreground the motorized element, or otherwise remove it entirely, mostly due to budgetary restraints. If cycles 'offered both the new and the familiar' (Stanfield 2015: 2), then the post-apocalypse/MadMaxploitation movie forms a new set of standardized and repeatable elements but one that is built out of what had gone before. Despite many of these films being highly derivative, the combination of generic influences and varying transnational contexts means that there is enough material for them to be a distinct cycle with its own conventions, iconography and thematic concerns. Through these concerns, they offered a 'standardized product and repeatable experience' (Stanfield 2015: 2) of their own.

Identifying the precise amount of films that belong to the cycle is difficult because of the way they subsume a number of influences from different sources, albeit mostly filtered through the international popularity of *Mad Max* and *The Road Warrior*. Xavier Mendik notes that the Italian versions in particular are characterized by a 'cross-fertilisation' (Mendik 2015: 212) and include material reminiscent of the gladiator/peplum cycle of the 1950s and 1960s. Mendik identifies that at least twelve Italian (or European co-productions) entries were produced in the 1980s that fitted the template. Newman's chapter on the cycle in *Millennium Movies* identifies more than fifty films made in the 1980s that are set after a post-apocalyptic event. And in David J. Moore's *World Gone Wild* (2014), a comprehensive guide to a broad rubric of 'post-apocalypse cinema', there are over four hundred 'warriors in the wasteland' variations listed, where they might also cross with other cycles and genres, such as being set on other planets in deep space or featuring time travel or zombies. In the same compendium there are also a further four hundred entries that feature 'warlords and marauders'

(including TV series, shorts and Miller's films themselves). While many of them also appear on other lists of variants, some date to before the release of *Mad Max*, and some otherwise do not directly invoke Miller's series as an inspiration; of those that do, Moore lists sixty-four that borrow liberally from *The Road Warrior* (Moore 2014: 410).

Newman writes that Max usurped the Man with No Name and Bruce Lee as the leading action icon in the 1980s, and that 'the drive-in and grindhouse screens ... were cluttered up' with his imitators (Newman 1990: 188). But this observation ignores that they were released around the time of the evolving popularity of home video. Out of all the films playing in New York 42nd Street grindhouses from 1980 until 1991, only nine are from the cycle (Filibus 2018). The rest of the listings from this period mostly comprise of kung fu movies and the mainstream studio films that made up a far larger percentage of what was available in grindhouse theatres than is often given credit for.

Exploitation film culture has since the very beginning been composed of a splintered range of production contexts and consumption practices. These became even more fragmented at the transition point between cinema and home viewing in the 1980s. The ushering in of home video and the format of VHS as the principal way exploitation films were consumed changed the industry in several ways. It meant that the medium was no longer site specific, and films could now be shared privately between groups of fans. There was also an impact on low to no budget production because video provided a much cheaper way to make films. This, in turn, highlighted the increasingly apparent distinctions between the materiality of film and video, and the overlapping notions of what constituted 'professional' and 'amateur' film. These factors meant that the MadMaxploitation cycle was also 'post-cinema'. As Shane Denson and Julia Leyda theorize in their edited collection on the term (2016), 'post-cinema' may be a blunt expression, but it also helps us to think about a relationship, rather than a separation, between historical and current medias. They write that 'post-cinema asks us to think about new media not only in terms of novelty but in terms of an ongoing, uneven, and indeterminate *transition*' (2016: 2). The cycle came at an important transitional point towards convergent viewing formats that would change the production, reception and consumption of exploitation cinema. The popularity of video not only provided the novelty of new markets for MadMaxploitation but also kept *Mad Max* and its sequels in circulation. This gave Miller's series an ongoing relevance and thus also continued the commercial opportunities for filmmakers looking to exploit its success and reputation.

Defining MadMaxploitation

Whereas the title 'Mad Max' is both a description of its central character and an allusion to the ethos of the world he inhabits (it's gone 'mad'), films in the cycle that followed were almost exclusively titled around what people would see if they rented the movie. This results in recurrent references to 'warriors', 'barbarians', 'exterminators' and 'warlords'. These are then aligned to a non-specific time and place: 'the wasteland', 'the year x', 'after the fall of' and so on. This practice of repeating similar titles was, according to Stanfield, a defining feature of the biker movie's seriality and was also an example of 'intertextual dialogue', where a film can be 'authenticated' by 'playing it off against another example' (2016: 75). This, he contends, is driven as much by the demands of the market as it is by attempts at a knowing intertextual parody of other titles. In the case of MadMaxploitation these practices of serial production cross national boundaries, languages and sites of exhibition.

Similarly, the poster and cover art that accompanies these titles features persistent imagery of modified bikes, cars, trucks, leather-clad warriors and ruined cities or deserts, all designed to bring other examples to mind. The poster for Enzo G. Castellari's *The New Barbarians* (1983), which was repeated on the 2010 Shameless DVD release cover, reflects this interchangeability of the iconography. Only a supporting character (Fred Williamson) and the villain (Luigi Montefiori under his English alias George Eastman) are shown. These are familiar exploitation stars, who are wearing costumes and brandishing weapons typical of the cycle and are therefore positioned prominently and in the complete absence of the actual heroic lead. These details are all that is needed to inform the audience about what sort of film it will be, and so accurate story information is unnecessary. As late as 2014, way later than the main scope of this chapter, the Australian *Wyrnwood: Road of the Dead* (Kiah Roach-Turner, 2014) uses its subtitle to align itself with *The Road Warrior*, in what is otherwise a low-budget zombie movie that only has a double-barrelled shotgun and a couple of modified vehicles to link it to its forebear (and it is these features which are given prominence on the DVD cover rather than zombies).

Across the cycle, the central narrative scenario is of a nomadic lone road warrior wandering a wasteland or desolate environment who happens across a conflict between 'good' and 'bad' tribes. This wandering is typically by motorized

vehicle but can also be on foot or by horse.² So engrained is this formula that in the American *Steel Dawn* (1987) the hero is called Nomad (Patrick Swayze) and is chided for 'roaming the wasteland' that he declares is his 'home'. The films in this chapter all feature variations of one, and typically several, of the following other tropes:

- A 'Good' group who are vulnerable in battle with a 'Bad' group of marauders
- The road warrior has a generic name (examples include One, Hero, Alien, Stryker, Nomad, Trash, Rider)
- He/She takes on a protective role to the vulnerable group
- The road warrior is either sidelined from the main plot or otherwise takes a supporting role in the action. He/She is an observer and interloper on the main conflict
- A desert, wasteland or desolate urban locale as a result of a nuclear or environmental catastrophe
- Characters who have suffered forms of mutation as a result of the catastrophe or nuclear fallout
- Automobile-based action
- Staged scenes of gladiatorial combat where people are forced to fight or race in front of a crowd or audience
- A lack of resources, typically water
- Women as commodity/resource
- The Bad tribe is eventually vanquished and the good tribe goes on to live in peace
- Narrative ends with water being found, or the suggestion of a cure for any environmental problems

Certain Italian entries in the cycle also integrated material and motifs from American films such as *The Warriors* (Walter Hill, 1979) and *Escape from New York* (John Carpenter, 1981). Many of these are also set in New York, feature recurring actors, and cover similar thematic ground. In doing so, and by being nominally located in the city itself (if only partially shot there), they contributed to a body of New York-based Italian exploitation films that also includes sections

² In the case of *Spacehunter: Adventures in the Forbidden Zone* (Lamont Johnson, 1983), this wandering takes place on a desert planet in the far future.

of Lucio Fulci's *Zombie Flesh Eaters* (1980) and all of his *New York Ripper* (1982). In part thanks to the popularity of the revenge/vigilante narrative, New York had become the prime location for films exploring contemporary social decline or as a space that had already taken on post-apocalyptic qualities. *The Ultimate Warrior* (Robert Clouse, 1975) was an earlier example of a film using the city as a post-global catastrophe backdrop, whereas *Death Wish 3* (Michael Winner, 1985) took place in New York, but many scenes were shot in London. The sense of displacement this created nullified much of the critique of law and order that its predecessors at least ostensibly attempted to address and subsequently made the location appear as a broken-down futuristic dystopia.

The Italian New York-based MadMaxploitation titles work as a mini-cycle and subsume material from multiple other sources. Martino acknowledges the pervasive influence of both *Escape from New York* and *The Road Warrior* (Moore 2014: 337) on his 2019: *After the Fall of New York*, where a car chase through a tunnel to escape the city rehashes the finale of Carpenter's movie but with a heavily modified muscle car more immediately familiar from *Mad Max*. Strangely, in an interview Martino also implies a distinction between *Mad Max* and its sequel by claiming that by the time he directed 2019 he had not yet seen *Mad Max*. Yet in response to the question as to whether Carpenter's film or *The Road Warrior* were 'direct inspirations', he responds: 'surely, the films you cited were inspirations' and goes on to say that 'in those years the Italian cinema wanted to explore varied genres and American films at the time constituted a good inspiration to work from' (in Moore 2014: 337). This suggests that Martino was not aware that *The Road Warrior* was a sequel to *Mad Max*, however unlikely this may seem. As well as hinting at the way *Mad Max* hid its Australianness, this lack of clarity here demonstrates another example of a genre director responding to the needs of the market by making various topical tropes visible both on-screen and in the marketing, rather than through unique creative inspiration. Martino talks of the importance that principal cast members could speak English to help aid the translation into a product that could transcend different markets (Martino 2017), and this focus on exportation also accounts for the wide range of inspirations and imitations. As well as the aforementioned movies, 2019 also mimics the *Star Wars* boom, with costumes, laser blasters and automatic doors looking as if they are emulating a style of design more associated with George Lucas than George Miller. Castellari's *The New Barbarians* similarly mixes the space age and the ramshackle, and features silver buggies and bikes similar to those in *Deathsport*, which are manned by marauder types with

coiffured pink hair and Mohawks. Their guns fire laser bolts with accompanying appropriate sound effects, which even emanate from recognizably twentieth-century weapons such as M16 assault rifles. Rather incongruously, a laser blaster pistol wielded by George Eastman appears to shoot bullets.

Castellari's 1990: *The Bronx Warriors* and its sequel *Escape from the Bronx* amalgamate aesthetic influences from Miller's series with that of *The Warriors*, as well as American biker movies. It features colourful and violent gangs attempting to control areas of a near-abandoned future New York, who battle with each other and against the corporate and State institutions that are attempting to redevelop the city. The gangs are clearly modelled on those of *The Warriors* as much as *The Road Warrior* – with plentiful leather jackets, silk-suited pimp types, cowboys in chaps and top-hatted dandies – and are made up of mostly multi-ethnic members. Castellari combines this explicit replication of the basic plot of Hill's film with aspects of *Mad Max* by motorizing the gangs and making them bikers. The lead gang, headed by the enigmatic Trash, is called 'The Riders'.³ Other gangs travel in elaborate Hot Rod-style cars, while another operates on skates in a reference to *Rollerball*.

Castellari opens with a title sequence of fetishized close-ups of gang iconography, including tattoos and spiked leather elbow pads. The Riders are characterized by a jumble of assorted symbolism and are adorned with both Stars and Stripes and Confederate flag patches (Trash even has a Confederate bed spread), as well as Nazi regalia. One member wears an SS officer's jacket, while another has a swastika embellishing his crash helmet. These insignia are disassociated from their right-wing political ideologies and inferences by the multi-ethnic membership of The Riders. Instead, Castellari conforms to the generic conventions and cribs these symbols from contemporary punk fashions and previous biker movies, who used such imagery to symbolize the antisocial or the 'shocking'.

Another convention is in how they reiterate the themes of *Death Race 2000*. Fulci's *The New Gladiators* (1984) locates its contest in a future Rome to emphasize the regressive tendencies and return to barbarism of the post-apocalyptic

³ As further evidence of the interchangeability and repetition at work, Trash is the name of a (female) character in *Exterminators of the Year 3000* (Giuliano Carnimeo, 1983), while The Rider is the lead character of *Warrior of the Lost World* (David Worth, 1983).

world. *2019: After the Fall of New York* features a brief sequence with a car race to the death in Nevada, which is cheered on by about twenty punks in denim, leather and studded belts. *Endgame* (Joe D'Amato, 1983) structures its narrative around a gladiatorial contest in New York. Like the *Death Race* lineage, it features the framework of a televised spectacle and cleverly shows the diegetic production crew directing the programme and deciding to replay bits of action – 'we better run a replay on the first kill' and 'get in close for the kill shot'. Rather than being the point of the film, as in *Death Race 2000*, these moments are fleeting and only as significant as its other superficial gestures towards the cycle's other conventions. *Endgame* opens with stock footage of an atomic blast, uses familiar cast veterans such as Eastman and briefly introduces a motif of nuclear mutation that includes the development of gills, an idea later explored in the big budget studio variation *Waterworld* (Kevin Reynolds, 1995). Evidence of wider influences are in its jazz score and scenes of kung fu and martial arts training. There are also mutants who can move rocks with their minds and telepathically kill the Nazi-esque bad guys that recalls elements of 'the force' from *Star Wars*.

The recurring New York setting moves beyond just suggesting a connection to Carpenter's movie and is both a production trend and an intertextual reference to other Italian films of the period. Castellari's *Bronx* duo uses location shooting in mostly abandoned areas of the city, as well as in clearly populated areas. In *2019*, New York is mostly rendered through matte paintings and miniatures, creating backdrops of its ruined but still recognizable city skyline. The rest is recreated through some excellent production design of the rubbish-strewn streets, which is smeared with smoke from burnt-out cars. In both of these cases, the filmmakers are taking advantage of real-life social deprivation in the city by either shooting there or mimicking its more downtrodden areas, but were also responding to the demands of a marketplace that results in a medley of influences. The resulting narrative, thematic and aesthetic incoherence is what accounts for their poor reception among critics.

While the shared aesthetics and concerns of the Italian entries constitute a mini cycle-within-a-cycle, Filipino director Cirio H. Santiago made nine variations that riffed on the same conventions: *Stryker* (1983), *Wheels of Fire* (1984), *The Sisterhood* (1985), *Future Hunters* (1986), *Equalizer 2000* (1986), *Raiders of the Sun* (1991), *Dune Warriors* (1991), as well as *Bloodfist 2050* (2005) which was made for TV and *Water Wars* (2014) that was completed after his death. Unlike the urban cityscapes of the aforementioned European films, Santiago relocates most of the action back to sandy wastelands to appropriate the

more familiar landscape of the *Mad Max* sequels. Within the hands of a single director the repurposing approach to filmmaking included the repetition not just of tropes but also of materials and cast. There are reused costumes, weapons and vehicles visible across several of the films, as is the motif of multiple actors of restricted growth among the supporting cast. In addition, several of them repeat some of the same footage. This technique to save money and fill out the running time was one Santiago probably picked up through his association with Roger Corman, who had taken a similar approach during his own directorial career.⁴ Santiago had directed for Corman's New World Pictures in the 1970s and had also produced the company's Philippines-shot *Women in Prison* cycle of the same period: *The Big Doll House* (Jack Hill, 1971), *Women in Cages* (Gerardo de Leon, 1971), *The Hot Box* (Joe Viola, 1972), *The Big Bird Cage* (Jack Hill, 1972) and *Caged Heat* (Jonathan Demme, 1974).

There is evidence that as well as being influenced by frugal production techniques, Corman's satirical and playful approach to genre, sustained by the sense of humour of directors like Hill and Demme, also impacted Santiago's own directorial work. His MadMaxploitation films demonstrate a knowingness towards the cycle and its readily lampoonable seriousness, while simultaneously slavishly following its conventions and meeting the requirements of his investors. In *Stryker* the eponymous hero has a car that looks like Max's Interceptor but in the opening chase it is stolen by a woman so that he is forced to walk in the desert, parodying the 'road warrior' concept. In one sequence, there is a neat reversal of the trope of the heroes in convoy being attacked by marauders by having Stryker and another road warrior called Bandit attack the moving truck. Perhaps the most obvious burlesque of the overall po-facedness that characterizes the cycle is when Stryker is saved and helped at the climax by a gang of Filipino people of restricted growth, to somewhat undermine his status as an all-conquering macho hero.

Whereas the *Mad Max* films integrated their series of spectacular attractions of costume, violence, stunts and freaks into lean plot lines built upon direct movement across mostly flat, straight roads, many of their imitators do not have the same commitment to the merging of spectacle and story. What is left is a series of disjointed moments that render the tropes of the cycle as abstract 'attractions'.

⁴ Corman reused some of the same sets in his cycle of Edgar Allan Poe adaptations (1960–4), as well as the same footage of a barn burning down that recurs across several of the films.

In Tom Gunning's assessment of silent cinema's tendency towards the pleasure of exhibiting shocking events, stunts or people, he writes that their structure typically involved 'the act of display and the anticipation that can be heightened by delaying xor announcing it' (2004: 47). By doing so, these attractions 'do not show a temporal structure, but the structure consists more of framing a momentary appearance than an actual development and transformation in time' (2004: 47). Cinema attractions, then, would set themselves up with 'gestures of display' that would 'perform the important temporal role of announcing the event to come' (2004: 45). And while the 'announcing gesture creates a temporal frame of expectation' in the audience, it does not have to 'refer to diegetic unfoldings' and instead 'could occur outside the actual film, embodied in the way the film was presented' (2004: 45). In the most formulaic of MadMaxploitation, these 'announcing gestures' appear from outside the film in the narrow and rigid conventions of the cycle and as such are well understood by the audiences in theatres and viewing at home. The formula employed across MadMaxploitation is both temporal (the unfolding of the plot) and aesthetic (the various acts of display in the *mise en scène*). *Exterminators of the Year 3000*, which has the distinction of being referred to as 'adequate' by Newman (1999: 188), begins with two characters we don't know being chased by someone we cannot see (who eventually turns out to be the hero). This is immediately followed by another car chase with no accompanying exposition, which does not establish a clear idea of who is who but which is followable because of its adherence to the formula. We know who the road warrior type will be by his black car, leather outfit and because he is the most handsome of the cast. After this opening, the film throws convention upon convention in a series of haphazard gestures towards MadMaxploitation: a villainous leather-clad henchwoman with metal claws, both nuclear war *and* environmental catastrophe as the reasons for the apocalypse, a warrior woman called Trash who chastises the hero for being a chauvinist and a bad guy called Crazy Bull who quotes Shakespeare.

Non-Italian variations also feature a similar array of chaotically inserted conventions that fracture the plot and narrative development. The Canadian *Maniac Warriors* (Lloyd Simandl, Michael Mazo, 1989) has a plot that meanders around the idea of religiously motivated marauders (who make the sign of the cross whenever they kill) pillaging the peaceful group and another separate strand that has mutants harvesting people for their blood. It includes another henchwoman in revealing tight leather clothes, a 'mad dog'-style villain chained up on the back of a truck like Wez from *The Road Warrior*, a female road warrior

with cropped hair and generic heavy metal music whenever there is an action sequence. The plot construction resembles a connection of disjointed and unconnected scenes. For example, the filmmakers do not establish antipathy between the mad dog henchman and the heroes, and they do not share any screen time until very late on. But, sharing screen time is not necessary, we know they are on opposite sides because that is what the convention dictates. Even more significant is how, during the middle of the film, both the male hero and the female road warrior, who has a plotline of needing to find her kidnapped sister, are absent for a consecutive period of over twenty-five minutes (in a film that has a running time of less than ninety minutes). Such a jumble of ideas and resulting narrative incoherence is only followable because of the 'announcing gestures' that exist between the films.

Reading MadMaxploitation

The Italian films were 'heavily indebted to a pre-existing strand of science fiction cinema' (Mendik 2015: 210) identified by Mick Broderick as being based around 'Survival Long After the Nuclear War' (1983). The caveat to this is that it is not only the Italian films that are indebted to this subgenre of science fiction. And also, not all of them depict the conflict-strewn aftermath of an explicitly post-nuclear event. Instead these films are often set after some other form of disaster, most often an environmental one, although the effect on screen is virtually identical and interchangeable. Narratives set after some other form of apocalyptic event, such as an environmental catastrophe or the Earth's population being decimated through disease, are presented in the same manner, making the origin of the event unimportant. The resulting effect is still one of deserted highways, industrial wastelands, debris-strewn landscapes and graffiti-marked walls. Any particularly well-thought-out or significant comment on the causes of the apocalypse, such as a satire or critique of geopolitics, is largely generalized. In 2019, for example, the narrative is set against a backdrop of geopolitical conflict between two fictional states, the Pan American Confederacy and the EURAC, a European, African and Asian Coalition. With even less subtlety, Massaccesi has the security forces in *Endgame* dressed in clearly demarcated Nazi-style helmets and trench coats, embellished with quasi-SS style insignia.

Like in the spaghetti western, throughout the cycle there are pointed, if scattershot, attempts at aligning with anti-authoritarian ideas. *Escape from the Bronx* deals with gentrification of poor areas and social cleansing of those who

require (often underfunded) social housing. It begins with the government's Disinfestation Annihilation Squad attacking tenement blocks on the lie that it is because the area is uninhabitable and burning to death anyone who refuses to leave. There is corporate and State collusion in rebuilding the city with 'no social blocks', but this elimination of poverty comes through violence and social cleansing, despite propagandist claims that the former residents will be rehoused somewhere in New Mexico. In this critique of fascism and corporatism the yuppie characters behind the plan are slick-haired, pinstripe suit and red tie wearers of a kind that were later satirized in films such as *Robocop* (Paul Verhoeven, 1987) and *American Psycho* (Mary Harron, 2000). In revenge for the killing of his parents during the social cleansing, Trash helps kidnap the president. This variation of the plot of *Escape from New York* differs in that it is from the point of view of the gangs. Carpenter's version by contrast is told through the viewpoint of a State agent in the character of Snake Plissken, who remains ostensibly neutral towards the events. As a result, Carpenter keeps the audience distanced from those left to rot within the prison walls surrounding Manhattan. Castellari instead aligns us with the socially marginalized and shows Trash and the rest of the gangs repelling the government forces and maintaining their control of the Bronx.

In *The New Barbarians* Castellari reveals an anti-church spirit and includes a close-up of a Bible being torn in two, with the accompanying dialogue: 'That's what started the whole apocalypse.' Once more, this is the extent of its examination of the alleged malignancy of the Church. Not much is given other than the implication that religious ideologues will lead the Earth to doom. The central conflict is between the nihilistic Templars, who want to kill what's left of humanity out of revenge for its perceived responsibility for causing the apocalypse, and a group who still cling to the religion of the old world. Unlike in *Bronx Warriors* and its sequel, where Castellari puts us on the side of the antisocial marauder types, here he puts a clear 'good against evil' spin into the narrative. Even within this, however, there is a moral ambiguity towards what is meant by 'good' and 'bad' values. This is made particularly explicit when a villainous Templar called Shadow asks the hero: 'Hey, Scorpion. You fight, you kill, you rob. How the hell are you any different from us?' This prompts one of the central political questions of the cycle: who is doing what, and why? How does fighting, killing and robbing fit into the societal structure, when are these things justified, and are they acceptable when committed by the State or by corporations? This moment also recalls one of the key moments from *Mad Max*, when Max himself acknowledges he is beginning to enjoy his work on the road as a law enforcer,

and that only his badge legitimizes his actions. It also replays the scene in *The Road Warrior* when Papagello refers to Max as a 'scavenger', who is 'living off the corpse of the old world'. These moments challenge the distinctions between the hero and villain, and state violence and the outlaw, although never fully resolving these dichotomies. Scorpion's response to Shadow's taunt is that he is doing it not for the nihilistic sake of it, unlike the Templars and, indirectly, every other gang we see across the cycle. Although, the question remains, if the effects of these actions are the same, what is the difference?

Mendik writes that the Italian films in particular emphasize the muscularity of the white male body, testing its strength and masculinity through a series of physical trials and frequently placing it under extreme duress. The extreme muscularity of the men is foregrounded in the marketing, which frequently depict their heroes as quasi-gladiators, in the requisite poses and clothing, only updated to a future landscape (2015: 214). Mendik tentatively, and with significant justification, suggests that this updating of the peplum cycle, with its 'wandering males banding together when their skills have become redundant due to cataclysmic industrial change' (2015: 214), is a reaction to a decline in the traditionally male-dominated industries of the Italian economy in the 1980s. These white male heroes win out by using tools of a bygone era. Their cars, clubs and guns are materials no longer produced in the dead zone of the post-apocalypse, and increasingly less so in contemporary Western economies, and are therefore 'ramshackle reminders of [their] former social and sexual stability' (2015: 214).

While this is a persuasive argument, it ignores that the wide-ranging transnationality of the cycle extends beyond Italy, and how countries as diverse as Australia, America, Italy, New Zealand, Great Britain and the Philippines produced remarkably similar films featuring recurring plots, characters, scenes, motifs, backgrounds and locations. In turn, they can then host similar critical interpretations by audiences, critics and scholars despite originating in different individual contexts. That many of them were dubbed into English (in the case of the original *Mad Max*, dubbed into supposedly even clearer and more understandable English) has the effect of obscuring the cultural specificity of their origins and any corresponding political interpretations that would accompany them. Castellari's *Bronx* movies, for example, can tell us something about the state of politics and masculinity in Italy at the time, because they are Italian in origin, but they also reveal much about the social, political and material conditions of New York because they are shot in the city's streets. The concerns of these films and the methods of delivering those concerns were crafted to

appeal to international markets and interests. That many of these transnational films were *located* in the United States further contributes to the obscurity of each film's origins and to the internationalization of the cycle as a whole. They take place in abstract spaces, and any identifiable space such as New York can also become abstracted from the real place through its rendering by outsider filmmakers, the use of matte paintings as background or the obviousness of a film being set in a specific location despite clearly not being shot there.

It is, of course, possible to speculate that the socio-economic background that fuelled the Italian productions was also a factor in inspiring the creation and success of the cycle internationally. So, the redundancy felt by blue-collar Italian males was just one example of a general feeling of growing obsolescence impacting working-class men globally during the 1980s. This would mean that the films' popularity for producers and audiences was in how they re-centred and re-empowered the abilities and skills that were now far less required. Being able to perform mechanics, to drive large powerful vehicles and succeed in combat are skills that had fewer opportunities to be developed as the requisite industries that could make use of them were in decline. This decline also happened at the same time as an increase in critical attitudes towards so-called unreconstructed masculinity in the West.

It is impossible to ignore that the muscular road warrior male leads in these films are a contrast to the outlandish, often feminized, and sometimes homosexual villains. While there are fetishistic connotations to the wearing of black leather, the male leads' look is more fixed, masculine and monochrome compared to the wildness and flamboyance of the villains (even when there is a female road warrior lead she is also often masculinized through short hair and a costume of leather trousers and jacket). In both *Endgame* and *Exterminators of the Year 3000*, for example, both male leads are decked head to toe in black leather, in contrast to the extravagant motley attire of those they do battle against.

This extreme masculinity of the hero is consistently undercut throughout the cycle by them repeatedly being fetishized, brutalized or otherwise sidelined from the main storyline. Mendik focuses on how the Italian entries centre on the 'male body as a source of erotic spectacle and mutilation' (2015: 213) and as such is 'dominated by a display of unrestrained phallic energy that defies either domestication or heterosexual sublimation' (2015: 225). The fetishization of the male body and relative absence of sexual unions as a new equilibrium by the end of the narrative are a feature of the non-Italian versions of the cycle that largely follow on from Max's sexless journeys through the wasteland. The hero is always



Figure 5 Fernando Bilbao as Crazy Bull, in makeup, fur coat and plumage in *Exterminators of the Year 3000* (1983).

at least coded as heterosexual, even if he largely fails to engage in on-screen heterosexual sex acts, and is mostly both single and wandering as the credits roll.⁵ This status is underscored by the comparative rarity of images of women being depicted as victims of sexual violence or as a sexual reward for heroism (2015: 223) and the presence of a conspicuous number of female warriors across the cycle, including as lead character in films such as *Land of Doom* (Paul Maris, 1986) and *Cherry 2000* (Steve De Jarnatt, 1987).

This relative dearth of women as sexual objects is made more significant in the context of the sexual display, victimization and vulnerability of the male bodies on display. In *The New Barbarians* the hero Scorpion is himself ritualistically raped by One in front of his cult-like Templars. Scorpion is tied upright to a stake and forced to bend over with his buttocks exposed in a brief close-up. Castellari intercuts with the ritual leading up to the rape, in a way that builds tension and, it could be argued, creates an eroticism through anticipation. The effect is disorienting and abstract, and builds into a sequence of close-ups of watching Templars, of neon spotlights and lens flare, of Scorpion's increasingly

⁵ There are exceptions. In *Desert Warrior* (Jim Goldman, 1988), the hero walks off into the sunset at the end with his female romantic interest. Although despite this heterosexual coupling, throughout he has been portrayed in a particularly homoerotic manner – he is played by the bodybuilder Lou Ferrigno, wearing nothing but a combination of black leather shorts and boots.

anguished reactions, and when penetration finally begins, One's sweating face and Scorpion gripping at his restraints in distress. Scorpion demonstrates no particularly traumatic psychological or physical after-effects, but Castellari emphasizes his assault by including a symbolic but unsubtle revenge at the film's climax. A modification on Scorpion's car is an extendable drill that protrudes and pierces the rear of One's car during the final chase, killing him by drilling through his seat and into his back.

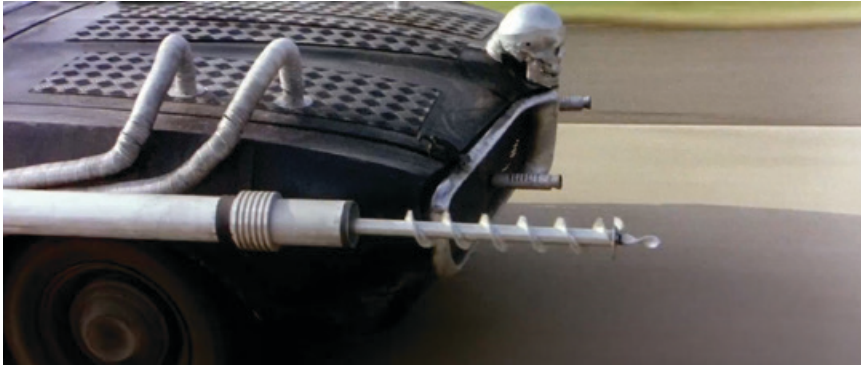
These hints of male victimization and threats to their heterosexual dominance are not just concerns of the Italian filmmakers. The male lead of Michael J. Murphy's *Death Run*, Paul, is similarly feminized and repeatedly shown to be ill-equipped for life in post-nuclear Britain. He is ineffectual, cannot fight and fails to protect his girlfriend. At one point director Murphy feminizes Paul's appearance when he has to escape from marauders, by dressing him only in a shirt and with no trousers. Paul eventually has to learn to be a man under the guidance of the road warrior called 'Hero', who trains him to develop some skills in combat. Murphy undercuts this journey towards stoic traditional masculinity by imbuing the sequence with tongue-in-cheek homoeroticism as Paul and Hero spar each other wearing nothing but tight blue jeans and with glistening bare chests, a homoeroticism that comes out of the director's love of gladiator movies and other sword and sandal epics (Longhurst 2018, Lyndon 2018). The continuation of the themes of the peplum that characterized the Italian cycle crossed the national context over into what is a virtually homemade production, due to the close repetitions of cyclical convention.

While these sequences challenge the physical dominance of the male hero, others marginalize his presence in the narrative. Feminist analysis of *Fury Road* underscores Max's position as a secondary character to Furiosa. However, this was a continuation of his significant periods in bondage in *The Road Warrior* and *Beyond Thunderdome*, when in both cases the significant motivating actions propelling the plot are not performed by him. Part of the reason for this is the blankness of the road warrior archetype, as indicated by the character names. Whereas for Max we see the origins of how he became the way he is, in the following cycle there are no origin stories. Instead, we know who the hero is because he is silent, gruff, masculine and a loner. There is little attempt to give them anything beyond these characteristics.

In *Maniac Warriors*, the road warrior male hero gets five minutes of screen time during the first forty minutes. Together with a female warrior they search for her sister, but the search does not relate to many of the actions and events



Figures 6 (a)–(d) Scorpion is raped by One in *The New Barbarians* (1983) and exacts his revenge by drilling into One's back.



Figures 6 (a)–(d) Continued.

we see. They are the heroes because the cycle requires the presence of wandering road warrior types, but it is questionable whether they are the *protagonists* of the story. Instead, they remain on the periphery of narrative development. In *Stryker*, we are not shown who the titular character is until after twenty minutes, because convention assumes we know his role in the plot. We get midway through the film before it is established that Stryker is the brother of Trun, the leader of the peaceful community. There is also a long seduction scene between two supporting characters, rather than between Stryker or the lead female character of Delha. In the absence of meaningful characteristics, the hero gets pushed aside and it is necessary to fill out the rest of the narrative development with secondary characters.

What makes MadMaxploitation cyclical is the attempt to topicalize these examinations of politics and gender roles through references to contemporary fashions and anxieties. In doing so, the MadMaxploitation cycle shares ancestry with the social problem films that date back to the silent period that would, according to Kay Sloan, transform ‘dilemmas into fairy tales of the day’ (Sloan 1988: 1). The characters of these narratives, the ‘greedy corporate tycoons, villainous landlords, corrupt politicians, flamboyant suffragettes, and striking workers’ (Sloan 1988: 1), would later transmute into teenage criminals and eventually bikers. In the 1980s, punks replaced the biker as the shorthand for the savage barbarian whose presence and behaviour threaten to destabilize civilization, a trope familiar from larger budget pictures such as *Robocop*, all the way down to low-budget exploitation like *Savage Sisters* (Danny Steinmann, 1984). *The Protector* (James Glickenhaus, 1985) demonstrates further evidence

of the ubiquity of the street punk in 1980s action films. Though mostly set in contemporary Hong Kong, it begins with a sequence unrelated to the main plot of a truck being looted in a Downtown New York so despoiled that it resembles the futuristic dystopias envisaged by Castellari and Martino, with streets full of rubble and suffused in dry ice. The crime is perpetuated by street gangs dressed in costumes as outlandish as anything in MadMaxploitation and which includes a subsection of punks, who happen to be of restricted growth, who trip the traffic lights to get the truck to stop.

In films that depict the crushing of the wilder displays of biker/punk energy, the cycle is suggesting a societal shift beyond such behaviour. As I discussed in the previous chapter, in the *Mad Max* series this is never fully resolved. The men (or the same types of men) who follow the Toecutter morph into the Humungus's gang and then work for Auntie Entity in Bartertown, and eventually for Immortan Joe. Because there are few sequels among MadMaxploitation, instead of replaying the same concept – Max wanders the wasteland coming across, and defeating, ever more powerful enemies – they can offer a genuine end and 'start over' point by not having a sequel that reopens the same problem dealt with in the previous film.

The use of punkish costume choices and iconography in the MadMaxploitation film suggests not a serious, or even pretend serious, investigation of punk and youth culture, so much that it is an acceptance that it signals the end of the world. If these films are set in the near future, then the coming of punk at the end of the twentieth century makes punk the final development in fashions and attitudes, after which we will just play ourselves out in fighting each other and the reusing of material until nothing is left. As Newman observes in *Millennium Movies*, the post-apocalypse movie responded to an era of civil rights, anti-Vietnam war fever and a hippy movement that was looking to remake the world (1999: 176). But to remake the world, in the absence of an ability to think of ways to reform the capitalism of the West, the apocalyptic event becomes necessary.

Much of MadMaxploitation concludes with the possibility of rebuilding and restarting civilization. In *2019*, the world's last remaining fertile woman opens her eyes and awakens after hibernation, ready to help repopulate. Both *Stryker* and *Exterminators of the Year 3000* climax with inexplicable and unexplained rainfall after years of drought. *Steel Dawn* ends with dialogue explaining that there is a plan to build a city and redistribute the water to the poor. In these cases, there is the hint at a utopian break from the state of the world we see

at the beginning, and the implication that the characters have moved beyond conflict. If one was to read these moments looking for social commentary, we can identify the focus on essential resources and their relevance to the collective, rather than anything related to the individual. The problems facing collective humanity, rather than individual survival, are what is most important.

Kay Sloan writes that ‘those formative years of the cinema, unique as they were, established the manner in which films continue to raise social issues while at the same time containing them in satisfactory bourgeois resolutions’ (1988: 13). The typical resolution of the MadMaxploitation film is a similarly bourgeois triumph of the community over punky marauders, and the consolidation of resources that would have been ‘used wrongly’ by the gangs who are enjoying the opportunities offered by the collapse of civilization a little too much. That the male hero is left either wandering or unreconstructed by the end suggests that he has no place in the rebuilding of civilization.

Ozploitation meets MadMaxploitation

Dead End Drive-In (Brian Trenchard-Smith, 1986) is an Australian response to the worldwide success of the cycle, directed by a leading Ozploitation filmmaker whose career began in the 1970s. Based on a short story by Peter Carey called *Crabs* from 1974, *Dead End Drive-In* is about a secret government programme for dealing with an abundance of rowdy and unemployed youths by incarcerating them in a drive-in cinema (where they sleep in their vehicles) and keeping them docile by feeding them on junk food and trash movies. This concept is an allusion to both the diegesis of the original *Mad Max* and the social problem of purposeless youths and their vehicles that originally inspired George Miller. The events could be a prequel to *Mad Max*, or set in the same world, taking place before the truly catastrophic collapse of society that leads to the events in *The Road Warrior*. So enamoured are the youth with their new lives in the drive-in that they make no attempt at an escape. The only discontent is when Asian immigrants are also bussed in to be interned with them. This unsettles the white youths, who see the environment as exclusively theirs, and they organize bullying and harassment against their new camp mates. Only the film’s hero, Jimmy, who goes by the nickname of Crabs, sees the drive-in for the prison it is, and he eventually affects an escape (via an elaborate car stunt – the biggest in Australia at the time). Jimmy leaves his girlfriend and the rest of the

inhabitants of the drive-in behind and the film closes with him cruising out into the open road – with a white line bisecting the screen recalling the closing images of *Mad Max*.

In its exploration of the dynamic between film, audience and exhibition space, *Dead End Drive-In* evokes Peter Stanfield's description of the biker movie and its audience, and how they were set 'in marginal spaces and exhibited in out of town drive-ins and dilapidated theatres' and 'watched by, self-obsessed mobile youths going nowhere, cycling back on themselves in endless displays of repetitive inchoate activity' (2018: 6). The film is filtered through this dynamic of the biker movie, alongside its satire of Australian car and youth culture of the 1980s. Burnt-out cars, punk attire and graffiti dominate the mise en scène and are such an established and necessary convention that they were written into the script (Trenchard-Smith, 2018). The drive-in setting means it works as a reflexive comment on the trashier strands of cinema culture, and Trenchard-Smith pokes fun at both himself and the particular strand of Australian cinema he was working within. The drive-in screens examples from Trenchard-Smith's own filmography such as *Turkey Shoot* (1982), and by using his own films he does not denigrate the exploitation film or establish *Dead End* as being outside of its milieu. Because of its low-brow attractions, *Dead End* was only ever likely to appeal to those audiences that the film is satirizing, and so it works as a reflexive in-joke aimed at people who epitomize the attitudes and outlooks that Trenchard-Smith wanted to lampoon.

That the drive-in is used as the internment camp reflects old anxieties over the social use of cinema and the historical perceptions of the drive-in screens which were in fast decline by the time of production. Historically, animosity towards the drive-in was based on its potential for negatively affecting the revenues for regular cinema chains by cannibalizing the audience (Segrave 2006: 142). The idea was propagated that the audiences for both indoor and outdoor screens were naturally separate, and that primarily the drive-in was the preferred choice of those from working-class demographics (2006: 143). Also, the probability for overt sexual activity at the drive-in 'was obvious to observers from the very beginning' (2006: 148). Kerry Segrave reports that some of the outdoor venues in the United States employed police in uniform to address the problem. That the drive-in was designated as a 'passion pit' reflected anxiety over the nudity and pornographic content of what was playing on the screen, particularly in the mid- to late 1960s as censorship decreased in the wake of the end of the Hays code and the decline of the studio system. Segrave reports that concern over the

content was so great that it even resulted in police raids on certain properties with the intention of impounding sexploitation films such as *Inga* (Joseph W. Sarno, 1968) and *Starlett!* (Richard Kantor, 1969) along with other burlesque movies or X-rated porn films. By 1986, there were virtually no drive-ins left, and young people had no need for them to engage in sexual activity. Nor did they, through the presence of home video, need cinemas to watch low-budget exploitation. It was the beginning of the post-cinema period. Trenchard-Smith's film re-centres the cinema, and its influences both on-screen and off-screen, as an unruly place. *Dead End Drive-In* presents cinema as a symbol of the twentieth century that is now defunct and a home for the washed up and redundant. It presents cinema itself as being a feature of the post-apocalyptic.

Claire Corbett restricts *Dead End*'s context to Australian cultural concerns, noting the similarity between its originating short story and the film, with Miller's series (and other Australian post-apocalypse narratives). She poses the following series of questions:

Is it possible that they have arisen from the same elements in Australian history? Does the representation of these elements arise from a compulsion to both evoke and repress traumatic aspects of the colonial past? While the *Mad Max* films have been globally popular, do these stories feature uniquely Australian elements? (Corbett 2017: 331)

But, in the same way that the focus on male bodies in the Italian cycle is not only culturally specific, the privileging of the Australian-ness of the 'Crabs' story, and the implication that it illuminates a relatively narrow set of cultural anxieties, ignores how the narrative tropes, conventions and iconography present in *Dead End* (and *Mad Max*) readily crossed national boundaries. Focusing in on the uniqueness of their Australian roots implies that the multitude of transnational rip-offs are merely worthless facsimiles of the more 'meaningful' originals.

Rebecca Johinke's article examines the way Trenchard-Smith's film reveals anxieties in the Australia of the 1980s around immigration and heterosexual white masculinity. She writes that 'the Asian characters trucked into the drive-in are clearly based on Vietnamese "boat people" who arrived on Australian shores in the late 1970s and early 1980s', so in addition to being an explicit comment on race relations the film becomes an allegory for 'inter-generational conflict' (2009: 311). In conversation with me, and speaking from his home in the United States, Trenchard-Smith alluded to the continuing topicality of this reading,

by likening it to America under Donald Trump's presidency and the campaign against Muslim immigration.

The film has been called a socio-political allegory of the retro-future. I was attracted to the obvious symbol of the Vietnamese 'boat people' and the reaction to them when they desperately flung themselves on our shores. Now we are seeing it mirrored in the response to Islamic refugees – 'don't want 'em', 'too many of them'. We are watching in America an attempt to scrub away as much brown out of the voting base as possible. These kind of racist attitudes [was something I wanted to] get up front and centre. People thought at the time I'd overemphasized the racial issue. I don't think you can overemphasize something like that ... There's some interesting parallels there with the lead demagogue in the drive-in [who] says 'what about when one of these zipperheads tries to rape our women?' I should know the line better, but what we get in Trump's presidential campaign [is him] saying that Mexico is sending us rapists. If you want to demonise a class of people you smear them with a sex crime. History repeats itself. And drama repeats itself too. (Trenchard-Smith 2018)

Here, Trenchard-Smith is demonstrating an understanding of the way his films can have a relevance beyond the narrow national confines of Australia. Just as the conventions of the cycle crossed national boundaries, so too does its politics, which have continuing relevance so long as the political systems repeat themselves in different contexts and eras.

Yet while Johinke's reading is supported by Trenchard-Smith's own creative intentions, a strange paradox results from pursuing this interpretation. If the youths are victims of State policy by virtue of their imprisonment, it is a double switch within the film to then demarcate these victims as being villains when they turn against the Asian immigrants. Is the target of the film's commentary the populace, who are incarcerated against their will, or the State for introducing the drive-in as a detention centre? There is no sense that the white youths are being manipulated to blame people in the same situation as them (such as other poor people and immigrants), instead the implication is that their prejudice is a result simply of their own personal failings. If this is the case, it is a curiously apolitical reading divorced from the political and economic reasons that might inspire racism and xenophobia among people who otherwise might have a common cause. Are these racist youths villainous because they are ignorant? If this is the case, then the question should be asked as to why this is the case. Surely, it is because they have been let down by the State, who have failed to

provide education and economic opportunities to such an extent that they need the internment camp in the first place.

The thematic resemblance of *Dead End Drive-In* to the BBC Play for Today *Stars of the Roller State Disco* (Alan Clarke, 1984) reveals a cross-national fascination with how youth culture fads could be co-opted by the State to oppress and control.⁶ The roller disco of the title is also an employment office and holding pen for unemployed youths. They glide on skates around the track endlessly, eating from vending machines, avoiding bullies and indulging in joyless sex in a boiler room, all while hoping for jobs opportunities to arrive. Often the jobs are unpaid on the 'promise' that they will turn into fully paid positions in the future. The lead character of Carly, who considers himself a craftsman, is wise to this sort of dubious opportunity and hangs around in the disco longer than necessary because he wants a job befitting his skillset. While an admirable trait, Clarke also depicts his attitude as a symptom of institutionalization. Eventually, after his girlfriend leaves him, Carly slashes his own wrists while eulogizing on the benefits of the Roller State Disco. The camera follows as he circles the track while bleeding out, finishing on a freeze-frame that echoes the final image from *Rollerball*. In both cases, the track symbolizes a desolate space void of people and hope, whereas *Dead End Drive-In* and *Mad Max* end on movement with the cars on the road. Clarke cuts any movement dead with the use of the freeze-frame, and in this instance, it is the filmmaker who provides the end of the movement; the character within the diegesis is still moving, and it is only the freeze-frame that stops him.

Clarke explores the idea that movement as an activity provides an opportunity to explore life's purpose, which in this case is roller skating rather than the automobile obsessions of *Dead End* and *Mad Max*. What does it mean to be in motion, and what happens when that is all there is or, in the case of *Dead End*, when the possibility of movement is taken away? In *Stars of the Roller State Disco* the government provides a skating rink, which at least allows those interned to have some exercise, along with access to arcades and junk food. Swirling around on skates is a pointless movement because it goes nowhere. Like the cars

⁶ Alan Clarke was a prolific British director of television and film drama. His body of work repeatedly centred on the impact that the State and its institutions had on individuals, particularly those who struggled to fit in or conform. In *Stars of the Roller State Disco*, Clarke uses the graffiti aesthetic in politicized ways. In the background of shots there is visible graffiti of a mushroom cloud, the Circle A symbol of anarchism and the feminist slogan 'If men could menstruate abortions would be a sacrament'.

in *Dead End* that are built to cruise but sit impotent and stationary – and are reconditioned for other more static uses – ultimately, the act of skating is shown to be a redundant activity.

The marauding gangs in MadMaxploitation are subject to the same short-term sense of purpose as the youth in *Dead End Drive-In* and *Stars of the Roller State Disco*. Their movements through the wastelands are purposeless because the lifestyle is unsustainable. The gangs only have to keep moving on because they have destroyed the permanent communities they happen across. They continuously use up resources and so need to keep moving to find more. The distinction is in the freedom the gangs have. In *Dead End* and *Roller State Disco* the freedom is an illusion. The things the youths are given to do – watch movies, play arcade machines, learn skills, have fun – are ultimately illusory because there is an overarching system that controls them. There is a legal and bureaucratic system controlling and governing their interactions. The marauding biker gangs of the cycle do not face these challenges. They have ultimate freedom and an almost infinite number of ways that they could spend their time (depending on the landscape and resources). Instead they choose to act this way – they like this nomadic, violent lifestyle. It allows them to live out their fantasies, to do what they enjoy doing, renaming and reidentifying themselves, and dressing how they wish to dress.

Johinke writes that the Asian immigrants represent an enemy that ‘provides the men with an opportunity to validate and privilege their “crisis”, and in doing so reinforce their performance of collective masculinity’ (2009: 316). It is by them treating the drive-in as a closed-off independent space, similar to a country or nation like Australia, that the men can demarcate the space they have been allocated as their own, dividing it up into arbitrary zones for themselves to govern. The drive-in becomes the nation state that the white characters have claimed as their own. It is by having a fixed space that the wayward youths are given meaning. Without it, by being on the open road as the bikers and marauding gangs of the cycle are, masculinity becomes a performance untethered to anything of substance. The marauding gangs continually roam to find people, communities or property, to enact their performance of masculinity against. (The presence of female marauders does not change this interpretation because they either conform to traditional feminine roles or also perform the traditionally masculine activities that the male members of the gangs do.)

According to Johinke, Jimmy’s escape temporarily renders him ‘the type of heroic character usually seen on cinema screens’ (2009: 316) and marks the

moment he breaks free of his previous social constraints and becomes a man. Corbett also makes this observation (2017: 349), noting that the film opts for the 'heroic ending' in contrast to the short story (where there is a more conspicuous fantasy element when Jimmy actually transforms into a car himself). Theodore F. Sheckels, in his examination of Australian cinematic heroism, also suggests that Jimmy's story is 'much more heroic' than that of Max in *Beyond Thunderdome* (2002: 183). However, while Jimmy certainly takes decisive masculine action by jumping over the wall in his truck, he does not 'become a man' by doing anything especially heroic. Despite him standing up for the Asian populace of the drive-in, Jimmy liberates nobody but himself. This is in contrast to the overwhelming tendency across the rest of the cycle, where the disinterested road warrior, who often has no personal connection to the plot, ascends to heroic status by being willing to sacrifice themselves for a more vulnerable third party or justifiable cause (epitomized most evidently at the climax to both *The Road Warrior* and *Beyond Thunderdome*). Instead, Jimmy merely escapes and leaves them all to it.

Dead End Drive-In ends with Jimmy's car soaring over the exterior wall and him escaping. The concluding shot, preceded as in *Mad Max* by a close-up of our hero driving, is shot from the front of the car, with the white line bisecting the screen for the duration of the end credits. In *Mad Max*, it is a permanently physically and mentally scarred man heading into 'the wasteland', which represents physical liberty but really stands for the end of civilization. In *Dead End*, the road means literal freedom in comparison to being taken care of (in a manner of sorts) by the State within the drive-in itself.

Dead End satirizes the sense of freedom offered by youth culture and details a society that is both free and oppressed simultaneously. But, because it satirizes the idea of liberty in a society of persistent state interference, it comes closer to films like *Death Race 2000* in theme. Unlike the other films that have been studied in this chapter, in *Dead End*, the graffiti, the gangs, the remaking of culture in its own image (reduced to symbols, based around repurposing of what is already there, rather than building anything new) is endorsed by the state.

Exploiting new formats

The use of contemporary fashions is one of the ways film cycles 'maintain a correspondence with contemporary culture through the incorporation of

everyday objects' (Stanfield 2015: 13). Indeed, this reliance on contemporary fashions is the reason 'why [these] movies fast become outmoded' (2015: 13). The 'look' of the cycle threatens to time-stamp it as a uniquely 1980s trend. But the natural tendency towards impending 'built-in obsolescence' of the previous exploitation cycles (Stanfield 2015: 2) was challenged by the industry's move towards home viewing possibilities in the 1970s and 1980s. MadMaxploitation coincided with what Frederic Wasser calls the 'golden years' of home video between 1981 and 1986 (2001: 104). By 1983, he observes, this part of the industry was worth \$1 billion in the United States alone (2001: 116). The coming of home viewing and the VCR not only afforded new opportunities for increasing the lifespan of exploitation films but also presented a fresh market for films made in the 1980s, a market that did not rely on cinemas to find an audience. As the appetite for exploitation films in theatres decreased, most of the films in the cycle would have been released onto home video formats. This affected their potential audiences, critical reception, legacy and form. Perhaps the most extreme example of the repetition at work across the cycle is in the Canadian 'series' consisting of *Maniac Warriors* and its follow-up *Last of the Warriors* (Lloyd Simandl, Michael Mazo, 1989). These two films were released as *Empire of Ash* in some territories, but as a trilogy consisting of *three* films, together with the sequels *II* and *III*. *Empire of Ash* and *Empire of Ash II* actually comprised only *Maniac Warriors*, which was released twice under these different numerical titles. By releasing the same film twice under two distinct titles the producers were not only relying on the repetition of on-screen content (using the same locations, cast, crew and story) but also ensured that there was a literal repetition of the same content by selling an identical film to the market twice.

Among the many changes that transformed the industry since the beginning of VCR in 1975, and which continued into the 1990s, were the new styles of filmmaking as well as the new markets (Wasser 2001: 3). Wasser speculates that after 1987 sales and rentals of videocassettes were making up roughly 40 per cent of US film industry revenue, but this was not because its success had worked to negatively impact other markets, in a process of 'cannibalization', but had instead generated a fresh source of income as an addition to the revenues studios had received from theatrical releases (2001: 4). One of the main financial opportunities was to sell a movie directly to the consumer, often in non-traditional places such as petrol stations, fast food outlets (2001: 11) or the newly created, specialist video shop, rather than in the cinema theatre. It was also a period of experimentation into what kind of product could be sold. Music

videos, such as *Michael Jackson's Thriller* (John Landis, 1983), as well as fitness and workout tapes, and of course pornography, were also a big part of what could be rented and bought for home viewing. While Wasser points out that it was the success of independent distributors that contributed significantly to the building of the home video market, the rapid growth of sales of videocassettes now 'paved way for their ultimate doom' (2001: 12), in that wholesalers would privilege the stocking and distribution of blockbusters backed by major studio marketing pushes, leaving the independents to either fold or be swallowed up and merged with big studios (2001: 12). However, initially, during the period that this chapter covers, the opportunity opened up for producers and marketers of exploitation film product. Menahem Golan, whose Canon Films were one of the production companies who truly optimized the opening of the VCR market, claimed that there was 'space for the mediocre' (Yule 1987: 85), and that there were simply not enough big-budget Hollywood blockbusters to satisfy the demand of home video audiences (Wasser 2001: 123). During the 1980s, independent companies such as Canon and New World would have up to twice as many films in production as the major studios (in Canon's case up to three times as many) (Wasser 2001: 123).

The biggest opportunity for producers and distributors of exploitation product was the success of higher profile, and often bigger budget, films. The established formula of the MadMaxploitation cycle allowed for an interplay between filmmakers and the market. *Death Run* is one of the few British variants of this cycle and one that is entirely amateur. It was shot on 16mm for £4,000 (Moore 2014: 112), but with a cast and crew working for free (Lyndon 2018).⁷ So threadbare was the production that cast members report playing multiple roles as well as being crew members (Lyndon and Longhurst 2018). *Death Run* was inspired by director's Michael J. Murphy's ability to watch other MadMaxploitation films on VHS (Moore 2014: 111). And because of the developing international video market, Murphy was able to sell a film with little chance of theatrical exhibition and fund his next amateur production.

⁷ The now deceased Michael J. Murphy was a prolific auteur, whose legacy lives on with the restoration and preservation of his work through Murlyn Films – kept together by previous collaborators, cast and crew. In addition, the spirit of no-budget filmmaking that Murphy fostered during his active years has continued. Phil Lyndon, an actor in *Death Run*, has written and starred in *Fixer* (Sam Mason-Bell, 2019), under the banner of the Trash Arts company in Portsmouth, England. This very low budget crime narrative also stars Patrick Olliver from *Death Run*.



Figures 7 (a)–(b) Production stills from *Death Run* (1987) – warrior woman Barbara (Debbi Stevens) and the John Pounds Scrapyard in Portsmouth, England, where it was filmed.



Figures 7 (a)–(b) Continued.

Wasser points out that it was also common that customers would ‘often leave the video rental store without their first choice under their arm’ (2001: 149). My own experience, and that of my friends, confirms this to be the most typical result of a trip to the video store. This is where the ‘intertextual dialogue’ of the titling becomes especially relevant. The ephemerality of titles and an ability to substitute one for the other was common to exploitation cinema prior to VCR, accounting for much of its cyclical nature, and was a practice that continued into the home market. If the video store’s copy of *The Road Warrior* had been rented by someone else, then the next best thing would be a film with ‘road’, ‘warrior’ or associated terms such as ‘future’ or ‘wasteland’ in the title, accompanied by a cover that promised material interchangeable with that of the ‘original’. This would extend to other areas of exploitation cycles, such as the war movies around the time of the success of the *Rambo* films, and in the case of *Codename: Wild Geese* (Antonio Margheriti, 1984) a borrowing of the title from the more famous *The Wild Geese* (Andrew V. McLaglen, 1978). The emergence of home video meant a move towards a wider landscape of post-cinema media which was, according to Denson and Leyda, ‘interactive, networked, mobile, environmental, and convergent’ (2016: 1). With the ability to discuss films in private spaces, to copy (pirate) them and pass them to

like-minded friends, the 'intertextual dialogue' was happening both in and around these titles.

There was a developing awareness of how an extended life in the market could exist for product that was previously short-lived. With home viewing and the VCR, the industry begins selling the film directly to the consumer, rather than tickets for time spent in the theatre. Also, the derivativeness of exploitation cycles – the repetition of tropes and iconography – becomes more readily identifiable when people can rewatch movies in short spaces of time at no extra cost. In addition, the technical and creative shortcomings of many lower budget titles can be examined in closer detail. Filmmaking errors and deficiencies become magnified with the ability to pause and watch on repeat.⁸ It would of course mean that films could live longer in the memory of fans because they could physically own a copy, and its circulation was no longer just in the hands of distributors and exhibition chains. As David Church notes in *Grindhouse Nostalgia*, the 'range of material sites', from theatres through to home viewing, gives films from the margins such as those discussed in this book, which are often produced on very low budgets and independent of major studios, to be 'resilient against the forces of obsolescence' (Church 2015: 1).

If there was a 'built-in obsolescence' to previous cycles, such as the beach movie and then the biker film, as correctly observed by Peter Stanfield, then VHS provided a disruption for this model, one which both Miller's series and the filmmakers wishing to capitalize on its popularity took immediate advantage. Xavier Mendik puts the timing of the cycle's end at about 1989 (2015: 211), whereas Kim Newman estimates it at around 1992, when low-budget action producers turned to cashing in on films such as *Die Hard* (John McTiernan, 1988). Yet the presence of the cycle on home video meant that it never fully fell into complete redundancy. The high-budget studio attempts to replicate its mood and style in *Tank Girl* (Rachel Talalay, 1995) and *Waterworld*, alongside occasional other variations cropping up every few years, such as the British *Doomsday* (Neil Marshall, 2008), were made in response to the dominant themes, trends and fashions of the decade following *The Road Warrior*. As well as transposing the basic premise of *Escape from New York* to Scotland,

⁸ One of the aesthetic shifts prompted by video was a move towards what Charles Eidsvik calls the 'glance', as opposed to the 'gaze' (in Wasser 2001: 197), to account for the increase in rapid cutting and the more frenzied film style that accelerated in popular film in the 1980s, though the post-apocalypse films *The Killing Edge* (Lindsay Shonteff, 1987) and *Shatter Dead* (Scooter McCrae, 1992), both shot on videotape, contradict this observation by relying on longer takes.

Doomsday also restaged some of the most iconic stunts from the *Mad Max* series. Because its iconographic elements are now a permanent feature of film culture, MadMaxploitation never truly belongs to the past.

Conclusion

Peter Stanfield claims that *Easy Rider*, the most popular biker movie of all, took the cycle's blue collar and low-brow tropes and made them bourgeois (2018: 101). It is an idea that usefully sums up *Fury Road*'s relationship to MadMaxploitation. Several of the details of the critically marginalized MadMaxploitation cycle recur in *Fury Road*: the presence of a female road warrior, the relegation of the male hero to the fringes, questioning of patriarchal tendencies, a despotic/quasi-religious cult leader, references to 'blood bags', water as a resource and so on. What was once thought of as evidence of the disreputable or a result of filmmaking incompetence has been used as evidence for George Miller's genius as a moviemaker and artist. That *Fury Road* was written without them in mind, demonstrates how the topical references, the desolate landscapes and locations, and the costume styles they were built around became the dominant way of rendering the post-apocalyptic on-screen even after the main period of cyclical production had finished. The cycle, indirectly through the critically lauded *Fury Road*, has moved from the margins to the mainstream.

Fury Road and the imitation of exploitation

Though released in 2015, *Mad Max Fury Road* had been in gestation since 2003, initially with the intention of having Mel Gibson reprise the title role. Due to a number of financial difficulties its production was postponed for a decade. *The Art of Fury Road* reveals that when it finally appeared in theatres, it was in a remarkably similar incarnation to that which had originally been envisaged by Miller and his collaborators back in 2003. While the final released version was assumed by some commentators to have been imbued with the cultural attitudes of the time, its thematic premise and version of a post-apocalyptic world was conceived in the immediate post-millennium years. The script followed the same pattern, had the same cast of characters and featured similar designs on many of the vehicles and costumes. As discussed in the previous chapter, the sense of repetition that characterized the MadMaxploitation cycle extended into many of the elements of *Fury Road*. This repetition also includes innumerable other references back to the original trilogy, such as the reappearance of the musical toy and resurrecting the motif of ominous crows from the first film. There was also continuity in its cast and crew. Nico Lathouris, who had acted in *Mad Max*, was one of its co-writers, and Hugh Keays-Byrne returned as the main villain, Immortan Joe, after originally playing the Toecutter,¹ while second-unit director Guy Norris had performed several notable stunts in *The Road Warrior*.

When writing his monograph on the original series, Adrian Martin speculated on what a future 'Mad Max 4' would look like and concluded that it would likely be produced using the now ubiquitous computer-generated imagery (2003). Martin was acknowledging that *Mad Max* would be returning in a new era of digital film production, one that had transcended increasingly outmoded and redundant analogue and live-action methods. The decade in which *Fury Road*

¹ This continuity in casting stretches back even further as Keays-Byrne is also a prominent cast member of Ozploitation biker movie *Stone*.

was eventually released was also a new era for exploitation cinema. Whereas *Beyond Thunderdome* had been released during the VHS home video boom, *Fury Road* came out at a time when exploitation product had moved away from home viewing on VHS and DVD and onto streaming platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime Video. Also, by being released thirty years after *Beyond Thunderdome*, it came out after historical exploitation cinema had been reappraised by critics and audiences and had been reappropriated by mainstream filmmakers as a style and form rather than as something that emerged from a specific economic production context.

As David Church observes in *Grindhouse Nostalgia*, one response to changes in industry and technology is a nostalgia for a sense of community (though not always a convivial community) that may have been, in part, imaginary in the first place. As he writes, 'past spaces of consumption can be nostalgically linked to particular time periods and audiences' (2015: 5). One example is the phrase 'grindhouse era,' which suggests a clear sense of place – the grotty cinema auditorium, possibly on 42nd Street in New York, as well as an ethos and aesthetic of unruly films and illicit content. In part, these ideas are forged out of films from the period that were often set in and around grindhouse theatres² and also out of almost entirely nostalgic works produced much later such as *Grindhouse* (Robert Rodriguez, Quentin Tarantino, 2007). This faux double-bill portmanteau film comprises a zombie film, 'Planet Terror' (Robert Rodriguez), and a car-based slasher film, 'Death Proof' (Quentin Tarantino), and accompanied by fake trailers for non-existent films (directed by fans of the grindhouse era such as Rob Zombie and Edgar Wright) to give the impression that the audience is spending time in a grindhouse theatre during some bygone era. The success and attention given to high-profile ersatz exploitation movies like *Grindhouse* also became a catalyst for the re-releasing of older exploitation titles and as the inspiration for a slate of new low-budget and low-profile productions that could find an audience in the market due to the newfound enthusiasm for the form. Often, these new exploitation films in the wake of *Grindhouse*, such

² Director James Glickenhaus contributed to this aesthetic by making exploitation films set on 42nd Street, such as *The Exterminator*. Also, his *Shakedown* (1988) features a character temporarily living in The Lyric theatre, who sleeps in the auditorium and brushes his teeth in its public bathroom. In a self-reflexive moment, The Lyric is playing a double bill of *The Exterminator* and another of Glickenhaus's films, *The Soldier* (1982). The MadMaxploitation film *Steel Dawn* is also showing at the Cine 42 during a car chase sequence, indicating that the production for those scenes took place on the week of 13 November 1987, according to the listings (Filibus 2018).

as *Nude Nuns with Big Guns* (Joseph Guzman, 2010) and *Hobo with a Shotgun* (Jason Eisener, 2011), achieved the stylistic 'effect' of degraded film stock and lo-fi analogue techniques through the use of digital tools.

Though its source material had been a low-budget yet highly successful exploitation film, *Fury Road* was instead a mainstream blockbuster produced on a significant production budget. While it utilized a substantial digital process to create landscapes, augment its live-action footage and achieve specific effects, it was 'sold' on its reliance on genuine stunt work. This 'for realness' and sense of authenticity and danger was crucial to its marketing as well as its critical and commercial success. *Fury Road*, with its foregrounding in the marketing materials of dangerous stunts being performed by real stunt men in real vehicles, its initial theatrical release in 3D, as well as being a sequel to a famous exploitation film, signalled a return to a tradition of spectacle that was in keeping with other recreations of 'exploitation' happening in the second decade of the twenty-first century.

Amid the impression of 'authenticity' that pervaded the conversations about *Fury Road* was the issue of its release in 3D, which is rarely mentioned on discourse surrounding the film. Although not shot using a custom 3D camera (Panavision 2015) and converted during the post-production process, Miller clearly designed sequences to exploit the format. The final moment of the chase is a huge crash into the camera, done for real, but with the Doof Warrior's guitar and a steering wheel emblazoned with Joe's symbol digitally added to project out into the auditorium. This technique is a long-standing element of Miller's style, and he uses similar devices in the previous films, such as the camera sat at road level waiting for a speeding ambulance to pass in *Mad Max*, shattered car wreckage hitting the lens in *The Road Warrior* or a train heading into the camera in *Beyond Thunderdome*.

When considering the status of the car accident in early cinema Karen Beckman reminds us of Tom Gunning's observation that the cinema of attractions is concerned with a movement *towards* the spectator, rather than an attempt at 'absorbing' them into the diegesis (Beckman 2010: 9). The breaking of the fourth wall and directly addressing the audience was one method for doing so, but the filming of moving vehicles in the early silent era also became an appropriate tool to experiment with the process. Beckman writes:

The figure of a mechanical collision is articulated through the use of formal devices that attempt in different ways to exceed the limitations or parameters of

the medium, and at times this produces an interesting correlation among scenes of mechanical accident, the expression of liminal or transgressive social desires, and experimental or innovative formal gestures. (Beckman 2010: 35)

The sense of 'shock' and transgression created by these early attractions was realized by placing the camera in a position so that objects such as vehicles like trains and cars appear to be heading towards it, and by extension also towards those watching the screen. In *Fury Road*, Miller's adoption of 3D renders this gestural movement towards the audience as literal, with objects and bodies appearing to break from the screen and into the auditorium in a development of his style that goes beyond similar camera placement in the previous films in the series. In *Fury Road*, the action is staged directly in front of the camera, so that the object can appear to pass through the lens/screen and into the face of the viewer, whether they are watching in 3D or not. The use of 3D is the logical conclusion of this particular recurring technique.

3D signals an explicit return to the cinema of attractions model, which always 'foreground the role of spectator' (Gunning 2004: 43). By having objects projected into the audience's face, the spectator is being directly addressed. If we take the assumption that to watch a 3D movie is to experience the narrative world in a different way than 2D – by creating an impression you are 'there', an illusion of being in the space on screen, objects move as if literally coming towards you from out of the screen – then the filmmaker is breaching the 'fourth wall'. The implication is one of physical immersion into the narrative world and conversely of the film rupturing the separation between film and auditorium. If 'attraction' through the generation of pleasure in looking is presenting the unusual, the taboo or the causing of visceral sensation (Gunning 2004: 44), then this is the central purpose of the production and marketing of exploitation cinema traditions. The marketing of a movie as being in 3D emphasizes the process of looking, maintaining a separation with the world of the film by drawing attention to the falseness of the spectacle but doing so on the premise that by it being in 3D, the audience is invited to be even closer to the action. It implies the film will feel more real, even if the audience is being made more aware of the artifice of the process.

Miller's use of 3D for *Fury Road* only exemplifies the overall impression of *Mad Max* as being that of spectacle. Miller's narratives of chase and crash, exoticism and show, violence and sensation are part of a continuity running from early cinema and through the traditions surrounding the exploitation movie.

With the use of 3D, he adopts a technique closely associated with the B movie and historically associated with the trashy rather than the earnest. While Miller's integration of action spectacle into narrative is as keen and skilfully employed as ever, *Fury Road* demands a 'looked-at-ness' in its use of 3D. While this aims at a viewer's absorption into the screen, when it is viewed through glasses you might not be used to wearing, or when watching the 2D version, attention is drawn to the act of looking.

Likewise, the 'Black and Chrome' edition that was released on Blu-ray disk in 2016 also hinges on selling the film due to its 'look' rather than narrative. Miller himself stated that 'the best version of this movie is black and white', and that because monochrome is the 'reserve of art movies now' the implication is that this is the classier version (Lyne 2016). That to shoot in black and white was Miller's original intention also implies it is more definitive than both the colour and 3D releases.

But the Black and Chrome edition, far from being the 'definitive' version of the film, is presented in such a high contrast that it compresses the *mise en scène*, reducing it to indistinct matter. Much of the richness of the background detail – the props, the costumes and idiosyncrasy of the vehicles – is lost in the denseness of the 'black' parts of the frame. When the War Boys decorate their faces with chrome spray paint, it is harder to see the distinction between the shininess of the paint and their whiteness of their bodies. A key feature of the series and the resulting cycle is the vibrancy of their *mise en scène* and the meanings generated in the tiny details, props and costumes that are not given narrative prominence but which contribute to the ways the films can be understood. By reducing this detail to being either 'black' or 'white', the clashing symbolism is lost and the meaning changes. Or, at least, previous meanings we can attribute to the films have been negated. The 'looked-at-ness' of the 3D and Black and Chrome versions is therefore distinct from their narrative. It is an added layer of spectacle used to market the film and is divorced from its content and the narrative chain of events.

Fury Road and exploitation cinema's past, future and present

In *Grindhouse Nostalgia*, David Church refers to a trend of 'retrosploitation', where films made in the digital DVD era specifically reference the look and tone of films made from the analogue 1970s and the VHS exploitation films

of the 1980s. This harking back to bygone eras also extends to the marketing and distribution materials, such as posters and artwork and packaging. Slasher film *The Sleeper* (Justin Russell, 2012), for example, was manufactured to look as if the buyer was picking up an old VHS tape from a rental store. This is an extension of the ‘fetishisation of cinematic decay’ (2015: 121) that characterized some of *Grindhouse*’s stylistic flourishes. This aesthetic, which is ‘indebted as much to the early years of home video as to the glory days of grindhouse theatres’ (2015: 124), can also be found in other revivals of films made outside of the milieu of exploitation cinema. The entertainment retailer HMV, for example, rereleased popular Paramount Pictures titles from the 1980s on Blu-ray and DVD, such as *Beverly Hills Cop* (Martin Brest, 1984), *Back to the Future* (Robert Zemeckis, 1985), *48 Hours* (Walter Hill, 1982) and *The Warriors*, in faux VHS packaging, in the same size and shape casing as if it contained a videocassette (Palmer 2018).

Retrosploitation’s ‘deliberate archaism’ (Church 2015: 124) sees filmmakers ‘compensating for their historical newness and cultural visibility by drawing mnemonic value from a longer tradition of marginalised film history’ (2015: 125). As Church notes, this leads to a tendency for the tone to vary through homage, pastiche and into parodic territory (2015: 125). By way of example, he cites *Black Dynamite* (Scott Sanders, 2009) and how it parodies blaxploitation and contrasts it with films like *The Sleeper* or *Run! Bitch! Run!* (Joseph Guzman, 2009) that avoid parodic effect in favour of a more sombre and non-ironic tone, which appears to be an attempt to ‘seamlessly disguise themselves among their historical referents’ (2015: 125). *Grindhouse* itself clearly passes through these variants in tone; from the pastiche of the zombie movie in ‘Planet Terror’, through the clear comedic parody of the faux trailers, through to Tarantino’s evidently more earnest carsploitation slasher ‘Death Proof’. Furthermore, while some retrosploitation films are located in the times that they were made but were altered in post-production to look like artefacts from the past, others are set in the period of the ‘post-classical’ exploitation period between 1950 and 1980 (2015: 125).

In many ways, despite its progenitors coming from an exploitation background, *Fury Road* exists outside of these paradigms. It is not degraded visually, for example. However, because its origins are from the post-classical period it alludes to practices which exemplify the ‘specialness’ of this era. Because its narrative takes place in the future, but one that was designed in the past – that is to say, it has a view of the future dependent on a post-punk 1979–85 aesthetic – it is similarly trading on, and selling itself on, its retro qualities. Its

vision of the future is almost entirely reliant upon recreating a cinematic past, going back to Miller's origins to old stories and old visions of what the world would look like when destroyed. *Fury Road's* narrative is the future according to the 1980s rather than the future according to 2015, because it takes place outside of the industrial turn towards digital technology (bar a few oblique references such as the casing of a mobile phone on Immortan Joe's armour), and therefore takes place in an alternative present. Beyond this, the memes and online activity, such as a fan-made mock-up of *Fury Road* as a Warner Bros. home video release, are an attempt to relocate the film among this 1980s VHS zeitgeist (see next chapter for more). This is evidence that fans want to consume it as part of the same lineage of 1980s exploitation, a desire made on the premise of nostalgia for a nearly redundant filmmaking mode and a defunct home release format. That the official 'Legacy Trailer' for *Fury Road* also begins with the red 1970s Warner Bros. ident demonstrates that its location by fans as part of a historical lineage was also encouraged by the production company behind its release.

In David Lerner's essay on how *Grindhouse* attempts to recreate an imagined memory of the theatrical grindhouse experience, he points out that much of the interest and joy for fans of exploitation and paracinema is in the way they can 'insert themselves into textual gaps' (2010: 359). This practice is closed down by Rodriguez and Tarantino 'inadvertently', because they 'employ distancing techniques in the self-conscious foregrounding of its materiality' (2010: 358). In 'Planet Terror', the 'reel' crackles and melts throughout, as if aged and degraded, but it does so at opportune moments, such as during Rose McGowan's go-go dance over the opening titles. Other times the film pretends to break down causing an ellipsis in narrative, returning to find characters in the middle of a battle and several of them already dead. In 'Death Proof', Tarantino introduces a 'missing reel' segment that imagines that it has been misplaced while travelling between projection booths that creates the effect of a suspenseful jump in the story. But by doing so textual gaps are *re-created*; they are not really textual gaps at all, only creative decisions necessary for the film/s to be understood in a way their makers intend. The core audience for such material, fans of paracinema, exploitation and cult cinema, are thus locked out of the film, at least in the way they would normally enjoy the process of being a fan of that sort of movie. *Grindhouse* is an exploitation film aimed at audiences who are not fans of exploitation and works only, as Lerner writes, as 'a pedagogical reflection on cinematic history' (2010: 359). They appear as if they are materially degraded, antiquated exploitation films from a bygone era, but in reality they are not. *Fury*

Road circumvents identical criticism because the *Mad Max* series is not prone to the same breakdown in form and incoherence common to the exploitation films that came before and after, hence one of the reasons why they were absorbed into the mainstream far more quickly and readily than equivalent movies. *Mad Max* transcended its origins by being a superior product and whose success meant greater budgets were on offer for Miller to make the sequels, unlike someone such as Miller's contemporary Brian Trenchard-Smith, who was continually making films with relatively limited resources throughout his career.

Instead, the supposed authenticity of *Fury Road* is in its utilization of stunt performers and a lack of CGI effects to achieve its action sequences. So, a similar discussion around cinema history that took place around *Grindhouse* also appeared around *Fury Road*. Both are films that are imitations of historical cinemas that existed at the margins of film culture, yet are aimed at mainstream audiences, and minus the formal incongruities that kept those cinemas at the margins in the first place. What has been created is a facsimile of exploitation cinema's past. *Fury Road* cannibalizes the previous films in the series, and because of the inherent repetition of film cycles, inadvertently it repeats tropes from other post-apocalypse films that relied on *Mad Max* as their main inspiration. But also, its marketing and the buzz around the film centred on its return to the supposedly more authentic mode of film production that favoured staging actual physical stunts and crashes in an attempt to recall the past as an indicator of something more genuine or real. As Evan Calder Williams writes in *Shard Cinema*, it was lauded as 'some messianic rejoinder to the excesses and insubstantiality of the digital' (2017: 153) and notes how an online review by screenwriting guru Robert McKee marvelled that it 'doesn't have CGI cars bouncing weightlessly across a desert, kicking up weightless sand. It has real cars. Really driving. Across a real desert' (McKee, in Williams 2017: 153). This more 'authentic' mode of production recalls that of carsploitation of the 1970s, which Robert J. Read points out was predicated upon being 'entirely real', with 'real cars, real speed, and real danger', and which often resulted in severe injuries or even fatalities of the stunt men involved (Read 2016: 100).

There are, however, multiple contradictions to indicate that this was a manufactured authenticity, mainly based on the abundant use of CG to create the look and stunt effects. There is a willing amnesia in play around the discourse surrounding the film and a consistent attempt by the production and marketing team to play down the role of the visual effects. Clearly, the stunt work of the series is one of its principal selling points and one of the reasons for their critical

and commercial success. A huge amount of space in Luke Buckmaster's telling of the series' production history is devoted to the mechanics and logistics of creating the stunt sequences. That 'Miller and Max' is the book's title indicates the extent to which it is the handling and staging of stunts that is Miller's contribution to cinema history, especially given how much of the space in the book is dedicated to the staging of the action. His vision and skill in this area is what, according to Buckmaster, defines him. The chapter heading of 'Doing It for Real' (2017: 72) fetishizes Miller's stunt-creating ethos, which is an undoubtedly dangerous process that has yielded some remarkable results, with several quite stunning action set pieces and an Academy Award win for Best Editing.

The behind the scenes featurette entitled 'Crash and Smash' (2017a) on the Black and Chrome edition Blu-ray disk boasts the lack of CGI in the action scenes in honour of the various crews who staged and performed the highly dangerous and impressive stunts. In 'Maximum Fury' on the same disk Guy Norris states that the intention was to 'go back to the roots [of the originals] to get that kinetic energy on camera' (Norris 2017b). In *The Art of Mad Max Fury Road* Miller does praise the visual effects team headed by 'polymath' Andrew Jackson, as well as the colour work of Eric Whipp. But, he does so only after emphasizing that 'as much as possible those are real people, cast and stunties, in the speeding vehicles and catastrophic crashes' (Miller, in Bernstein 2015: 8). By writing 'as much as possible', Miller is positioning the use of VFX as unavoidable, as if they would have produced everything through practical effects and stunt work had they been allowed. This emphasis on positioning the practical work above the VFX is repeated throughout the book. Storyboard artist Mark Sexton is quoted as saying that *The Road Warrior*

is almost pure cinema. There's something very elegantly clean and efficient about how that world's portrayed. So that was the paradigm we were looking for – we just needed to actually make it grittier and darker, but we wanted to make sure everything was done for real. We all agreed very early we didn't want it to be a VFX/CGI fest, we wanted it to feel like it was actually done for real, that everything had that tangibility and that tactile quality that doing things for real gives you. (in Bernstein 2015: 18)

The implication is that the 'purity' of *The Road Warrior* is down to its lack of artifice, and the conspicuous artificiality of the use of a computer dilutes the cinematic qualities. It implies that true cinema, in its purest form, is genuine, and that it can be tainted by the use of a computer. When the book addresses

the issue of VFX use, which it is compelled to because of the extent to which computers were used to achieve the overall visual design, it is keen to stress that its presence is minimal. For example, Bernstein mentions that Jackson comes from a background in creating practical effects, and that 'much of the VFX work ... will be undetectable by the audience' (2015: 20). Jackson himself is quoted as believing that live stunts are important to the ethos of the film, that 'it wouldn't be right to do a big thumping CG event for the very first crash' (in Bernstein 2015: 27). Thanks to the almost entirely CG sandstorm sequence, the account of the production cannot downplay the use of VFX completely, and nearly all other mentions of the effects emphasize that part of it which was real, based on something that exists or created mostly in-camera.

For example, the initial tests for a sequence involving polecats, attackers on flexible poles attached to trucks that can swoop down and grab people, looked 'puppeteered' (Miller 2017) when created with digitally composited shots of moving vehicles combined with another of the performers working from a stationary position. The use of a computer to create the shot in this instance revealed the hand of the filmmakers, as do poorly rendered effects. It is the onscreen performers, rather than those working off-screen, that should be the attraction.

This line of thinking in the marketing and creation of *Fury Road* ignores that in the digital age the distinction between the 'real' and the 'artificial' has collapsed. Lev Manovich, writing in *The Language of New Media*, notes that cinema has always attempted to divest itself of 'its origins in artifice' (2001: 298). Prior to when it established itself in terms of its art and uses of technology, moving images in the nineteenth century were a form of animation; 'manual construction of images, loop actions, the discrete nature of space and movement' (2001: 298). Animation in the twentieth century then 'became a depository for nineteenth century moving-image techniques left behind by the cinema' (2001: 298).

Animation does not attempt to hide its artificialness because 'its visual language is more aligned to the graphic than to the photographic' (2001: 298). Cinema, on the other hand, attempts to hide its constructions. It uses actors to pretend to be invented characters and artificial sets to represent real locations. The effect is to give the impression of documenting a happening (and through early experiments by the Lumiere Brothers it emerges out of such a practice). Manovich writes that the use of techniques such as back-projection, the use of mirrors, optical effects like painted matte backdrops and foregrounds and anything that 'could reveal that cinema was not really different from animation' (2001: 299) were disavowed by 'practitioners, historians, and critics' (2001: 299).

Manovich's analysis here is a little simplistic and does not take into consideration outliers to this tendency such as the special effects work of Ray Harryhausen, for example. In films like *Jason and the Argonauts* (Don Chaffey, 1963) and *Clash of the Titans* (Desmond Davis, 1981), there is a clear distinction between live action created by the film's director and the stop-motion animated action scenes created by Harryhausen, and it was the latter's efforts that were most notable and celebrated by fans and historians of cinema. Nevertheless, it is tempting to draw a continuous line between this more dismissive attitude towards animation from cinema's past and the discourse surrounding *Fury Road* with its eagerness to present it as being 'for real'.

Manovich contends that the digital turn has redefined cinema and renders it all as a form of animation and that the distinction between live action and animation (which has always been a myth) is no longer valid. Instead, the connection between both forms is laid bare. At the centre of this argument is the digitization process which means that live action footage 'loses its privileged indexical relationship to prefilmic reality' (2001: 300). The computer renders everything as pixels, whether it is filmstock, computer graphics, music and so on. It all becomes the same material and so live action shooting is no longer the principal element of a film but just another material for use in the construction. This means that in the process of filmmaking the job roles cross over. The processes of editing and creating special effects are no longer separated because of their shared necessity of the use of a computer.

Manovich continues:

Live-action footage is now only raw material to be manipulated by hand – animated, combined with 3-D computer generated scenes, and painted over. The final images are constructed manually from different elements, and all elements are either created entirely from scratch or modified by hand ... *Digital cinema is a particular case of animation that uses live-action footage as one of its many elements.* (2001: 302)

David Church observes in relation to fandom that a nostalgia for analogue forms and previous modes of making films ensures that 'their stance towards emergent technologies is often infused with a longing to occupy the past' (2015: 9). In this, we can see the way directors who are also conspicuous fans of cinema such as Tarantino, and the other imitators of exploitation movies, deliberately avoid aligning their work with the clean and polished digital aesthetic. But in doing so, and making films that look materially degraded, they

are only proving that the digital aesthetic both holds and contains the analogue 'filmic' aesthetic within its range of potentialities. Now that 'the digital' has taken over and monopolized cinema at all levels and stages of production and exhibition, it can contribute to a film looking like an old 35mm print, or Super 8mm, including grain and technical dropouts.

The work of cinematographer Steve Yedlin to achieve an artificial 'film look', for example, involved him identifying four elements that make up such an effect: halation, gate weave, grain and colour rendition (Heller 2020). He then created an algorithm for each that could replicate the type of cinematographic image associated with shooting on film stock. This is to say that the 'look' of film is itself now a part of the digital aesthetic. The aged 'look' of productions that recall the grindhouse era is not distinct from the design of a film such as *Ghost in the Shell* (Rupert Sanders, 2017), where it is conceived to be deliberately and conspicuously 'digital'. This 'live action' version of the renowned cyberpunk anime has a visual dimension of neon and smoothness, and includes multiple fake digital glitches to signify a breakdown in form and disruption of the digital signal. The degraded analogue look in something like *Grindhouse* references an epoch of roughly the analogue 1970s, but the design of *Ghost in the Shell* is just as artificial, even if it is attempting to resemble a technology that is closer in time and how it works (in that it is using the digital to comment on the digital) than the analogue production practices were to *Grindhouse* in 2007.

Stephen Prince highlights how, rather than being evidence of greater artifice, 'visual effects merely provide a more overt kind of construction' (2012: 2), not less authentic a tool of filmmaking than safety rigging when it comes to the creation of spectacular scenes of action. He writes that 'visual effects are not a peripheral element of cinema but a core feature, essential to its operation as a narrative medium' (2012: 2). Prince rejects the differential between the use of visual effects and so-called cinematic realism and points out that instead visual effects can be used to achieve a verisimilitude (2012: 2). The gap between the two methods goes back to the beginning of film history, between the actuality of the Lumiere Brothers and the fantasy constructions of Georges Méliès. Prince writes that 'digital composites thereby achieve much higher levels of perceptual realism than optical printing' (2012: 5), which was used in analogue production to combine different image elements. The digital composite by contrast provides layers that can be adjusted as necessary to identically match the live action footage and the visual effects shots.

Fury Road did stage its stunts 'for real', as the 'making of' book and behind the scenes featurettes prove. Its action sequences are highly intricate, spectacular and dangerous to produce. But such is the amount of conspicuous colour grading and compositing that I argue they do not look 'real'. They look as if they have been altered digitally. Close inspection of the B-roll footage comparison with the finished film also makes noticeable that colour and grading have changed between production and release, most clearly in the introduction of digitally created day-for-night scenes (Whipp 2016).

Also, while the stereoscopic 3D image has always been a part of cinema through early adoption of the technology required to render the extra dimension, or through the simple fact that when watching we interpret the flat image into three dimensions, ultimately it is the technological capabilities of digital that 'has led inexorably to 3D' (Prince 2012: 218). *Fury Road's* 3D-ness leaves an indelible imprint of its digital creation. This is not particularly noteworthy other than that there is very little discussion of its 3D elements either in critical reviews or by the producers. Its use is deliberately downplayed and not mentioned at all in either *The Art of ...* or any of the making-of featurettes on the Blu-ray release version, despite its use being entirely in keeping with the series' origins in sensational, low-budget filmmaking. It also raises a contradiction by adding a layer of digital 'falseness' to the production process which is ostensibly predicated on how much was achieved 'for real'. The 3D process has been improved by digital projection since the days of celluloid because it can now achieve a far greater degree of smooth motion within the image because of increased frame rates (2012: 205). This 'artificiality' of 3D and the digital process is no more the case than in any of the previous films, as Prince argues, because cinema *is* artifice. But I would argue that it is *perceived* to be more artificial.

What, then, is the difference between staging a stunt for real and using computer-generated effects? As Evan Calder Williams remarks in relation to VFX-heavy *Battleship* (Peter Berg, 2012), 'even the most literally analog moments, such as the incorporation of physical-destruction effects into the mix, become a mark of digital mastery, all the more so for how they succeed in looking indistinguishable from what was never filmed in the first place' (2017: 137). This moves beyond the criticisms of CGI that it looked fake and did not align with the live action footage when it first became widespread in the mid-1990s and into the noughties. Everyone has their own particular favourite example, but for me the surfing scene in *Escape from L.A.* (John Carpenter, 1996) has to be the starkest instance of the failure, from a major movie that is, of the premature

adoption of cheap CGI to convince you that what you are seeing may have actually taken place. Such moments, as Williams argues, jar us out of the experience of comfortable viewing by 'stealing attention and refusing to resolve into any adequate figuration' (2017: 147). Indeed, the general complaint around visual effects more recently has been that there is no sense of physical impact to the actions they render based on how effective they are in mixing with 'live' footage. When Adrian Martin speculates that the future and unmade 'Mad Max 4' would likely use CGI to create its action, any possible trepidation was based on either the effects being so poor that the realness of *Mad Max* would be lost or that they might be so interchangeable from any live action that the collisions and crashes might feel too 'light'. Such 'weightlessness', Williams writes, 'is a real aspect of how visual information is processed and produced by modelling and animation software' (2017: 152).

Stephen Prince writes:

Visual effects need not exist in a state of dialectical tension with live-action elements, and it is doubtful that the medium includes among its essential characteristics a belief by viewers that everything in the frame evidences an event that occurred before the camera. Editing expands and contracts story time; changing camera positions break the depicted action into constituent elements. Viewers almost never see events depicted holistically; fragmentation of time and space is the normative condition. (2012: 189)

His point is that any viewer who thinks that what they are seeing actually, at some point in time, happened the way it looks to have happened 'is poorly schooled in the ways of cinema' (2012: 189). Many examples of visual effects are used to create a realism rather than to provoke an acknowledgement that the viewer is watching an illusion (2012: 189). This tendency is designed to offer an 'immersive illusion' (2012: 190) rather than draw attention to the medium. In contrast, Prince writes that some visual effects are 'disruptive' and encourage a 'dualistic response' in the viewer (2012: 189), who can accept what is happening as part of the diegesis, while also being able to appreciate the success of the filmic achievement of the effect itself. In *Fury Road*, this is only partially achieved through the techniques utilized in making the film. The visual effects work in *Fury Road* is used to take out the evidence of analogue special effects (wires attached to the stunt team, for example), while combining elements of the photo-real, such as two separate images of crashes and explosions being composited. After this work has been completed to create an immersive impact within its diegesis, reinforcement is needed that what the audience is seeing 'actually happened'.

As Williams remarks, 'we no longer believe images are capable of bearing the traces of what they represent without literally confirming it by showing in space what they show, by explaining the trick' (2017: 155). This 'explanation of the trick' comes through the discourse surrounding the film. The 'making ofs' and behind the scenes materials become just as important in defining the meaning of *Fury Road*, that it is a return to real action filmmaking, as the movie itself. The paratexts and various 'making ofs' tell us the truth of the production. Indeed, it is in the making of featurettes and the lo-fi B-roll footage that one can fully appreciate its spectacle. Revealing the hand of the production team foregrounds its attractions.

All of this is vital to *Fury Road*'s reputation; its 'for realness' is a part of its appeal. *The Road Warrior* was done 'for real', and so, to maintain a continuity with the past, *Fury Road* must be seen to be the same. And so, intentionally or not, there is a sleight of hand aspect to the promotion of *Fury Road* as being 'for real'. It is not enough for the stunts to have taken place. They need to have *been seen* to have taken place, and the reason this has to be told to us is because the presence of a conspicuous digital aesthetic, plus the acceptance of the preponderance of CG in modern action cinema, means it is not immediately clear that this is the case. Furthermore, it needs to be 'for real' because the chief selling point of the original trilogy was the phenomenal stunt work, and that the 'rip-offs' that followed also relied on ballsy stunts (on much smaller scales due to lesser resources and budgets). All of this supports the notion that the 'grindhouse period' of the 1970s and 1980s was somehow more authentic, dangerous and genuine. It is this notion that provides its ongoing value. It stands for a lack of sanitation in terms of cultural attitudes, production practices and for authenticity in their uses of raw material such as perishable film stock, put upon actors working long hours in uncomfortable conditions and stunt workers with only a passing concern for their own safety. As evidence, one can look to how documentaries that eulogize low-budget, exploitation and trashy production periods of the past, such as Mark Hartley's *Not Quite Hollywood* or *Electric Boogaloo: The Wild Untold Story of Canon Films* (2014), emphasize their subject's lack of politically correct attitudes, dearth of on-set safety and a general madness to the filmmaking atmosphere.

Rob King notes this emphasis on the genuine and the real when it came to spectacular cinema was not always the case, and that the artificiality of cinema

was not always something to obfuscate. He writes that the technology that allowed for, and created, spectacular entertainment of the silent cinema era was not just a

desire to see machine technology not simply in utilitarian terms, but as a source of enjoyment and fascination in its own right provided the basis for a very wide range of entertainments during this period, not only at Keystone. Whether manifest in the mechanical rides at Coney Island, in the 'invention' cartoons of Rube Goldberg, in the cult of the automobile, or even in the public's fascination with cinema itself, technological innovation had become the core of a vernacular tradition whose influence extended across cultural hierarchies and social divisions. (King 2010: 115)

For King, it was the 'mechanical spectacle' of the Keystone Film Company that enabled them to 'build a cross class public for its films and draw film-goers into a new world of mass culture' (King 2010: 115). As he notes, from quite an early period, even audiences of Keystone productions were aware of the elements of trickery. The stunts and effects 'evoked pleasure not because they convinced audiences of their authenticity, but because they inspired wonderment in the representational possibilities of cinema and the delight in being "taken" in by the skilful trickery' (King 2010: 120). He continues to point out that, supported by statements from Keystone directors such as Roscoe Arbuckle who admit that trick effects were involved, 'audiences knew their eyes were being deceived, yet they delighted in their own mystification' (King 2010: 120).

All of this is, on the surface, removed from the 'doing it for real' rhetoric surrounding the *Mad Max* series, even though it is often assumed that contemporary audiences are more sophisticated than those of the early days of cinema and are more aware of the various procedures and tricks involved in producing action and stunts on screen. Instead there is a willing suspension of reality on behalf of fans of *Fury Road*, where it suits a narrative of eulogizing Miller and his collaborators at the expense of making a point about the staid and conservative Hollywood and their reliance on the 'safety' of CGI.

Conclusion

Fury Road looks back to a historical vision of the future, resurrecting an antiquated production cycle, but it cannot go back entirely to the old ways of producing such material. It is conspicuously digital and dependent on animated

techniques *as well as* genuinely dangerous and spectacular stunt work. This process signals another crossover between the marginal practices, forms and aesthetics of the exploitation film and mainstream Hollywood cinema.

By way of comparison, *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (Quentin Tarantino, 2019) was released fifty years after the Charles Manson Family murders and references those events as part of its story to capitalize on the anniversary. It is a \$100 million production with A-list stars that is made to resemble marginal film contexts such as Italian westerns and James Bond-inspired Euro-spy films, as well as repetitious genre-based television series. However, there are genuinely low-budget alternatives 'exploiting' the anniversary of the murders that more authentically resemble the marginal and low-budget production contexts that Tarantino is attempting to mimic because they themselves are low budget and marginal productions, such as *The Haunting of Sharon Tate* (Daniel Farrands, 2019) and *The Manson Family Massacre* (Andrew Jones, 2019). While *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* may well be exploiting something topical, it is imitating exploitation cinema practice (among other genres and forms, and regardless of its many other qualities). *Fury Road* has a similar relationship to its descendants. It is the mainstream equivalent of what had gone before and the acceptable version of MadMaxploitation. Modern versions of the road warrior genre that have failed to attain such 'classic', Academy Award-winning status, such as *Death Race 3: Inferno*, may perhaps be the more genuine article.

Mad Max and the metatext: Fan engagement and online culture

In his groundbreaking *The Language of New Media* from 2001, Lev Manovich claims that the database structure of CD-ROMs and Web pages had become the primary form of engagement with information in the digital age, superseding the linear narratives that dominate novels and movies. Rather than sequential structuring based on theme or temporal order, as in the linear narrative, the database does not privilege any one piece of information over another. Instead, the database is a collection of 'individual items, with every item possessing the same significance as any other' (Manovich 2001: 218). In the Web age, much of the fan engagement with cult and exploitation cinema takes place not just as an interaction with a movie but also with the range of official studio-produced paratexts used in promotion, such as those I examine in the previous chapter, and with the unofficial responses by fans that are published online and which serve as metatexts that comment upon the series. The film that instigates these paratexts and metatexts may no longer be the primary work with which fans might engage.

To understand *Mad Max* today means looking not only at the films but also through the prism of the Web, where Miller's series has formed the basis of a range of cultural responses. In the case of *Mad Max*, its existence in the years between *Beyond Thunderdome* and *Fury Road* was continued by fan discussions, in its influence on cinema through MadMaxploitation, other media forms such as music videos and video games, as well as how it was an often-satirical reference point for imagined post-apocalypse futures. This process kept the name of *Mad Max* relevant and ensured that its return to cinemas after thirty years was not 'dry', because there was already a market for it in place because the 'name' had endured.

Today, the existence of *Mad Max* is sustained not just by the series itself but by fan-made productions, trailer mash-ups that blend genres, and critiques and criticisms of the franchise that take the form of both primitive and often very

sophisticated and informed video essays published online. All of these responses to the series are then subject to rejoinders by other fans in the form of message boards and social media comments, or even in their own videos which expand these dialectical exchanges further into the online sphere.

As outlined in the previous chapter, Manovich claims that because live action footage shot by filmmakers (now most likely to be digital anyway, but even if it was made using film stock) is digitized to edit and distribute, it no longer has a 'privileged indexical relationship to prefilmic reality' (Manovich 2001: 300). The use of a computer renders it all a form of animation. The same devices, all computers of some kind, are used to store and view exploitation films and also used to discuss them and to assist the creation of video responses to them. Therefore, the material distinction between original source text, the paratexts and social interaction around them no longer exists. They all form part of the same database, whether that be an individual computer or the Web itself, through which we can view, stream, download and upload.

In *Grindhouse Nostalgia*, David Church writes that 'different nostalgic valences – sometimes conflicting, sometimes complimentary – play out in the minds of viewers whose once-obscure media choices are revived in the marketplace in ways that seem less confined to niche fan groups than even before' (2015: 4). The presence of *Mad Max* on the Web in various forms means that it is now part of the same 'collective memory' rather than part of a separate space at the niche margins of culture. Henry Jenkins writes that cult fans 'possess not simply borrowed remnants snatched from mass culture, but their own culture built from the semiotic raw materials the media provides' (Jenkins 2008: 444). Now that the entire available archive of exploitation cinema history exists digitally in some form, accessing that history is increasingly more likely to be via a computer or other networked device. Exploitation fandom no longer resides in specialist theatres or in the corners of video stores and through the shared medium of the Web is no longer segregated from mainstream film fandom. In the previous chapter I considered how the turn towards digital production coincided with, and shaped, a resurgence of interest in exploitation film practice from the 1970s and 1980s, and affected both the style and marketing of *Fury Road*. This chapter begins to look at how digital culture has influenced engagement with exploitation cinema and *Mad Max* through the form of fan-created videos.¹

¹ The most literal example of digital interaction between *Mad Max* and fans is in the video game adaptations that have appeared in 1990 and 2015. A study of these is outside of the scope of this book, however.

These activities are ubiquitous and not unique to *Mad Max*, and a number of classic 1970s films such as *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975) and more commonly *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977) have understandably attracted even more significant interaction online.² The most imaginative of these is the work of an editor under the pseudonym ‘The Man Behind the Mask’, who has uploaded recut versions of *Star Wars* and *Jaws* to make them resemble exploitation films from the grindhouse era, in a way that demonstrates the extent of the artistic and material connections between mainstream and exploitation cinema. The re-edited *Star Wars* – titled *The War of the Stars: A New Hope Grindhoused* (2010) – uses aging celluloid grading effects, includes blood spurting in the shootouts, shortens the running time and adds a new soundtrack. His *Jaws: The Sharksploitation Edit* (2009) recuts the film in a similar manner, with added gore and a funkier musical score (minus John Williams’s famous theme). The effects and editing turn these mainstream classics into marginalized and ephemeral grindhouse knock-offs, especially since they are themselves hard to find and links to the finished versions are repeatedly removed from their host websites. In making these works, ‘The Man Behind the Mask’ has not only provided a new way of interpreting the original films but also created something that disregards the sanctity and meanings of the source material. Fan edits use the original as source material, rather than treat it like a sacrosanct work of art.

The internet resource fanedit.org lists and reviews (rather than shares) the many fan-created versions. There are several alternate versions of *Mad Max* series listed, all of which show a disregard for Miller’s narrative structures. One, by ‘Amadi’, removes Max entirely from the story of *Fury Road*, and a review claims that the story still ‘makes perfect sense’ (MCP 2019). Another, by ‘maniac’ called ‘Mad Max: The Desert Road’, is an 88-minute version of *Fury Road* that cuts out much of the exposition, and there is also a fan edit of the 1979 original subtitled the ‘Get to the Point Edit’, which chops it down to less than an hour to transform it into a ‘pretty straight forward cop vs biker film’ (Tranzor 2012).

² The most significant are the ‘De-specialized Editions’ of the original *Star Wars* trilogy. These unofficial fan-made reconstructions, which are the result of hundreds of hours of unpaid labour, and of professional editing standards, recreate digital versions of *Star Wars*, *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*. All of these are reproduced to resemble as closely as possible the versions from 1977 to 83 without the VFX additions and deleted scenes that George Lucas added and released as ‘Special Editions’ in 1999, and which have been the only official versions commercially available since.

The videos that engage with *Mad Max* in this chapter, from the fan edits to the critical visual essays and parodies, affect how we can view the series and its range of meanings and place in culture. But they are also original works that can be interpreted as separate from the films from which they derive. Because of the interplay between them, clear divisions between amateur and professional filmmaker, between industry and fandom, and between the 'cinema' and other medias can no longer be defined.

In *Reinventing Cinema*, Chuck Tryon writes of a 'redefinition' of film culture forced by the emergence of digital cinema (2009: 1). This emergence affects the economic strategies of the industry, as well as the range of narrative and aesthetic options open to the filmmaker, 'allowing for a potentially vast expansion of what constitutes a cinematic text' (2009: 3). Sarah Atkinson refers to these expansions as an 'extended cinema', where a film might also include paratextual information delivered through websites that extends the narrative beyond the film itself, and a 'mobile cinema', where mobile phones are used for production, distribution and exhibition (Atkinson 2014). One result of the move from cine to tape, and eventually to digital code, is that film is no longer medium specific (Wasser 2001: 198). Frederick Wasser writes:

In today's economy of proliferating media, producers are encouraging the audience to consciously retain only that part of the movie that can be translated from medium to medium. Few members of the viewing public will remember or value that part of a film that does not survive its translations. This explains the new prominence of sound and roller-coaster effects. These elements survive medium transfer. (2001: 198)

The need for translatable material is even more relevant when it takes into consideration the spread of a movie's influence beyond the text, and where its elements are mashed up, remixed and commented on in new visual mediums. In turn, these become original artefacts and products (which have digital currency) on their own. The Jenny Beavan Vine videos I refer to in this book's introduction, for example, or the *Fury Road* mash-ups looked at in this chapter are aesthetically distinct from their original source in Miller's series but are also utterly dependent upon it. The film on which fan engagement originates is now only one inflection of its scope of 'meanings'. And according to Manovich's logic of the database structure, it has no more significance or privilege than any other element of the database because the linearity of its development from script to screen to engagement online has been circumvented. That is to say

that fan engagement with the *Mad Max* films might not, and probably does not, begin with the film as a separate text but by clicking on an item online, such as an official trailer on YouTube.³ The algorithms of YouTube will then suggest other videos of interest to the user, which may well be a critique of the film, an overview of the entire series or a mash-up which draws parallels with another film. Any contextualization, understandings and interpretations will come prior to viewing the original material on which the suggested videos are based. *Fury Road* in particular epitomizes the extent of the impact the digital has had upon cinema not only in the way that it is shot (for 3D projection, significant computerized effects and colour correction) but also in how it has been taken up by fans to create alternative versions and ideas born out of Miller's original vision. For example, after Miller claimed he wanted to shoot in black and white, a fan created their own version that they drained of colour and made monochrome, with the sound effects and dialogue removed, and which they published on the Web shortly after *Fury Road*'s original theatrical release and two years prior to the official Black and Chrome edition made it to home disk (Mufson 2015). Additionally, the wide variety of online discussions it prompted, as well as its imagery used for parodies and memes, exemplify the expansion of a cinematic text into web territories. The 'meanings' of *Fury Road* are both created and sustained by its existence in the online space.

By studying some of these communications, we can get a sense of not only how the readings and interpretations of *Mad Max* are given more depth by its existence in online fan spaces but also how this relates to exploitation and cult film culture more widely. This chapter seeks to examine some of this online material in more detail and to consider how it reflects and comments on the series, and also how it works as an extension of the nostalgia for the outmoded filmmaking and viewing practices examined in the previous chapter. The online mash-ups, reviews and fan creations on YouTube continually recontextualize *Mad Max* with different locations, backdrops and contexts. They work to not only comment on the films themselves but also force *Mad Max* to interact with other areas of culture.

What has happened is that the extension beyond the text has now become not only digitized and visible but also marketable (in that it can be used to

³ Of course, promotional materials such as posters, trailers and even television interviews by cast and crew have long existed, but these did not allow for visible interaction through online comments or widespread peer-to-peer sharing until the advent of the Web.

make money online or even create careers in the case of particularly successful YouTube businesses and individuals). Frederick Wasser points out how the embracing of the home viewing market fractured and expanded the possibilities for selling film. He writes that 'going out for a film is romantic time, or social time ... buying the film is gift time ... allowing the children to watch the film at home several times is mechanical baby-sitting' (2001: 201). This is not taking into consideration the engagement with a movie through toys and other tie-ins, as well as the enjoyment one can get from discussing it with friends. *Mad Max* in the online space has both contributed to the reinvigorated interest in cult and exploitation cinema, as well as helped cement the franchise's place within the mainstream. These developments rely on an interchange between fans and the industry. In this sense, *Fury Road*'s existence online helps exemplify how other cult texts function in a world where YouTube can extend and create an array of 'meanings' and readings of any particular film. Examination of all this material opens our understanding of exploitation culture today, because, as with other cult fandom practices, it 'stands as an open challenge to the "naturalness" and desirability of dominant cultural hierarchies' (Jenkins 2008: 433).

According to Henry Jenkins, this has a potency because fans 'cannot as a group be dismissed as intellectually inferior' because 'they are often highly educated, articulate people' (2008: 433). To understand and examine exploitation culture in the twenty-first century, when so many of the films themselves date from more than forty years ago and are no doubt significantly older than many of the fans today, or at least date from the fans' early youth, means to look at how it exists in these fan reactions online. Exploitation film culture today, given the likelihood that new exploitation films will be streamed at home, means that it is an online culture, taking place in the same spaces as mainstream film fandom and interaction.

Whereas the pre-YouTube era discussion around culture and taste among fans would have taken place in private or social spaces, now they are made to be visible to the whole world and monetized for the creator and uploaders and, ultimately, if it keeps a movie in the marketplace, for the studio to further profit. And this is, or could be argued, a form of unpaid digital labour, according to Christian Fuchs's usage of the term. Fuchs defines digital labour not as a 'common type of occupation' but as a 'collective workforce that is required for the existence, usage and application of digital media' (2014: 4). The work analysed in this chapter, the mash-ups, fan films and video critiques, as well as the comments, sharing and retorts they provoke online, is undertaken by a collective workforce who operate

in the service of YouTube and Google, as well as for the studios themselves. The digital interactions serve the interests of not only the fans but also YouTube, who profits from their labour and may also sustain interest in a film that would previously have spent its market value.

Mash-ups, remixes and parodies

Chuck Tryon refers to the range of online fan engagement as a 'remixing' which incorporates blogging, mash-ups and critiques, and trailer parodies such as those made by the YouTube channel The Screen Junkies called Honest Trailers. These practices 'reactivate many of the claims made on behalf of digital cinema' (2009: 149) that it is democratizing and, in the case of YouTube (where much of this material is housed and broadcast), epitomizing 'inclusivity and diversity' (2009: 150). The remixing process is, according to Tryon, an updating of the cinephile activity of quoting lines or acting out scenes with friends (2009: 151). Laurence Lessig discusses this system of exchange as a form of cultural dialogue. In *Remix* (2008), Lessig argues that 'Read/Write culture' (as opposed to 'Read Only') allows for people to see what other people have created and published in documents of various forms. The spread of these documents, which can be any form of media, can then be added to, or their meanings and aesthetics adopted for other documents which are then published online. This is a form of participatory culture and is central to the idea of the remix.

An example of a *Mad Max* mash-up is in how YouTube user and creator CineMash mixed clips of the Disney Pixar movie *Cars*, while underlaying the soundtrack of the *Fury Road* trailer (2015). Another, by KrisK, uses the images from the trailer but replaces much of the soundtrack with sound effects from the video game series *Mario Kart*, such as when pinging game sounds are used to synchronize with images of Immortan Joe's paint bombs exploding as featured in the trailer (2015). KrisK also regrades the colour scheme, turning Max's black leather jacket maroon and inserting several icons from the games, such as coins/tokens being collected by the film's travelling vehicles. As Max, Furiosa and Nux are introduced in the trailer, each shot is preceded by the name of a *Mario Kart* character in the original font. This mash-up has so far received over three million views and has led to a response of further videos that show people's reactions to the trailer on multiple other channels. These 'reaction' videos are another of YouTube's genres, ensuring that the product and brand of 'Mad

Max', from another time in cinema's history, slip seamlessly into contemporary cultural exchanges.

Another mash-up, titled *Road Wars – The Emperor Strikes Back* by Krishna Sheno (2015), integrates moments from the *Star Wars* franchise. X-Wing Fighters are edited into joining Immortan Joe's convoy, while Darth Vader replaces Joe. A partially constructed Death Star from *Return of the Jedi* (Richard Marquand, 1983) is visible in the night sky above the desert. Bullets are replaced with laser blasts, and characters such as the bounty hunter Boba Fett appear in the action. Furiosa wields a green Lightsabre, and one of the final shots sees the Millennium Falcon emerge out of the sandstorm to blast two motor buggies into pieces. In the scene of Furiosa howling in frustration after finding only the remnants of the Many Mothers, the twin suns in the sky behind her situate the action on Luke Skywalker's home planet of Tatooine. It is an effective piece that is both funny and impactful, with a genuine verisimilitude for both films because the VFX work by its creator is of such high quality.⁴ So *Mad Max*, through the admittedly high-budget *Fury Road*, finds a unity with a franchise that was once at the separate ends of the scale of film culture. *Star Wars* and *Mad Max* are now conjoined by knowledgeable, creative and technically competent fans.

Other YouTubers have created videos referring to elements from *Fury Road*, including the *Chrome Spray Challenge*, where people imitate the War Boys spray painting their own faces (Mike Rotch, 2015), and *Flamethrower Ukulele* inspired by the Doof Warrior's guitar (Make 2015). Other forms of remix include using *Mad Max* to comment upon cultural moments or ideas rather than being parodies of the source material. Tom Hardy saying 'That's Bait' when Max, Furiosa and the Wives come across what turns out to be the Green Place has, for example, been turned into a popular GIF on Twitter and used to flag to other social media users that an article or comment is explicitly designed to attract negative and trollish attention, often based around identity politics. Along these lines, the Vine videos of costume designer Jenny Beavan receiving her Academy Award becomes part of the story surrounding *Mad Max*.

⁴ This is arguably a part of the ongoing tendency to link *Star Wars* to other genres. The recent Disney+ series entitled *The Mandalorian* (2019) is set in the *Star Wars* universe and has been reimaged as a spaghetti western by YouTube creatives. kingkida edited a trailer for the series to make it look like Sergio Leone's *Dollars* trilogy (26 November 2019), while Guillermo CM has done the reverse and edited clips of the trailer for Leone's film to the soundtrack of *The Mandalorian* trailer in 'A Fistful of Dollars 1964 (The Mandalorian Style)' (31 August 2019).



Figure 8 The 'That's Bait' GIF from *Fury Road*.

In the case of politically inspired remixes and mash-ups, Tryon writes that 'shared cinematic values become mapped onto shared political values' (2009: 168), with films enabling the fan creators to make satirical comment. One example, *Immortan Don's Inauguration Day Speech*, plays Donald Trump's opening speech over footage of Immortan Joe talking to his peasants from high up on his balcony (Conan of Cimmeria 2017). This reveals once again how *Mad Max* becomes a shorthand way of referencing that which is deemed imminently disastrous or apocalyptic, signalling how the series occupies a mainstream cultural space. It has moved from one medium, that of cinema (and a niche subcategory within that medium), into newspapers, websites and the evening news. And, like the original ways of thinking about *Mad Max* as a method of imagining a dystopian, post-apocalyptic future, it is divorced from the precise elements of the films. The fragmentation of film and loss of medium specificity is an inherent part of the remix process, where each creator not only gives up control over the meaning of their creation (which is arguably an established factor given how differently visual material can be interpreted anyway) but also has to accept that their creation can then be used in ways they may not have originally intended or desired.

Abigail Keating argues that such exchanges mean the source material itself, such as movie clips, responses and parodies, becomes interactive, and that this crosses the traditional boundary between professional and the amateur. The very

act of watching videos on YouTube is part of the communicative process because what you view 'transfer immediately to logs and statistics, which in turn affect the website's analytics, the video's view count, the website's engagement with our preferences ... and product advertising according to our tastes' (Keating 2014: 308). In the case of movie culture, this is an active form of engagement with the text that becomes visible and public, whereas previously it might have taken place in private spaces among close friendship groups. Indeed, Tryon recognizes that the history of the remix and mash-up is embedded in experimental film history. However, it should be noted that although the mash-up (and variations of it) has a long history in moving image, it is an integral feature of digital media in that the mash-up is inherently intertextual and non-linear. The mash-up is a form of database in accordance with Lev Manovich's use of the term, and one of the primary dominant narrative structures and methods of engagement with the online space. Engagement with *Mad Max* is no longer through the movies alone and via their linear storylines but is also through non-linear mash-ups housed on the prism of the Web – the database of databases.

Remixes of popular works of art also serve a purpose beyond their currency in gaining hits, views and recommendations on websites. In the cases of remixed and parodic trailers, they expose the conventions of film marketing and mock the interchange between producer and consumer (Tryon 2009: 152). However, while they appeal to people with the same spectrum of interest and taste, because they also usually inadvertently contribute to the selling of a movie and work to extend its cultural lifespan, the creators of the often critical videos exist as part of the production, distribution, dissemination and consumption cycle of cinema (Tryon 2009: 154). All this has made visible the battles that take place within fan culture to define ways of understanding and interpreting films and to attain some form of subcultural capital and sense of identity by doing so. This sort of 'extraordinarily vicious struggle for distinction' (Jancovich 2008: 150) is particularly prevalent in cult fandom, typically centring on what constitutes the 'authentic' and 'non-authentic' fan (Jancovich 2008: 150).⁵ One way that cult fans distinguish themselves is to establish a more refined or distinct taste than that of 'normal' cinemagoers and audiences.

Greg Taylor describes part of this process in *Artists in the Audience* (1999), where he considers how audiences might assert their own tastes towards films.

⁵ In some ways this debate functions as an expansion of the discussions over what is considered to be an 'authentic' or 'non-authentic' movie from the previous chapter.

In it, he defines two styles of fan response: the 'cult' and the 'camp'. In each of these responses, audiences demonstrate their autonomy from the text and try to manufacture cultural taste, such as studios during promotion, as well as established critics, historians or commentators. The 'cult' response is when audiences resist mainstream and institutional notions of quality and re-evaluate films that may have been commercially or critically unsuccessful upon initial release. In doing so, they attempt to determine the 'quality' of a production for themselves. The way exploitation fans reclaim forgotten films that never attained mainstream success is one example of this. The 'camp' style of audience response is when a critically unsuccessful film will be celebrated precisely because of its perceived lack of 'quality' or is eulogized because of its incoherence. The ongoing sold out screenings and fan appreciation of *The Room* (Tommy Wiseau, 2003) at The Prince Charles Cinema in London constitute a notable contemporary example of such a response. Also, the popular American television series *Mystery Science Theater 3000* (1988–99), which screens 'bad' films while the show's hosts comment and joke about their faults, is an example of an institutionalized version of 'camp' appreciation. Naturally, a MadMaxploitation film, *Warrior of the Lost World*, provided the object of scorn for one episode (Season 5, Episode 96), which is typical of the esteem in which the cycle is held.

This form of fan appraisal, reappraisal and engagement that happens on sites like YouTube is an example of what Henry Jenkins calls a 'refusal of authorial authority and a violation of intellectual property' (2008: 433). The films themselves, then, become the 'raw materials' for fans' 'own cultural productions and the basis for their own social interactions' (2008: 434).

The 'cult' and 'camp' models that Taylor describes map on to the nostalgia demonstrated by exploitation fans that David Church refers to. It is present in the celebration of the low quality of many of the films from the grindhouse period and the state in which they are available to be viewed, such as poor-quality transfers or damaged prints, and the reassessment of the films' more effective aspects that had previously been overlooked. Church writes that in exploitation fandom, such debates and conflicting interactions about a text 'all share a common concern with memories of film history's material sites' (2015: 8–9). When he writes that this can 'factor into a fan's feelings of (sincere) closeness to, or (ironic) distance from, the broader groups of viewers that may crystallise as home video mobilises nostalgia by allowing its objects to move better through time and space in the marketplace' (2015: 9), he is making clearer the deep connections that exist between the 'cult' and 'camp' viewer. Home video

and now peer-to-peer sharing of files and links allow greater connectivity and crossovers between fan groups.

Cult fandom media, such as fanzines prior to the Web age, were a 'complex range of communications systems that act to both compose and maintain a sense of an "imagined" community' (Jancovich 2008: 160). But by revealing specialist insider knowledge, the fan media was under threat of making this knowledge less exclusive through its dissemination. So, while Taylor's 'cult' and 'camp' audience processes do take place in the post YouTube world (and perhaps more so than ever), it has been subsumed back into the Hollywood production machine through the Web as an important part of making a movie visible in an increasingly competitive and saturated marketplace.

Fan critics

The continued visibility for films online does not have to be controlled by studios to be effective because, as Tryon writes, 'even negative attention serves to reinforce the ongoing existence of the entertainment machine itself' (2009: 152). The proliferation of fan critics using YouTube to challenge and critique contemporary and historical cinema does not contradict the argument that fan interactions serve mainstream corporate requirements to promote and sell cultural products.

One significant channel on YouTube that uses the platform to focus on an individual film's negative elements is Cinema Sins. Their series entitled 'Everything Wrong With' is dedicated to pointing out a film's 'sins', which can range from continuity mistakes, plotting errors or even simply moments the channel originator does not enjoy. Each 'sin' is tallied with a counter in the top left corner of the screen. According to the channel, new 'Sins' videos are uploaded twice per week, and they focus on mainly Hollywood productions, including everything from *Frozen* (Chris Buck, Jennifer Lee, 2013) to the original *Death Wish*. Typically, they attempt to keep their content topical, such as releasing a video critiquing a film just as its sequel is about to be released in theatres to maximize the number of hits. For example, their critique of *Beyond Thunderdome* was uploaded on 7 May 2015, only a few days before the theatrical release of *Fury Road* (2015b).

Their video 'Everything Wrong with Mad Max: Fury Road' (2015a) is a particularly hollow and snide enterprise. The voice-over clearly states several

times that the film is 'gorgeous' and 'awesome', and so the point of tallying its errors appears redundant. Nevertheless, examples of *Fury Road's* 'sins' include Tom Hardy's voice being too deep, Immortan Joe's wasteful pouring of thousands of gallons of water into the sand and the use of the deus ex machina plot device when Max revives Furiosa by performing a transfusion using his own blood.

While Cinema Sins is not providing oppositional readings, instead merely pointing out what they do not like regardless of how shallow or inaccurate the observation, the channel distinguishes itself from that which has been critically lauded by attempting to trash a film's reputation. It is an example of the mainstreaming of Taylor's cult audience style of engagement with a text, by allowing the viewer to determine the value of a movie for themselves, thus ignoring its positive critical reception. So committed is the channel to this cause that it even criticizes films its creators enjoy. While Cinema Sins seems to take a gleeful joy in critiquing plots, this criticism is often ill informed and features many of their own mistakes, though there is little to suggest that this is particularly intentional or a deliberate self-deprecating joke about their own lack of comprehension.

With 8.2 million subscribers to the channel, the videos are produced to satisfy demand, rather than from a genuine fan response. It needs to generate 'sins' to provide content, rather than being an organic process based on genuine faults. Their presence reflects the extent to which online fan culture has become a shared experience, with YouTube users responding to the videos through comments or even with their own videos. The YouTube channel 'Shaun' responded to the video with 'Everything Wrong with Cinema Sins – Mad Max: Fury Road' (2015a). Here, the more pointless or baseless of Cinema Sins' complaints are skewered through another user's analysis, including pointing out that critiques of the plot are not valid. For example, Cinema Sins' reference to Max reviving Furiosa with his own blood at the climax as a deus ex machina is clearly wrong, as 'Shaun' points out, because Max's status as a universal blood donor is established very early on through both dialogue and because the tattoo given to him by the War Boys announces the fact and is therefore a significant plot point. 'Shaun' takes issues with what he describes as lazy analysis (the chief accusation being that Cinema Sins do not seem to watch the films they critique in their entirety), such as them missing that Joe is deliberately wasting the water when opening the pipes, while also arguing that sometimes dishonest and selective editing is used to reinforce a weak point or argument. 'Shaun' points out an example of this latter tendency by highlighting that when Cinema Sins complains about the depth of Hardy's vocal tones, he detects that they have

actually lowered the pitch from the original soundtrack and demonstrates this by playing the original audio and the one affected by Cinema Sins back to back. Cinema Sins' defence against this sort of criticism, which has been reiterated by other YouTube accounts and users, has been to claim that their work is satirical. But as 'Shaun' points out, this does not constitute a valid defence because Cinema Sins is not a satire of anything.

The popularity and notoriety of Cinema Sins has led to other channels that either critique their videos such as BobVids or alternatively celebrate films rather than disparage them, such as Cinema Wins, whose videos are entitled 'Everything GREAT about ...'. The responses to Cinema Sins by 'Shaun', BobVids and Cinema Wins work as an example of Lessig's Read/Write remix culture. These exchanges are then extended by the comments by YouTubers underneath the videos that subsequently criticize or endorse the views expressed in the uploaded content.

Other fan critics include The Screen Junkies, whose channel publishes a series called Honest Trailers, which works in a similar way to Cinema Sins, albeit in a manner that demonstrates a more rounded understanding of film convention. These videos structure their satire as a trailer to whatever movie it is lampooning. Like Cinema Sins, Screen Junkies has achieved considerable success, with 6.5 million subscribers. Their mockery of *Fury Road* is also dependent on similar comments to those of Cinema Sins: that Max's screen time is limited, that Joe is needlessly wasting water and that it appears as if it is just 'one long chase'. Tryon's observation that this popular YouTube genre of fake trailers exploits the 'tension between the trailer and actual film narrative' (2009: 157) does not work in the case of the Honest Trailer brand. Honest Trailers only critique the finished film using a faux trailer style, with a booming and grandiose voice announcer. The implication that movie marketing is false, implied by calling the series 'Honest', does not work because the typical professional industry trailer does not reveal everything about a film's plot. Honest Trailers, similar to Cinema Sins, is also frequently very poor satire. But its comments on Max's supposed sidelining in the plot do reveal the expectations associated with a Hollywood script, while also contributing to the online commentary surrounding *Fury Road* and feminism. Also, some of its comments coincide with other online responses to *Fury Road*, in particular a recycled comment from Cinema Sins regarding Joe's poor distribution of water (which is not a mistake as Joe is deliberately wasting the water for effect) and a reference to the plot resembling 'Mario Kart

from Hell], which inadvertently links to the previously mentioned video *Mario Kart: Fury Road*, where graphics from the famous video game series are overlaid onto the *Fury Road* trailer.

Some critical fan responses, however, demonstrate more sophisticated analysis in the form of visual essays. A video published by HeavyMetalEvilien, entitled *Mad Max Fury Road vs Spacehunter: Adventures in the Forbidden Zone* (2015), illustrates the similarities in content between the two. The opening caption reads 'Spacehunter was originally a rip off of the Mad Max movies and now it seems everything has come full circle', indicating a sophisticated awareness of the historical trajectory of MadMaxploitation. The essay begins with its title in a font with similar colours to that of *Fury Road* and features clips from *Spacehunter* (Lamont Johnson, 1983), with added captions detailing the similarities and crossovers. HeavyMetalEvilien's main observations and claims are as follows:

- *Spacehunter* features the capture of three beautiful women by a demi-god style dictator who requires a mechanical life support system to breathe. He also has chrome teeth.
- *Spacehunter* features a robotic woman, plus a female scavenger and tracker, which is conflated into the character of Furiosa in *Fury Road*.
- There is similarity in the vehicles depicted, and also some of the scenes, such as the attack on the convoy in the desert.
- There is a gang of Amazonian style warrior women, who recur as the Vuvalini.
- Scenes showing the 'forbidden zone' are similar to those in *Fury Road* when moving through the swamps, in particular the mutant style people who occupy them.
- *Spacehunter*'s blob like mutants resemble the People Eater and his elephantiasis.

In the comments below the video 'Ray the Retro Guy' writes:

Well according to interviews done with people involved in the production of *Spacehunter*, the whole Mad Max franchise lifts material from the original *Spacehunter* script that was being shown around at cannes back in 78 (it was originally to be a post-apocalyptic film set on earth called Road Gangs). Unfortunately I cant back this up since the site that the interviews were posted on is now defunct, but it's not hard to believe since it's such a cutthroat industry.

HeavyMetalEvilien replies:

I held out watching *Fury Road* because something seemed off to me about the trailers. When I finally watched it I recognized *Spacehunter* right away. If they

had just made this movie as an updated *Spacehunter* I'd like it just fine, but it's not Mad Max so I don't really enjoy it.

The listing for *Spacehunter* on the British Film Institute's website confirms Ray the Retro Guy's claim that its working title was actually 'Road Gangs' (BFI 2019). In these online exchanges then, there is an assertion of highly informed knowledge based on both a very personal interaction with the film, as well as detailed information, and a suggestion that *Fury Road* should have been acknowledged as a remade or updated version of *Spacehunter*. In another reply, HeavyMetalEvilien goes as far as claiming that they are 'pretty sure it is a remake ... that has been reworked since more people know about Mad Max and would have been more likely to see it'. 'Stuart Jarvis', another user, adds a comment reminding them that *Spacehunter* was also initially released in 3D, as was Miller's sequel. The critique of *Fury Road* in these exchanges is that it is a rehash of earlier, more marginal films, so they are taking a stand on behalf of the fan and their closeness to a particular text.

In truth, *Spacehunter*'s status as a marginal film that needs defending is not an especially accurate argument. If its initial stages of production coincided with the release of *The Road Warrior*, it was still released during the zeitgeist of Miller's film and was also a studio picture produced on a far larger budget. What we see is an American mainstream film, appropriating a more marginal (but highly successful) foreign picture and failing. Decades later the landscape has reversed, and now it is *Mad Max* that has turned into the established, mainstream example, and films like *Spacehunter*, which are either fairly or unfairly dismissed as 'rip-offs' (a term that even HeavyMetalEvilien uses), are defended by the cult and exploitation fan. This fandom reveals alternative timelines, debates and ways of looking at such histories, all viewable on a public forum.

Another video produced by the YouTube film satire channel MovieBitches works as a mash-up, fake trailer and also as an essay that comments on *Fury Road* and the MadMaxploitation cycle. Their more creative approach, like that of HeavyMetalEvilien, demonstrates sophisticated knowledge of the history of exploitation strands and trends. In *Hell Comes to Fury Road* (2016), they take the soundtrack of the *Fury Road* trailer and overlay it onto appropriate and corresponding clips from *Hell Comes to Frogtown* (Donald G. Jackson, R.J. Kizer, 1988), the MadMaxploitation action comedy about a future desert

America where man-sized mutant frogs roam and where Hell, played by Wrestler Rowdy Roddy Piper, is the only fertile man in the land.

Hell Comes to Fury Road begins with the sound montage from *Fury Road*'s trailer explaining the development of the 'Water Wars', which plays over Hell drinking from a cup but then spitting out its polluted contents. Max's gruff intonation that 'here they come again' underscores a shot of mutant frog-men hanging off the back of an armoured and modded jeep motoring hard through the desert, an image familiar from so many other MadMaxploitation films. The mash-up ends like the original trailer, with the hero being asked his name, only this time for Piper to step forward and answer 'Hell'. The mash-up trailer works effectively as satire because it makes comparisons between the films and ends up being a comment on both – whereas the 'Cars' and 'Mario Kart' videos draw more facile links. It lampoons the grandiosity of the *Fury Road* trailer by undercutting it with sillier and baser material such as Piper grasping his injured balls or fighting a six-foot frog mutant. It elevates the comedy of *Hell Comes to Frogtown* by reminding the viewer of how much it was a funny satire of the cycle in the first place. That the cycle shares such a limited range of tropes, iconography and conventions means a similar mash-up could have worked as equally well by combining *Fury Road*'s trailer with almost any other MadMaxploitation film.

The *Spacehunter* and *Frogtown* mash-ups are beyond the cheap jibes of the 'Sins' and 'Honest' brands and work instead as essays that expose genre crossovers, recurrent iconography and the cyclical nature of the exploitation film. These fan creations are inventive, informed and also subversive. They contextualize a recent film with the past and also work to archive the memory of older, and less prestigious, productions. Fan practices of collecting films and archiving that used to take place in private spaces are made visible through these online channels, as is debating the merits of different films that would once have taken part in social spaces between small groups.⁶

⁶ There is evidence that this form of cultural exchange can have an impact on production. Look at the interchange of ideas about *The Karate Kid* (John G. Avildsen, 1984) between an episode of sitcom *How I Met Your Mother* (Season 8, Episode 22), J. Matthew Turner's YouTube videos (2015) and the YouTube Red series *Cobra Kai* (2018–). Each of them reappraises the character of Johnny, and in the case of Turner's uploads, he claims to have proposed the ideas on his channel first, before the network sitcom aired and before YouTube launched its own subscription service with *Karate Kid* spin-off *Cobra Kai* as its flagship show.

Fan productions and fake trailers

Beyond this practice of recutting, redesigning or critiquing existing films is the wholesale fan production. These are short and sometimes feature-length films using the same characters (played by non-professional actors) and scenarios that work as either celebrations or parodies, or a mixture of both, of the real thing. Sara Gwenllïan Jones argues that the fan producer, rather than standing in opposition to the bloated commercial mainstream, as the 'cult' fan might, instead is often in total support of the industry and 'refuses any absolute distinction between commercial culture and the culture of everyday experience' (2003: 170). Fan productions demonstrate one example of the interactivity of film culture, as part of a dialogue between industry and audience that is necessary for the continued commercial relevance of a film.

Unsurprisingly given its place in popular cultural consciousness, one of the first notable fan productions was based on *Star Wars*. Kevin Rubio's *Troops* (1997) was a short parody of reality TV programme *Cops* (1989–2013) following Stormtroopers harassing residents of Tatooine followed by a handheld camera to give a *vérité* effect similar to the one on the original show. Other notable fan productions include the feature-length *Superman: Requiem* (Gene Fallaize, 2011), which was produced on a budget of \$20,000. Both Rubio and Fallaize have progressed onto industry careers, and Rubio even wrote an episode of *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* (2008–20). Not only is the fan text often highly sophisticated, it is also not then necessarily 'oppositional' (Jones 2003: 170). To argue that fan productions function in opposition to their mainstream equivalents just reinforces the distinct categories between fan and industry, what is the official, 'proper' or 'true' text and what is not. In this false binary, what is not official inevitably becomes 'lesser'. This binary way of considering the fan production only maintains the hierarchy of a top-down culture. In part, Jones contends, this is a result of the idea of the fan as erratic and irrational, someone who is overly invested in a cultural artefact or person, if not suffering from outright psychosis (2003: 171).

Like the YouTube videos discussed in this chapter, the fan production sits 'between production and consumption, industry and audience; they disrupt culturally inscribed expectations about the antagonistic relation between, and mutual exclusivity of, the commercial mainstream and the underground' (Jones 2003: 169). They are often not intended to have a cultural life beyond

its origins, they are not originally commercial enterprises, intending instead to entertain their makers and to speak to other fans. However, with YouTube and other online platforms this process can now be monetized and is a commercial venture in its own right.

She points out that while the fan can be unruly, this is by no means absolute and instead online fan groups in particular are mostly white, middle class, educated and able to use technology in sophisticated ways. She implies that they exude external indicators of privilege. However, I am not certain we should assume the whiteness of the creators in many of the cases I examine here. Jones is writing in 2002, and access to the internet and Web 2.0 is no longer the preserve of the privileged white middle classes within Western countries, despite ongoing discussions over the various 'digital divides' between race, location, age, economic disparity and class. Certainly, those who respond with comments below videos discussed in this chapter or those who subsequently share them on other social media platforms will come from a multitude of regions, classes, countries and genders, even if it is assumed that the creators of the original video are white (of which there is no guarantee in many cases given the anonymity involved). Their 'whiteness' and sophisticated use of technology also do not mean that they cannot be unruly.

Fan-made versions of *Mad Max* include numerous Lego animations that recreate moments from either the franchise or the *Fury Road* trailer.⁷ Of the smattering of live action fan productions, the most accomplished is Paul C. Miller's nine-minute *Mad Max Renegade* (2011). Set sometime between the first two films, it forms part of the ongoing story rather than as a comment upon the series or a parody. There are numerous stylistic and narrative references to the first film. It begins with the title card logo from the original only with 'Renegade' added, and then the 'A Few Years from Now' caption typed onto the opening shot. The 'high fatality road' sign is visible, with the number of deaths increased to ninety-eight, and Max, who is still driving his V8 Interceptor, has his limp after being shot by Johnny the Boy. The song from the Sugartown Club in *Mad Max* can be heard on a radio, as well as refrains from Brian May's score

⁷ At the age of 13, I started my own first foray into making films with a shameless rip-off of *Mad Max* – a sixty-second stop-motion animation produced using painted cardboard and pipe cleaner in some unidentified outback, featuring a chase between two cars (one in black and one painted in yellow and blue like that of the MFP) and a motorbike. The soundtrack was taken from the final chase in *Mad Max* and ends with the biker flipping over one of the cars and into the camera, turning the screen into a bloody mess.

for both films which are skilfully blended together. *Renegade* follows a newly married couple who are driving to meet the groom's parents, with an unseen baby in cardboard box as a cot sat on the bride's lap. They are attacked and killed by a male and female couple in a yellow Mustang car and their 'baby' stolen. Max, revealed in familiar fetishistic detail (through close-ups of his boots, jacket and badge), goes in pursuit of the attackers, causing them to crash, and finds that the 'baby' is actually the Australian cattle dog that follows him around in *The Road Warrior*.

While clearly coded as a fan production due to the recasting of Max and the use of copyrighted material, and that it is shot in the Mojave desert in California rather than Australia, *Renegade* is an accomplished piece of work. While obviously highly derivative, it contains material that is more inventive and stylish than some of the professional MadMaxploitation cycle that preceded it, in particular at the climax when the outlaws crash through an advertising billboard for the Main Force Patrol ('the MFP wants you'). The billboard is emblazoned with an image taken from an original *Mad Max* poster, with a large helmet (not present in the film) obscuring Mel Gibson's features. The use of a promotional image from the original release as a prop within the diegesis is a funny and knowing reflexive joke, reinforced when Max walks through the hole where his image once stood, effectively converging this fan fiction with the marketing of the original film.

The inspiration for *Renegade* was Paul Miller's desire to show off his own Interceptor car and to connect to other fans.

At the time, I owned a Mad Max Interceptor. The screen time of the car in *Mad Max* and *The Road Warrior*, when added up, wasn't very long. I wanted to feature my car in action so it could be seen and enjoyed by the fans. (Paul C. Miller 2018)

However, the film only got made through his real-life interaction with other fans of the series.

I wrote a script but had no real plan of making it. A few months later, a fellow *Mad Max* fan, Liam Fountain, contacted me. He looked a bit like Mel. He wanted to act in my film. His plan was to send the film to George Miller in hopes of getting an audition for *Mad Max Fury Road*, which was in pre-production. By his own admission, it was an audacious plan but he was passionate about his pursuit so *Mad Max Renegade* went into production. So, he donated a little money and we got started. (Paul C. Miller 2018)



Figures 9 (a)–(b) Production stills from *Mad Max: Renegade* (2011).

Paul C. Miller completed two other films that relied on his connections with the real-life *Mad Max* fan community. *Mad Max: A Wasteland Story* (2012) is a three-minute gag featuring the Lord Humungus stranded in the desert trying to hitch a ride, only for Max to pretend to pick him up but drive off instead. For *A Wasteland Story*, again Miller was reliant on his connections to the fan community because he had by then sold his Interceptor and had to borrow one from someone else. *Road Furies* (2012) is an incomplete short film, and all that exists online is the two-minute opening sequence. Again, the setting is around the time of the first film and the MFP still exists, but the Furies gang drive similarly modified vehicles to the marauders of *The Road Warrior*. Max himself is not included, and the clip ends with a link to a crowdfunding site in an attempt to raise funds to get the film completed. In this instance, funds were not found (Paul C. Miller 2018).

The homemade-ness of *Renegade*, and indeed the lower end of MadMaxploitation such as Michael J Murphy's *Death Run*, is only part of the same tradition of filmmakers attempting to create the best work that they can despite their multiple constraints and restricted opportunities. This includes the original spirit of *Mad Max*, where Luke Buckmaster paints a vivid picture of George Miller cutting the picture in his kitchen while Byron Kennedy edited the sound in the lounge (2017: 89). While a fan production with limited funds and resources, *Renegade* is also made by people working within the film industry. Paul C. Miller has directing credits listed on IMDB, as well as having worked as an art director and production designer, and several of the cast have continued to work in the industry. And, in a neat alignment with the focus of this book, Miller claims that the hood scoop from the Mustang featured in *Renegade* was one of the actual ones used in Paul W. S. Anderson's *Death Race*. These factors exemplify the blurring of the boundaries in the twenty-first century between the professional and amateur filmmaker: 'amateur' productions made by professionals or those with a high level of technical skill, made not for direct commercial purposes but to connect with fans or even to help signal to the industry the abilities of their creators.

Conclusion

In the previous chapter, I drew on David Church's observation that the nostalgic fan takes a 'stance toward technologies [that] is often infused with a longing to

occupy the past' (2015: 9), and that this takes the form of celebrating redundant technologies (mostly analogue). We can see this in activity from the meme of *Fury Road* as a Warner Bros. videocassette jacket (juvenilecinophile 2015), up to the Grindhouse-style features, shorts and trailers that proliferated in the noughties and beyond. However, the Web has fully remediated these past technologies to the extent that, like the way analogue and/or animation production is now materially the same, the symptoms of exploitation film fandom – arguments and discussions, sharing, mash-ups, imitations and so on – are all now materially identical and contained, and mediated, through the same space of the Web.

Tryon claims that the remixes interact in a dialectical way with other texts and other audiences (2009: 173). Crucially, this 'expanding archive' (2009: 173) and 'its role in shaping interpretation' (2009: 173) is also something academics working within film studies need to be aware of. But, as Manovich makes clear, the archive itself is the Web, and this is worthy of study because it changes existing media forms as well as creates new ones. The Vine videos of Jenny Beavan receiving her Academy Award are a part of this. They were linked, however briefly, with *Fury Road*'s supposed feminism and formed a part of the broader cultural discussions around the movie. While the 'feminism' of *Fury Road* is debatable due to the different methodological approaches to analysis available to us, that the cultural discussions surrounding it used the film within a feminist context, and to illuminate feminist theory, is not. In the same way that *Mad Max* existed in its thirty-year hiatus as a touchstone and marker for the apocalyptic, whatever meanings it holds now are constructed partly through the visible fan engagement discussed in this chapter.

Mad Max's absorption into online spaces such as YouTube, and fan fiction such as *Renegade*, characterizes its final shift towards the mainstream. While *Fury Road*'s gargantuan budget meant it only resembles its exploitation origins, rather than being part of a genuine non-mainstream, commercial alternative to Hollywood, it is its presence in online discussions and cultural exchanges that means it has fully transcended its marginal origins. This is symptomatic of how, through digital culture, exploitation cinema now also occupies mainstream cinematic space and is no longer characterized by its opposition to Hollywood.

Conclusion: A few years from now

In November 2016, British newspaper the *Daily Mail* published a story by Jennifer Newton about a recent Chinese ‘rip-off’ of *Fury Road* called *Mad Sheila* (Lu Lei, 2016), which features ‘desert wastelands and high speed car chases set to loud rock music’ (Newton 2016). Set after a complete environmental breakdown, *Mad Sheila* also mimics the font and design of the animated title that introduces *Fury Road*, as well as image grading to resemble its digital gloss. But being a very obviously low-budget production that includes superimposed explosions rather than the real thing, perfunctory action scenes, and derivative costumes and vehicles, it is a closer replication of MadMaxploitation of the 1980s than it is of the \$150 million budgeted *Fury Road*. The same applies to *Iron Monkey* (Yue Song, 2020), another Chinese post-apocalypse action film that appropriates the desert location and leather biker design, and that along with *Mad Sheila* hints at a new phase of MadMaxploitation. Their existence reveals the cycle’s continuing transnationality and also how it is not restricted to a historical period of production.

The *Daily Mail* article is only a throwaway story on a newspaper website, but the comments left by readers below the article online disclose the range of contested ideas that surround *Mad Max* and its place in cinema history that this book has attempted to navigate. A significant number of the one hundred comments, which come from multiple Western countries, took issue with the Chinese origins of *Mad Sheila*, indicating a belief that the ideas contained in *Mad Max* could only have meaning in a Western context. That many of the following statements contain a vehement dislike (and borderline racism) towards China as a country situates *Mad Max* as a contested cultural artefact:¹

¹ The quotations retain the original spelling and grammar.

SMD22: No surprise really, it's typical of China, a country that seems to lack the ability for original thought, just copying and imitating western ideas, the land of replication ... sad.

HELLIE1: China rips off everyone ... yet no1 does anything. Sad world

GOZER: Still doing what they do best. Stealing and copying everyone's intellectual property

MURASAKI: Years ago, Starbucks had arrived in China followed by a poor imitation. Similar green logo, comfy chairs, ... named Starstruck or something.

AMERICANBLOOD: China wants to be just like the western world and that is why they love to be the rip off queens of everything. Hey China how about coming with an original idea all on your own for a change! Leave the blockbuster movies to the real pros, Hollywood! China will always be second fiddle no matter what they do. Excuse me, they are the true rip off queens of the world. That title they can gladly keep.

Some comments re-instigated arguments around *Fury Road's* place in the online culture war and its relationship to feminist theory and anxiety over the perceived 'liberalization' and 'left-wing' domination of Hollywood:

SJB-29: how about that cultural misappropriation, are Chinese actors going to play western roles as well, are they going to allow western actors in this industry.

BRIAN BORU: The last one was useless anyway, like some feminist statement or something, just more Hollywood cultural indoctrination.

DONALD DAY: I'm all for this! The more we can deprive Hollywood of its money, the better!! Nothing but a bunch of liberal marxists/communists idiots!!

VESI: It can't be worse of what Hollywood produces and for sure a lot better than the political propaganda we have been recently carpet bombed.

NOTTINGHAM LACE: It looks better than the stupid feminist disaster that was *Fury Road*

The comments also contained antipathy towards 'Hollywood' productions and signal what they believe is a more discerning taste towards the cinematic output of other countries:

GOD'S FOLLOWER: Chinese one will be better same rubbish coming out of Hollywood.

KARL LUSDIG: This is great, keep them coming. The big shot Hollywood elites just had their jobs outsourced. How do you like globalisation now guys?

Some took the opposing view. HighKick's remark of 'Let me go find this so I can have a good laugh!!' resembles the dismissive attitude towards MadMaxploitation shared by scholars of paracinema such as Kim Newman and even one of the writers of *Fury Road* in Brendan McCarthy. Others demonstrated a more rounded understanding of the way creativity and genres often cross over international boundaries and also that the reliance on selling a movie through repetition of titles is part of a long-standing cyclical trend:

ROMERO16: Every big name movie in the US has a low budget counterpart. The only thing I find objectionable is the titles are often too similar.

DARRIN: This sort of thing isn't new. Even small American studios rip off block-busters with low-budget knock-off that have a related title.

SB4100: They all do this. Just like most top cinema releases get a cheap American TV rip off movie before its releases in cinema.

MUSTERMANN2015: What is the big deal? There are countless movies in Hollywood which were ripped off from HK or avian movies.²

'SuperDec' goes a step further and references a prominent MadMaxploitation title: 'Steel Dawn with out the cars, starring Patrick Swayze springs to mind'. Finally, several of the comments recall the original Australian context of *Mad Max* and challenge the claim that *Fury Road* is a 'Hollywood' film at all. Whereas 'PickleCake', from Philadelphia in the United States, writes: 'Perpetually counterfeiting. OUR Mad Max was my fave movie from the last 5 years', he/she is countered by other comments that recall the original trilogy and question the article's statement that *Fury Road* is a 'Hollywood' film:

GRATEFULAUSSIE: Can't beat the original and the best. 'Cundalini wants his hand back ...'

DAN.DE.LYON: I think you'll find the original starred Mel Gibson

GMELB: The Mad Max movies are Australian not Hollywood blockbusters.

Mad Max is the reference point for the convergence of these intersecting ideas about cinema and its relationship to cultural and political discussions. This book

² I am assuming this is supposed to read 'Asian' movies, rather than 'avian'.

has been an attempt to create a discernible pattern out of this spider's web of narrative threads, visual similarities, transnational industrial contexts, and the adjoining viewing practices and fan responses.

Aside from clear attempts to recall the *Mad Max* series and 'exploit' its more famous name, there have also been further oblique references and ongoing examples of the series' influence. The post-apocalypse family film *Maze Runner: The Death Cure* (Wes Ball, 2018) opens with a desert pursuit involving modified armoured trucks attacking a train convoy and features stunts that resemble those appearing in *The Road Warrior* and *Fury Road*. The most recent of the *Star Wars* franchise, *The Rise of Skywalker* (J. J. Abrams, 2019), also includes a 'Mad Max Scene' (FRESH Movie Trailers, 2019), which in this instance means another motorized chase through a desert. That it has been described this way by a YouTube channel means that the association between the two series by online creators is ongoing. Beyond cinema, the *Invictus & Olympea* commercial for perfume by Paco Rabanne (2019) takes place in the desert with a phalanx of exotic vehicles chasing each other that includes a number of similar shots and stunts from *Fury Road*, and even features an engulfing sandstorm.

More subtle references to the series are identifiable in S. Craig Zahler's *Dragged across Concrete* (2019), which stars Mel Gibson as a corrupt cop. Gibson, thanks largely to a series of well-publicized personal and legal problems, has found his acting career continuing in genre pictures that embody a B-movie and exploitation-style ethos, such as his villainous roles in *Machete Kills* (Robert Rodriguez, 2013) and *The Expendables 3* (Patrick Hughes, 2014). *Dragged across Concrete* contains several callbacks to Gibson's role as Rockatansky, which may be unintentional but nevertheless recall his breakout role. His character, Ridgeman, handcuffs a suspect by the ankle, as Max famously does to Johnny the Boy at the climax of the first film. In a scene where Ridgeman is called into his superior's office, they discuss how 'being out there' on the streets has affected his psyche, replaying a central dramatic arc of Rockatansky's and explored in the scene from *Mad Max* where he explains his motivations for quitting the MFP. In the same scene, Ridgeman is referred to as a 'steamroller with spikes', which if nothing else is reminiscent of the type of vehicle likely to turn up in *The Road Warrior* or one of its descendants.

Also, as part of the ongoing online fan engagement with the series, Mel Gibson has been 'inserted' into the trailer of *Fury Road* via 'deep fake' technology and his face merged with the body of Tom Hardy, so that he once again appears as Max (Burwick 2019). While this video by the YouTuber Sham00K (2019) has

since been removed, another has been published with Gibson replacing the male lead in the *Invictus & Olympea* Paco Rabanne commercial (The Fake Report, 2019). It seems inevitable that at some point there will be a full-length version of *Fury Road* available online with Gibson replacing Hardy for the entirety of the running time.

This book has been not just about how Miller's series has advanced from an initially reviled piece of exploitation cinema to being a respectable franchise, which has resulted in *Fury Road* being voted the twenty-first century's best film according to *Empire* magazine (Team Empire 2020). Nor has it only been about those films that feature a variation on the road warrior concept that *Mad Max* crystallized. Instead, it also charts the move of historical exploitation cinema towards respectability. This has been a slow process revealed through a number of shifts, such as how the antisocialness of the Ocker archetype and the excesses of the carsploitation movie lost their potency when variations of them were moved to television. Cinematic techniques and formal elements associated with exploitation have been softened by being subsumed into the mainstream. Television now produces scenes of sex and violence in programmes such as *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011–19) or *The Walking Dead* (AMC, 2010–) that are far more graphic than that of historical exploitation cinema, often even more so than many of the films that encountered censorship problems on initial release. This development has made many exploitation films look 'cosy' by comparison. The road warrior cycle has also seen a move towards television, with a short-lived series produced by the SyFy channel called *Blood Drive* (2017), which combines references to both *Mad Max* and the *Death Race* lineage, where due to an oil shortage, cars fuelled by human blood compete in weekly 'death races'. That it is set in 1999 – 'in the distant future' – hints at the retro-nature of the road warrior archetype, and that the world it depicts is based on a vision of the future according to the early 1980s.

The nostalgia that still exists for a largely defunct mode of exploitation production and exhibition in grindhouses or on traded video cassettes also extends to a wistfulness for the (possibly imagined) sense of danger or the illicit, and an approach to subject and overall tone that the form represented. Exploitation cinema of the 1970s and 1980s was, if nothing else, less preachy and less concerned with giving offence than today's cinema that has to undergo continual scrutiny of its cultural attitudes.

In addition, part of the affection and imagination stoked by the world of *Mad Max* onscreen is a longing for the possibilities of a utopian future where

capitalism is broken and no longer exists as we know it, and which in the wake of its demise allows for opportunities for multiple reinventions of the self and society. Dubbed 'The World's Largest Post-Apocalyptic Festival', the annual gathering called Wasteland Weekend is an example of this form of desire to live out an alternative reality, where there are 'no spectators, only participants' (Wasteland Weekend 2020). People gather together as either individuals or 'tribes' in the Mojave Desert in California, the same location as Paul C. Miller's *Mad Max: Renegade*, and 'turn the world of Mad Max into a festival'. It has a car show, where participants show off their modified vehicles, and its own Thunderdome where combat games take place. It also includes a film festival where people submit their own post-apocalyptic and MadMaxploitation shorts. It is the opportunities for the transformation of personal identity and the living conditions of humanity explored at Wasteland Weekend that differentiates the world of *Mad Max* from dystopian science fiction that instead depicts a rampant and unopposed capitalist future, such as those futures we see in *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982).

A sequel by Miller and co-written by Nico Lathouris called 'Mad Max: The Wasteland' was announced on IMDb in May 2020. In October of the same year, it was reported that this would be entitled 'Furiosa', focusing on the character played by Charlize Theron, but this time as a younger version with Anya Taylor-Joy in the role. As a prequel to events of *Fury Road*, it is probable that Max will not appear in a significant role, if at all. Such a move by Miller is likely to further cement the feminist interpretations of his movie, especially given it will outline Furiosa's traumatic past, rather than how she manages her newly acquired power and status, resources and political hierarchies after overthrowing Immortan Joe, which a sequel would have had to address. Should this prequel come to fruition, it will also refocus critical and fan attention on the road warrior films discussed here and the social and political discussions that surround them. But it remains to be seen to what extent these films will continue to have contemporary relevance as technology progresses further into the digital, the robotic and the virtual and away from the tactility of mechanical engines and gasoline.

The expansion of technologies and safety designs, and directives such as the mandatory implementation by the European Union of speed limiters on all new vehicles in 2022 (BBC 2019), plus the increasing use of electric and even driverless cars will perhaps render the future depicted in *Mad Max* as unimaginable. The growing obsolescence of the driver and the motor car, and the de-escalation of the use of gasoline and diesel in favour of electricity runs parallel to the demise

of cinema as it was and is analogous to the split between film and digital. There will soon be no drivers or mechanics in the way there will be no projectionists or even cinemagoers attending screenings in large auditoriums. The analogous development of the motor car and the cinema suggested by Karen Beckman, based on parallels of technological and social impact, has run its course.

Mad Max is set perennially in the near future but is now looking more and more like a future that can never arrive. Those watching the series from here on will see only a depiction of an alternative present where the digital age never happened. With all of this in mind, this marks the beginning of the end of the road warrior cinema charted in this book. The new safety directives and technologies will forever preserve *Mad Max*, both the filmmaking that so many fans love and that so many directors and artists are influenced by, plus the world it depicts, as a part of the past, and no longer *A Few Years from Now*.

Films Cited

48 Hours (Walter Hill, 1982)
1990: The Bronx Warriors (Enzo G. Castellari, 1982)
2019: After the Fall of New York (Sergio Martino, 1983)
A Boy and His Dog (L. Q. Jones, 1975)
A Clockwork Orange (Stanley Kubrick, 1971)
Adventures of Barry McKenzie, The (Bruce Beresford, 1972)
Alvin Purple (Tim Burstall, 1973)
American Psycho (Mary Harron, 2000)
Anthropophagus: The Beast (Aristide Massacessi, 1980)
Back to the Future (Robert Zemeckis, 1985)
Barry McKenzie Holds His Own (Bruce Beresford, 1974)
Battleship (Peter Berg, 2012)
Battletruck (Harley Cokliss, 1982)
Beneath the Planet of the Apes (Ted Post, 1970)
Beverly Hills Cop (Martin Brest, 1984)
Beyond, The (Lucio Fulci, 1981)
Big Bird Cage, The (Jack Hill, 1972)
Big Doll House, The (Jack Hill, 1971)
Black Dynamite (Scott Sanders, 2009)
Blade Runner (Ridley Scott, 1982)
Bloodfist 2050 (Cirio H. Santiago, 2005)
Blue Jean Cop, See *Shakedown*
Book of Eli, The (Albert Hughes, Aaron Hughes, 2010)
Born Losers (Tom Laughlin, 1967)
Breaker Morant (Bruce Beresford, 1980)
Bronx Warriors 2, See *Escape from the Bronx*
Bullitt (Peter Yates, 1968)
Caged Heat (Jonathan Demme, 1974)
Cannonball (Paul Bartel, 1976)
Cannonball Run, The (Hal Needham, 1981)
Cars That Ate Paris, The (Peter Weir, 1974)
Case of the Scorpion's Tail, The (Sergio Martino, 1971)
Cherry 2000 (Steve De Jarnatt, 1987)
Clash of the Titans (Desmond Davis, 1981)
Codename: Wild Geese (Antonio Margheriti, 1984)

- Crocodile Dundee* (Peter Faiman, 1986)
Damnation Alley (Jack Smight, 1977)
Dawn of the Dead (George A. Romero, 1978)
Day After, The (Nicholas Meyer, 1983)
Dead End Drive-In (Brian Trenchard-Smith, 1986)
Death Race (Paul W. S. Anderson, 2008)
Death Race 2 (Roel Reiné, 2010)
Death Race 3: Inferno (Roel Reiné, 2013)
Death Race 2000 (Paul Bartel, 1975)
Death Race 2050 (G. J. Echternkamp, 2017)
Death Race: Beyond Anarchy (Don Michael Paul, 2018)
Death Run (Michael J. Murphy, 1987)
Deathsport (Allan Arkush, Nicholas Niciphor, Roger Corman, 1978)
Death Wish (Michael Winner, 1974)
Death Wish 3 (Michael Winner, 1985)
Desert Warrior (Jim Goldman, 1988)
Diamonds Are Forever (Guy Hamilton, 1971)
Die Hard (John McTiernan, 1988)
Dirty Harry (Don Siegel, 1971)
Dirty Mary, Crazy Larry (John Hough, 1974)
Django Kill (Giulio Questi, 1967)
Doomsday (Neil Marshall, 2008)
Dragged Across Concrete (S. Craig Zahler, 2019)
Dune Warriors (Cirio H. Santiago, 1991)
Easy Rider (Dennis Hopper, 1969)
Electric Boogaloo: The Wild Untold Story of Canon Films (Mark Hartley, 2014)
Empire of Ash, See *Maniac Warriors*
Empire of Ash II, See *Maniac Warriors*
Empire of Ash III, See *Last of the Warriors*
Empire Strikes Back, The (Irvin Kershner, 1980)
Endgame (Aristide Massaccesi [Joe D'Amato], 1983)
Enforcer, The (James Fargo, 1976)
Equalizer 2000 (Cirio H. Santiago, 1986)
Escape 2000, See *Escape from the Bronx*
Escaped Lunatic, The (Wallace McCutcheon, 1904)
Escape from L.A. (John Carpenter, 1996)
Escape from New York (John Carpenter, 1981)
Escape from the Bronx (Enzo G. Castellari, 1983)
Expendables 3, The (Patrick Hughes, 2014)
Exterminator, The (James Glickenhaus, 1980)
Exterminators of the Year 3000 (Giuliano Carnimeo, 1983)

- Fight for Your Life* (Robert A. Endleson, 1977)
First Blood (Ted Kotcheff, 1982)
Fixer (Sam Mason-Bell, 2019)
Freaks (Tod Browning, 1932)
French Connection, The (William Friedkin, 1971)
Frozen (Chris Buck, Jennifer Lee, 2013)
Future Hunters (Cirio H. Santiago, 1986)
Gallipoli (Peter Weir, 1981)
Ghost in the Shell (Rupert Sanders, 2017)
Girl Shy (Fred C. Newmeyer, Sam Taylor, 1924)
Goldeneye (Martin Campbell, 1995)
Grand Theft Auto (Ron Howard, 1977)
Great Silence, The (Sergio Corbucci, 1968)
Great Train Robbery, The (Edwin S. Porter, 1903)
Grindhouse (Quentin Tarantino, Robert Rodriguez, 2007)
Harlequin (Simon Wincer, 1980)
Haunting of Sharon Tate, The (Daniel Farrands, 2019)
Hazards of Helen, The (J. P. McGowan, J. Gunnis Davis, 1914–17)
Hell Comes to Frogtown (Donald G. Jackson, R. J. Kizer, 1988)
Hobo with a Shotgun (Jason Eisener, 2011)
Hot Box, The (Joe Viola, 1972)
Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade (Steven Spielberg, 1989)
Inga (Joseph W. Sarno, 1968)
Invasion USA (Joseph Zito, 1985)
Iron Monkey (Yue Song, 2020)
I Spit on Your Grave (Meir Zarchi, 1978)
Jason and the Argonauts (Don Chaffey, 1963)
Jaws (Steven Spielberg, 1975)
Karate Kid, The (John G. Avildsen, 1984)
Keoma (Enzo G. Castellari, 1976)
Killing Edge, The (Lindsay Shonteff, 1987)
Land and Freedom (Ken Loach, 1995)
Land of Doom (Paul Maris, 1986)
Land of the Dead (George A. Romero, 2005)
Last House on the Left (Wes Craven, 1972)
Last of the Warriors (Lloyd Simandl, Michael Mazo, 1989)
Legend of the Rollerblade Seven (Donald G. Jackson, 1993)
Machete Kills (Robert Rodriguez, 2013)
Mad Jack beyond Thunderbone (Bruce Seven, 1986)
Mad Max (George Miller, 1979)
Mad Max beyond Thunderdome (George Miller, George Ogilvie, 1985)

- Mad Max Fury Road* (George Miller, 2015)
Mad Max Fury Road – Black and Chrome Edition (George Miller, 2017)
Mad Sheila (Lu Lei, 2016)
Maniac Warriors (Lloyd Simandl, Michael Mazo, 1989)
Manson Family Massacre, The (Andrew Jones, 2019)
Man with the Golden Gun, The (Guy Hamilton, 1974)
Maze Runner: The Death Cure (Wes Ball, 2018)
Michael Jackson's Thriller (John Landis, 1983)
My Darling Clementine (John Ford, 1946)
New Barbarians, The (Enzo G. Castellari, 1983)
New Gladiators, The (Lucio Fulci, 1984)
New York Ripper (Lucio Fulci, 1980)
Night of the Living Dead (George A. Romero, 1968)
Not Quite Hollywood: The Wild Untold Story of Ozploitation! (Mark Hartley, 2008)
Nude Nuns with Big Guns (Joseph Guzman, 2010)
Octopussy (John Glen, 1983)
On the Beach (Stanley Kramer, 1959)
Once Upon a Time in Hollywood (Quentin Tarantino, 2019)
Once Upon a Time in the West (Sergio Leone, 1968)
On Her Majesty's Secret Service (Peter Hunt, 1969)
Peterson (Tim Burstall, 1974)
Picnic at Hanging Rock (Peter Weir, 1975)
Pierrot le Fou (Jean Luc Godard, 1965)
Poseidon Adventure, The (Ronald Neame, 1972)
Prayer of the Rollerboys (Rick King, 1991)
Protector, The (James Glickenhaus, 1985)
Quadrophenia (Franc Roddam, 1979)
Raiders of the Sun (Cirio H. Santiago, 1991)
Rambo: First Blood Part Two (George P. Cosmatos, 1985)
Red Dawn (John Milius, 1984)
Requiem for a Village (David Gladwell, 1975)
Resident Evil (Paul W. S. Anderson, 2002)
Return of the Jedi (Richard Marquand, 1983)
Road, The (John Hillcoat, 2010)
The Road Warrior/Mad Max 2 (George Miller, 1981)
Robe, The (Henry Coster, 1953)
Robocop (Paul Verhoeven, 1987)
Rocky (John G. Avildsen, 1976)
Rollerball (Norman Jewison, 1975)
Rolling Thunder (John Flynn, 1977)

Ronin (John Frankenheimer, 1998)
Room, The (Tommy Wiseau, 2003)
Run! Bitch! Run! (Joseph Guzman, 2009)
Savage Sisters (Danny Steinmann, 1984)
Scorpio Rising (Kenneth Anger, 1963)
Searchers, The (John Ford, 1956)
Shakedown (James Glickenhaus, 1988)
Shatter Dead (Scooter McCrae, 1992)
Show, The (Larry Semon, Norman Taurog, 1922)
Silver Streak (Arthur Hiller, 1976)
Sisterhood, The (Cirio H. Santiago, 1985)
Sleeper, The (Justin Russell, 2012)
Smokey and the Bandit (Hal Needham, 1977)
Soldier, The (James Glickenhaus, 1982)
Spacehunter: Adventures in the Forbidden Zone (Lamont Johnson, 1983)
Starlett! (Richard Kantor, 1969)
Starship Troopers (Paul Verhoeven, 1997)
Stars of the Roller State Disco (Alan Clarke, 1984)
Star Wars (George Lucas, 1977)
Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker (J. J. Abrams, 2019)
Steel Dawn (Lance Hool, 1987)
Stone (Sandy Harbutt, 1974)
Stork (Tim Burstall, 1971)
Stryker (Cirio H. Santiago, 1983)
Summer City (Christopher Fraser, 1977)
Tank Girl (Rachel Talalay, 1995)
Terminal Island (Stephanie Rothman, 1973)
Texas Chain Saw Massacre, The (Tobe Hooper, 1974)
THX 1138 (George Lucas, 1971)
Turkey Shoot (Brian Trenchard-Smith, 1982)
Two Lane Blacktop (Monte Hellman, 1971)
Ultimate Warrior, The (Robert Clouse, 1975)
Ultra Warrior (Augusto Tamayo San Román, Kevin Tent, 1990)
Vanishing Point (Richard C. Sarafain, 1971)
Wake in Fright (Ted Kotcheff, 1971)
War Game, The (Peter Watkins, 1966)
Wargames (John Badham, 1983)
Warlords of the 21st Century, See *Battletruck*
Warriors, The (Walter Hill, 1979)
Warrior of the Lost World (David Worth, 1983)
Warriors of the Wasteland, see *New Barbarians, The*

Water Wars (Cirio H. Santiago, 2014)
Waterworld (Kevin Reynolds, 1995)
Weekend (Jean Luc Godard, 1967)
Wheels of Fire (Cirio H. Santiago, 1984)
Wild Angels, The (Roger Corman, 1965)
Wild One, The (László Benedek, 1953)
Wild Geese, The (Andrew V. McLaglen, 1978)
Wind That Shakes the Barley, The (Ken Loach, 2006)
Women in Cages (Gerardo de Leon, 1971)
Wyrnwood: Road of the Dead (Kiah Roach-Turner, 2014)
Zombie Flesh Eaters (Lucio Fulci, 1980)

YouTube videos

A Fistful of Dollars 1964 (The Mandalorian Style) (Guillermo CM, 2019)
CARS (Mad Max: Fury Road Style) (CineMash, 2015)
Everything Wrong with Mad Max: Fury Road (Cinema Sins, 2015)
Everything Wrong with Cinema Sins – Mad Max: Fury Road (Shaun, 2016)
Hell Comes to Fury Road – Trailer Mashup Mad Max/Hell Comes to Frogtown Recut
 (MovieBitches, 2016)
Honest Trailers – Mad Max: Fury Road (Screen Junkies, 2015)
Immortan Don's Inauguration Speech (Conan of Cimmeria, 2017)
Mad Max Fury Road Chrome Spray Challenge (Mike Rotch, 2015)
Mad Max Doof Warrior Inspired Flamethrower Ukulele (Make, 2015)
Mad Max Fury Road vs Spacehunter: Adventures in the Forbidden Zone
 (HeavyMetalEvilien, 2015)
Mario Kart: Fury Road (Parody Trailer) (Kris K, 2015)
Mel Gibson is Mad Max again! [Deepfake] (The Fake Report, 2019)
Road Wars – The Emperor Strikes Back (Mad Max/Star Wars Mashup) (Krishna
 Sheno, 2015)
Spaghetti Western Trailer for 'The Mandalorian' (kingkida, 2019)

Fan productions

Fury Road Fan Edit (Amadi, 2019)
Jaws: The Sharksploitation Edit (Man Behind the Mask, 2009)
Mad Max: A Wasteland Story (Paul C. Miller, 2012)
Mad Max: Get to the Point Edit (Tranzor, 2008)

Mad Max Renegade (Paul C. Miller, 2011)
Mad Max: The Desert Road (Maniac, 2017)
Road Furies Scene 1 (Paul C. Miller, 2012)
Superman: Requiem (Gene Fallaize, 2011)
Troops (Kevin Rubio, 1997)
War of the Stars: A New Hope Grindhoused, The (Man Behind the Mask, 2010)

TV series

Alvin Purple (ABC, 1976)
Amerika (ABC, 1987)
Blood Drive (SyFy, 2017)
Cobra Kai (YouTube Red, 2018–)
Cops (Fox, 1989–2013)
Dukes of Hazzard, The (CBS, 1979–85)
Game of Thrones (HBO, 2011–19)
How I Met Your Mother (CBS, 2005–14)
Mandalorian, The (Disney+, 2019)
Mystery Science Theater 3000 (KTMA-TV, Comedy Channel, Comedy Central, The Sci-Fi Channel, Netflix, 1988–99)
Number 96 (Cash Harmon Television, 1972–7)
Peep Show (Channel Four, 2003–15)
Star Wars: The Clone Wars (Cartoon Network, Disney+, 2008–20)
The Thick of It (BBC, 2005–12)
Threads (BBC, Mick Jackson, 1984)
Walking Dead, The (AMC, 2010–)
World War Three (NBC, 1982)

References

- Ackroyd, P. (1985), 'The Future of Australia: Review of *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*', *The Spectator*, 26 July 1985.
- Anderson, C. W. (1985), *Science Fiction Films of the Seventies*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Armstrong, R. B., and Armstrong, M. W. (2009), *Encyclopedia of Film Themes, Settings, and Series*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Atkinson, S. (2014), *Beyond the Screen: Emerging Cinema and Engaging Audiences*, New York: Bloomsbury.
- Bacchi, U. (2014), 'Dramatic Video of British Suicide Bomber's "Mad Max" Assault on Aleppo Prison', *International Business Times*, 12 February 2014. Available online: <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/syria-aleppo-prison-attack-bomber-was-british-suicide-jihadist-1436111> (accessed 21 February 2017).
- BBC (2019) 'Road Safety: UK Set to Adopt Vehicle Speed Limiters', *BBC News*, 27 March. Available online: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-47715415> (accessed 22 November 2019).
- Bean, J. M. (2004), 'Trauma Thrills', in Y.Tasker (ed.), *Action and Adventure Cinema*, 17–30, London: Routledge.
- Beckman, K. (2010), *Crash: Cinema and the Politics of Speed and Stasis*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Bernstein, A. (2015), *The Art of Mad Max Fury Road*, London: Titan Books.
- BFI (2019), Listing for *Spacehunter: Adventures in the Forbidden Zone* (1983). Available online: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/films-tv-people/4ce2b77079e25> (accessed 10 October 2019).
- Bordwell, D. (1989), *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Broderick, M. (1983), 'Surviving Armageddon: Beyond the Imagination of Disaster', *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 20, no. 61, November. Available online: <https://www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues/61/broderick61art.htm> (accessed 5 March 2020).
- Buckmaster, L. (2017), *Miller and Max: George Miller and the Making of a Film Legend*, Melbourne: Hardie Grant Books.
- Burwick, K. (2019), 'Mel Gibson Returns as Mad Max in Fury Road Deepfake Video', *MovieWeb*, 7 September. Available online: <https://movieweb.com/mad-max-fury-road-deepfake-video-mel-gibson/> (accessed 27 September 2019).
- Campbell, J. ([1949] 2012), *The Hero with a Thousand Faces (The Collected Works of Joseph Campbell)*, 3rd edn, Novato, CA: New World Library.

- Carlson, J. (2016), “‘Mad Max’ Costume Designer Jenny Beavan on Her Oscar Win: ‘I Don’t Mind in the Least If They Didn’t Clap’”, *Hollywood Reporter*, 3 February. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/mad-max-costume-designer-jenny-872342> (accessed 25 February 2019).
- Church, D. (2015), *Grindhouse Nostalgia: Memory, Home Video and Exploitation Film Fandom*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Chute, D. (1982), ‘The Ayatollah of the Moviola’, *Film Comment*, July–August: 26–31.
- CineMash (2015), ‘CARS (Mad Max Fury Road Style)’, YouTube, 5 June. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bR2gUVDNdIA> (accessed 13 July 2019).
- Cinema Sins (2015a), ‘Everything Wrong with Mad Max Fury Road’, YouTube, 8 October. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RoltZ7XjaAk> (accessed 31 January 2019).
- Cinema Sins (2015b), ‘Everything Wrong with Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome’, YouTube, 7 May. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJf-XUC7J9U> (accessed 31 January 2019).
- Cline, J. (2010), ‘Bernie’s “Death Wish”: History and Transgression in New York City’, in R. G. Weiner and J. Cline (eds), *Cinema Inferno: Celluloid Explosions from the Cultural Margins*, 145–56, Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press.
- Collins, M. A., Heller, S., Hagenauer, G. and Oberg, R. (2008), *Men’s Adventure Magazines*, London: Taschen.
- Conan of Cimmeria (2017), ‘Immortan Don’s Inauguration Speech’, YouTube, 20 January. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ghc5IEwros> (accessed 15 July 2019).
- Conterio, M. (2019), *Mad Max*, Constellations: Studies in Science Fiction Film and TV, Leighton Buzzard: Auteur.
- Cook, P. (1976), ‘Exploitation Films and Feminism’, *Screen*, vol. 17, no. 2, Summer: 122–7.
- Corbett, C. (2017), ‘Nowhere to Run: Repetition and Heterophobia in the Australian Post-Apocalypse – from “Crabs” to *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*’, *Science Fiction Journal of Film and TV*, vol. 10, no. 3: 329–51.
- Cranny-Francis, A. (1990), ‘Feminist Futures: A Generic Study’, in Annette Kuhn (ed.), *Alien Zone*, London: Verso.
- Cunningham, S. (1985), ‘Hollywood Genres, Australian Movies’, in A. Moran and T. O’Regan (eds), *An Australian Film Reader*, 235–41, Sydney: Currency Press.
- Denson, S., and Leyda, J. (eds) (2016), *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film*, Falmer: REFRAME Books.
- Ebert, R. (1980), *I Spit on Your Grave*, *RogerEbert.com*, 16 July. Available online: <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/i-spit-on-your-grave-1980> (accessed 14 December 2019).

- Falconer, D. (1997), ‘“We Don’t Need to Know the Way Home” the Disappearance of the Road in the Mad Max Trilogy’, in St Cohan and I. Rae Hark (eds), *The Road Movie Book*, 249–70, London: Routledge.
- Feminist Mad Max (2015), *Hey Girl*. Available online: <https://feministmadmax.tumblr.com> (accessed 13 September 2019).
- Filibus (2018), ‘42nd Street Grindhouse Listings, 1978–1993’. Available online: <https://letterboxd.com/filibus/list/42nd-street-grindhouse-listings-1978-1993/> (accessed 9 March 2020).
- Fisher, A. (2011), *Radical Frontiers in the Spaghetti Western*, London: I.B. Tauris.
- Fisher, A., and Walker, J. (2016) ‘Introduction’, in A. Fisher and J. Walker (eds), *Grindhouse: Cultural Exchange on 42nd Street and Beyond*, 1–12, New York: Bloomsbury.
- French, K., and French, P. (1999), *Cult Movies*, London: Pavilion Books.
- Fuchs, C. (2014), *Digital Labour and Karl Marx*, Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge.
- Geraghty, L. (2009), *American Science Fiction Film and Television*, Oxford: Berg.
- Goldberg, J. (2007), ‘The Media’s Katrina Malpractice’, *L.A. Times*, September 2007, Available online: <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/la-oe-goldberg4sep04-column.html> (accessed 21 February 2017).
- Gotsch, K., and Basti, V. (2018), ‘Capitalizing on Mass Incarceration: U.S. Growth in Private Prisons’, *The Sentencing Project*, Available online: <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/capitalizing-on-mass-incarceration-u-s-growth-in-private-prisons/> (accessed 22 January 2020).
- Grant, B. K. (2008), ‘Science Fiction Double Feature: Ideology in the Cult Film’, in X. Mendik and E. Mathjis (eds), *The Cult Film Reader*, 76–87, New York: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill.
- Grant, B. K. (2013), *100 Science Fiction Films*, London: BFI.
- Grant, K. (2020), *Vigilantes: Private Justice in Popular Cinema*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Guillermo, C. M. (2019), ‘A Fistful of Dollars 1964 (The Mandalorian Style)’, YouTube, 31 August. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YVfXGbzkTj0> (accessed, 22 March 2020).
- Gunning, T. (2004), ‘“Now You See It, Now You Don’t”: The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions’, in L. Grieveson and P. Kramer (eds), *The Silent Cinema Reader*, 41–50, London: Routledge.
- Halliwell, L. (1995), *Halliwell’s Film Guide*, 11th edn, J. Walker (ed.), New York: HarperCollins.
- Haraway, D. (1991), ‘A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century’, in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, London: Free Association Books.
- Hardy, P. (ed.) (1984), *Aurum Film Encyclopaedia Volume 2*, NYC: William Morrow.

- Hassler-Forest, Dan (2017) 'Mad Max: Between Apocalypse and Utopia,' *Science Fiction Journal of Film and Television*, vol. 10, no. 3: 301–6.
- Hazeley, J., and Morris, J. (2016), *The Ladybird Book of the Zombie Apocalypse*, UK: Penguin Random House.
- Heller, C. (2020), 'The Cinematographer of Knives Out Wants to End the Film-vs.-Digital Debate,' *Polygon.com*, 6 February. Available online: <https://www.polygon.com/2020/2/6/21125680/film-vs-digital-debate-movies-cinematography> (accessed 23 March 2020).
- HeavyMetalEvilien (2015), *Mad Max Fury Road vs Spacehunter: Adventures in the Forbidden Zone*, YouTube, 18 October. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYdDA-19LuM> (accessed 10 May 2019).
- Heller-Nicholas, A. (2016), 'From Opera House to Grindhouse,' in A. Fisher and J. Walker (eds), *Grindhouse: Cultural Exchange on 42nd Street, and Beyond*, New York: Bloomsbury.
- Holmes, N. (2018), *Welcome to Fear City: Crime Film, Crisis, and the Urban Imagination*, New York: State University of New York Press.
- Immortan Don (2016), Available online: <https://immortandon.tumblr.com> (accessed 13 September 2019).
- Isaacs, B. (2013), *The Orientation of Future Cinema; Technology, Aesthetics, Spectacle*, New York: Bloomsbury.
- Jameson, F. (1983), 'Pleasure: A Political Issues,' in *Formations of Pleasure*, 1–13, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Jancovich, M. (2008), 'Cult Fictions: Cult Movies, Subcultural Capital and the Production of Cultural Distinctions,' in X. Mendik and E. Mathjis (eds), *The Cult Film Reader*, 149–62, New York: Open University Press/McGraw-Hill.
- Jenkins, H. (2006), 'Exploiting Feminism in Stephanie Rothman's *Terminal Island*,' in H. Jenkins (ed.), *The Wow Climax: Tracing the Emotional Impact of Popular Culture*, 102–25, New York: New York University Press.
- Jenkins, H. (2008), '"Get a Life!": Fans, Poachers, Nomads,' in X. Mendik and E. Mathjis (eds), *The Cult Film Reader*, 429–44, Berkshire: McGraw Open University Press.
- J. Matthew Turner (2015), *The Karate Kid: Daniel Is the REAL Bully [J. Matthew Movies, Ep 3]*, YouTube, 23 August. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_Gz_iTuRMM (accessed 14 July 2019).
- J. Matthew Turner (2015), *J. Matthew Responds to Comments*, YouTube, 4 September. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cd82fxIbqUE> (accessed 14 July 2019).
- Johinke, R. (2009), 'Not Quite Mad Max: Brian Trenchard-Smith's *Dead End Drive-In*,' in *Studies in Australasian Cinema*, vol. 3, no. 3: 309–20.

- Jones, S. G. (2003) 'Phantom Menace: Killer Fans, Consumer Activism and Digital Filmmakers', in X. Mendik and S. J. Schneider (eds), *Underground USA: Filmmaking Beyond the Hollywood Canon*, 170–8, London: Wallflower Press.
- Juvenilecinephile (2015), 'Mad Max Fury Road as a Warner Home Video VHS Tape', Tumblr. Available online: <https://juvenilecinephile.tumblr.com/post/108138768649/mad-max-fury-road-as-a-warner-home-video-vhs-tape> (accessed 21 July 2018).
- Keating, A. (2014), 'Home Movies in the Age of Web 2.0: The Case of "Star Wars Kid"', in L. Rascaroli, G. Young and B. Monahan (eds), *Amateur Filmmaking: The Home Movie, the Archive, the Web*, 301–14, New York: Bloomsbury.
- kingkida (2019), 'Spaghetti Western Trailer for "The Mandalorian"', YouTube, 26 November. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWJrG3Ua5Kk> (accessed 10 December 2019).
- King, R. (2010) '“Uproarious Inventions”. The Keystone Film Company, Modernity, and the Art of the Motor', in T. Paulus and R. King (eds), *Slapstick Comedy*, 114–36, New York: Routledge.
- Kirby, L. (1997), *Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press.
- Krishna Shenoï (2015), 'ROAD WARS – The Imperator Strikes Back (Mad Max/Star Wars Mashup)', YouTube, 17 July. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tj1P1eEZrY> (accessed 14 December 2019).
- KrisK (2015), 'Mario Kart: Fury Road (Parody Trailer)', YouTube, 22 May. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NAxFjVCkpRY> (accessed 14 May 2019).
- Krzywinska, T. (2006), *Sex and the Cinema*, London: Wallflower Press.
- Lerner, D. (2010), 'Cinema of Regression: *Grindhouse* and the Limits of the Spectatorial Imaginary', in R. G. Weiner and J. Cline (eds), *Cinema Inferno: Celluloid Explosions from the Cultural Margins*, 358–79, London: Scarecrow Press.
- Lessig, L. (2008), *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy*, UK: Penguin Random House.
- Longhurst, S. (2018), Email interview with author, 9 December.
- Lyndon, P. (2018), Email interview with author, 21 November.
- Lyne, C. (2016), 'Is Mad Max: Fury Road Even Better in Black and White?', *The Guardian*, 12 November. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/nov/12/mad-max-fury-road-black-white> (accessed 12 January 2020).
- Make (2015), 'Mad Max Doof Warrior Inspired Flamethrower Ukulele', YouTube, 5 June. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzfyoSgFGNc> (accessed 14 July 2019).
- Man Behind the Mask, The (2018) 'Home'. Available online: <http://tmbtm-fanedit.com/blogspot.com/p/tmbtms-fanedit-list.html> (accessed 4 December 2019).
- Manovich, L. (2001), *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- Martin, A. (2003), *The Mad Max Movies*, Canberra: Currency Press and Screen South Australia.
- Martino, S. (2017), *After the Fall: An Interview with Sergio Martino*, 88 Films.
- McCarthy, B. (2018), Email interview with author, 2 May.
- McCarthy, B. (2020), @MysticMcCarthy, Twitter. Available online: https://twitter.com/MysticMcCarthy/with_replies (accessed 22 March 2020).
- McLean, B. (2017) 'Who Killed the World? Religious Paradox in *Mad Max Fury Road*', *Science Fiction Journal of Film and TV*, vol. 10, no. 3: 371–90.
- MCP (2019) 'Week of April 7, 2019 – New Fanedits', fanedit.org. Available online: <https://www.fanedit.org/week-of-april-7-2019-new-fanedits/> (accessed 20 October 2020).
- Mendik, X. (2015), *Bodies of Desire and Bodies in Distress: The Golden Age of Cult Italian Cinema 1970–1985*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars.
- Mercer, C. (1983), *A Poverty of Desire: Pleasure and Popular Politics*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Miller, G. (2017), *Maximum Fury: Filming Fury Road*, Warner Bros. Entertainment.
- Miller, P. C. (2018), Email interview with author, 16 February.
- Mike Rotch (2015), 'Mad Max Fury Road Chrome Spray Challenge', YouTube, 11 October. Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gw_0BnY9GIw (accessed 14 July 2019).
- Moore, D. J. (2014), *World Gone Wild: A Survivor's Guide to Post-Apocalyptic Movies*, PA: Schiffer.
- Moran, A., and Vieth, E. (2006), *Film in Australia: An Introduction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moran, A., and Vieth, E. (2009), *The Art to Z of Australian and New Zealand Cinema*, London: Scarecrow Press.
- MovieBitches. (2016), 'Hell Comes to Fury Road – Trailer Mashup Mad Max/Hell Comes to Frogtown Recut', YouTube, May 13 May. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uyt9twUSf1w> (accessed 14 May 2019).
- Mufson, B. (2015), 'Was Mad Max Meant to Be Black and White?', *Vice*, 23 September. Available online: https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/4xq7aq/was-mad-max-meant-to-be-black-and-white (accessed 13 July 2019).
- Musser, C. (2004), 'Moving towards Fictional Narratives: Story Films Become the Dominant Product, 1903–1904', in L. Grieveson and P. Kramer (eds), *The Silent Cinema Reader*, 87–102, London: Routledge.
- Nashawaty, C. (2013), *Crab Monsters, Teenage Cavemen, and Candy Stripe Nurses. Roger Corman: King of the B Movie*, New York: Abrams.
- Nathan, I. (2000), 'Mad Max 2 Review', *Empire Online*. Available online: <https://www.empireonline.com/movies/reviews/empire-essay-mad-max-2-review/> (accessed 24 August 2018).

- Newell, A. (ed.) (2016), *The Art of the B-Movie Poster*, Berkeley, CA: Gingko Press.
- Newman, K. (1988), *Nightmare Movies: A Critical Guide to Contemporary Horror Movies*, New York: Harmony Books.
- Newman, K. (1990), *Wild West Movies*, London: Bloomsbury.
- Newman, K. (1999), *Millennium Movies: End of the World Cinema*, London: Titan Books.
- Newton, J. (2016), 'There Will Be Fury in Hollywood When They See This: China Releases Mad Max Rip-Off Movie ... Titled Mad Sheila', *Mail Online*, 25 November. Available online: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3971420/There-Fury-Hollywood-China-releases-Mad-Max-rip-movie-titled-Mad-Sheila.html> (accessed 14 January 2020).
- Newton, J. (2019), *The Anarchist Cinema*, Bristol: Intellect.
- Norris, G. (2017a), *Fury Road: Crash and Smash*, Warner Bros. Entertainment.
- Norris, G. (2017b), *Maximum Fury: Filming Fury Road*, Warner Bros. Entertainment.
- O'Regan, T. (1989), 'Cinema Oz: The Ocker Films', in A. Moran, and T. O'Regan (eds), *The Australian Screen*, 78–98, Ringwood, Vic.: Penguin Books.
- O'Regan, T. (1996), *Australian National Cinema*, New York: Routledge.
- Osgerby, B. (2003a), 'Sleazy Riders: Exploitation, "Otherness", and Transgression in the 1960s Biker Movie', *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol. 31, no. 3: 98–108.
- Osgerby, B. (2003b), 'Full Throttle on the Highway to Hell: Mavericks, Machismo, and Mayhem in the American Biker Movie', in X. Mendik and S. J. Schneider (eds), *Underground USA: Filmmaking Beyond the Hollywood Canon*, 123–39, London: Wallflower Press.
- Palmer, J. (2018), 'HMV Goes VHS Retro for 80s Classics', *Entertainment Focus.com*, 15 June. Available online: <https://www.entertainment-focus.com/film-section/film-news/hmv-goes-vhs-retro-for-80s-classics-including-back-to-the-future-e-t-top-gun/> (accessed 14 January 2020).
- Panavision (2015), 'John Seale on Mad Max: Fury Road, Panavision'. Available online: <https://www.panavision.com/john-seale-mad-max-fury-road> (accessed 20 March 2020).
- Peary, D. (1982), *Cult Movies*, London: Vermilion.
- Press Association (2019) 'James DeGale Retires from Boxing at 33 after 10 Years as a Professional', *The Guardian*, 28 February. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2019/feb/28/james-degale-retires-boxing-10-years> (accessed 24 August 2019).
- Prince, S. (2012), *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema: The Seduction of Reality*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Pym, J. (ed.) (2002), *Time Out Film Guide*, 10th edn, London: Penguin Books.
- Quinlan, D. (ed.) (1996), *The TV Times Film and Video Guide*, London: Mandarin.

- Rattigan, N. (1991), *Images of Australia: 100 Films of the New Australian Cinema*, Dallas: SMU Press.
- Rayner, J. (2000a), 'The Cult Film, Roger Corman and *The Cars That Ate Paris*', in X. Mendik and G. Harper (eds), *Unruly Pleasures: The Cult Film and Its Critics*, 123–39, Surrey: FAB Press.
- Rayner, J. (2000b), *Contemporary Australian Cinema: An Introduction*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Rayner, J. (2005), 'Terror Australis: Areas of Horror in the Australian Cinema', in S. J. Schneider and T. Williams (eds), *Horror International*, 98–113, Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.
- Read, J. (2000), *The New Avengers, Feminism, Femininity, and the Rape-Revenge Cycle*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Read, R. J. (2016), '"The Smashing, Crashing, Pile-Up of the Century": The Carsploitation Film', in A. Fisher and J. Walker (eds), *Grindhouse: Cultural Exchange on 42nd Street, and Beyond*, 93–106, New York: Bloomsbury.
- Ricketson, J. ([1979] 1985), 'Poor Movies, Rich Movies', *Film News* January 1979, in A. Moran and T. O'Regan (eds), *An Australian Film Reader*, 223–7, Sydney: Currency Press.
- Romao, T. (2004), 'Guns and Gas: Investigating the 1970s Car Chase Film', in Yvonne Tucker (ed.), *Action and Adventure Cinema*, 136–52, London: Routledge.
- Schaefer, E. (1999), '*Bold! Daring! Shocking! True!*' *A History of Exploitation Films, 1919–1959*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Schauer, B. (2017), *Escape Velocity: American Science Fiction Film, 1950–1982*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Sconce, J. (1995), 'Trashing the Academy: Taste, Excess, and an Emerging Politics of Cinematic Style', *Screen*, vol. 36, no. 4, Winter: 371–93.
- Screen Junkies (2015), *Honest Trailers Mad Max: Fury Road*, YouTube, 25 August. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0RXhcqdewf0> (accessed 29 January 2019).
- Segrave, K. (2006), *Drive-In Theaters: A History from Their Inception in 1933*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland.
- Sham00K (2019), *If Mel Gibson Had Reprised His Role as Mad Max in Fury Road #1*, YouTube, no longer available online – previous link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dHualVqdTg> (accessed 27 September 2019).
- Shapiro, J. F. (2002), *Atomic Bomb Cinema*, New York: Routledge.
- Shaun (2016), *Everything Wrong With Cinema Sins – Mad Max: Fury Road*, YouTube, 8 May. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ti3chBx2Pc> (accessed 31 January 2019).
- Sheckels, T. F. (2002), *Celluloid Heroes Down Under: Australian Film, 1970–2000*, Westport, CT: Praeger.

- Shiach, D. (1993), *The Films of Peter Weir*, London: Charles Letts.
- Simpson, C., Marawska, R. and Lambert, A. (eds) (2009), 'Introduction', in *Diasporas of Australian Cinema*, 15–28, Bristol: Intellect.
- Sloan, K. (1988), *The Loud Silents: Origins of the Social Problem Film*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Smith, J. (2005), '“Are You Now or Have You Ever Been a Christian?: The Strange History of *The Robe* As Political Allegory', *Film Studies*, vol. 7, Winter: 1–16.
- Socialist Alternative. (2005), 'Hurricane Katrina: Biggest Refugee Crisis since the American Civil War', *The Socialist*, #406, 8–14 September. Available online: <https://www.socialistalternative.org/poor-black-and-left-to-die/hurricane-katrina/> (accessed 21 February 2017).
- Stanfield, P. (2015), *The Cool and the Crazy*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Stanfield, P. (2016), 'Run, Angel, Run: Serial Production and the Biker Movie, 1966–1972', in A. Fisher and J. Walker (eds), *Grindhouse: Cultural Exchange on 42nd Street, and Beyond*, 73–91, New York: Bloomsbury.
- Stanfield, P. (2018), *Hoodlum Movies*, Rutgers University Press.
- Stallybrass, P., and White, A. (1986), *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, London: Methuen.
- Straka, M. (2005), 'Grrr! Mad Katrina: Beyond Thunderdome', *Fox News*, 6 September. Available online: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/2005/09/06/grrr-mad-katrina-beyond-thunderdome.html> (accessed 21 February 2017).
- Taylor, G. (1999), *Artists in the Audience: Cults, Camp, and American Film Criticism*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Team Empire (2020), 'The 100 Greatest Movies of the 21st Century, Empire Online', Available online: <https://www.empireonline.com/movies/features/best-movies-century-page-10/> (accessed 22 February 2020).
- The Fake Report (2019), 'Mel Gibson Is Mad Max Again! [Deepfake]', YouTube, 4 December. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gN8euRxBF9E> (accessed 13 January 2020).
- Totaro, D. (2010), 'The Vertical Topography of the Science-Fiction Film', *Offscreen*, vol. 14, no. 8. Available online: https://offscreen.com/view/vertical_topography (accessed 21 November 2019).
- Tranzor (2012), 'Mad Max: Get to the Point Edit', fanedit.org. Available online: <https://ifdb.fanedit.org/mad-max-get-to-the-point-edit/> (accessed 20 October 2020).
- Trenchard-Smith, B. (2018), Skype interview with author, 17 May 2018.
- Tryon, C. (2009), *Reinventing Cinema: Movies in the Age of Media Convergence*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

- Valenti, J. (2015), 'Sexists Are Scared of Mad Max Because It Is a Call to Dismantle Patriarchies', *The Guardian*, 27 May. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/may/27/sexists-are-scared-of-mad-max-because-it-is-a-call-to-dismantle-patriarchies> (accessed 13 October 2019).
- Vince, J. D. (1985), *Mad Max beyond Thunderdome Novelisation*, London: W.H. Allen.
- Wallace, S. ([1976] 1985), 'Film Australia: Isolated and Middle-Class', *Film News* December 1976–January 1977, in A. Moran and T. O'Regan (eds), *An Australian Film Reader*, 122–6, Sydney: Currency Press.
- Wasser, F. (2001), *Veni, Vidi, Video: The Hollywood Empire and the VCR*, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Wasteland Weekend (2020), 'About'. Available online: <https://www.wastelandweekend.com> (accessed 22 February 2020).
- Whipp, E. (2016), 'Colored by Eric Whipp', *Lowepost*, <https://lowepost.com/casestudies/mad-max-fury-road-r9/> (accessed 17 October 2020).
- White, D. (1984), *Australian Movies to the World*, Sydney: Fontana and Cinema Papers.
- Whitehead, M. (2003), *Roger Corman: Almost Everything You Need to Know in One Essential Guide*, Harpenden, Herts, UK: Pocket Essentials.
- Williams, E. C. (2011), *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse*, London: Zero Books.
- Williams, E. C. (2017), *Shard Cinema*, London: Repeater Books.
- Wiseman, E. (2016), 'Jenny Beavan Interview', *The Guardian*, 20 March. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/mar/20/interview-jenny-beavan-costume-designer-oscars> (accessed 23 January 2019).
- Wood, R. (1986), *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Yates, M. (2017), 'Recasting Nature as a Feminist Space in Mad Max Fury Road', *Science Fiction Journal of Film and Television*, vol. 10, no. 3: 335–70.
- Yule, A. (1987), *Hollywood a Go Go: An Account of the Canon Phenomenon*, London: Sphere Books.
- Zalcock, B. (2001), *Renegade Sisters: Girl Gangs on Film*, London: Creation Books.

Index

- 3-D aesthetic 143–5
3-D technology 151, 153, 163, 174
42nd Street 6, 16, 111, 142
48 Hours 146
1990: *The Bronx Warriors* 115
2019: *After the Fall of New York* 37, 110, 114–15
- A Boy and His Dog* 14 n.1, 63
A Clockwork Orange 63
Ackroyd, Peter 61, 82
action cinema 61, 63, 68–9, 73–4, 155
Adams, Philip 56
Adventures of Barry McKenzie, The 20–2
Alvin Purple (film) 21, 57
Alvin Purple (television) 22
Amazon Prime Video 142
American International Pictures (AIP) 24
American Psycho 120
Amerika 109
Anarchist Cinema, The 32 n.2, 86 n.2
Anderson, Paul W.S. 45, 46, 48, 49, 50, 52, 180
Anger, Kenneth 23, 27, 66
animation 150–1, 154, 160, 177, 181
Anthropophagus: The Beast 108
Australian Development Corporation 17–18, 27
Australian national cinema 5, 32, 57–8
automobiles and cars in cinema
 in America 9, 17–18, 32, 35–6, 37, 40, 42, 45–6, 48
 in Australia 3, 9, 14, 17–19, 32, 36, 59, 79
3-D 144, 148
chases and crashes 72–7
fan Productions 175, 177 n.7
in Godard 95
Mad Max and Genre 56
NASCAR and Formula One 47
poster and cover art 112
post-apocalyptic 113, 115–16, 121, 129, 132
retrosploitation 146
social class 101–2
on Television 187
- Back to the Future* 146
Barry McKenzie Holds His Own 21
Bartel, Paul 9, 18, 35–6, 38–40, 46, 49–50
Battleship 153
Battletruck 46 n.1
BDSM imagery 97–100
beach movies 17
Bean, Sean 48
Beavan, Jenny 1, 162, 166, 181
Beneath the Planet of the Apes 10
Beverly Hills Cop 146
Beyond, The 108
Beyond Thunderdome, see *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome*
Big Bird Cage, The 117
Big Doll House, The 117
biker movie 18
 in Australia 42, 63–4
 cycle 14, 23–8
 exploitation film culture 6, 8, 11, 31, 36, 56
 see Anger, Kenneth
 MadMaxploitation
Billy Jack, character 28
Black Dynamite 146
Blade Runner 188
blaxploitation 6, 146
Blood Drive 187
Bloodfist 2050 116
Blue Jean Cop, see *Shakedown*
Book of Eli, The 46
Bordwell, David 86
Born Losers 26–8, 32, 66–7
Breaker Morant, 19
British Film Institute (BFI) 46 n.1, 174

- Bronx Warriors 2*, see *Escape from the Bronx*
 Buckmaster Luke, 8, 56, 60, 68, 79–80, 149, 180
Bullitt 35–6, 74
- Caan, James 40
Caged Heat 117
 Campbell, Joseph 5, 82
Cannonball 36
Cannonball Run, The 36
 Canon Films 136, 155
Carry On (series) 22
 car chases, see automobiles and cars
 in cinema
 car crashes, see automobiles and cars
 in cinema
 Carey, Peter 128
 Carpenter, John 114, 153–4
 carsploitation 9, 14, 32, 35–8, 44–5, 45 n.3, 56, 78, 110, 146, 148, 187
Cars That Ate Paris, The 9, 17–19, 21, 27, 35, 42, 59, 82
Case of the Scorpions Tail, The 108
 Castellari, Enzo G. 5, 108, 112, 114–16, 120–4, 127
 CGI 51, 148–9, 153–4, 156
 Charles Manson 157
Cherry 2000 123
 Church, David 139, 142, 145, 151, 160, 169, 180
 cinema of attractions, the 72–4, 143–4
 Cinema Sins 170–3
 Clarke, Alan 132–3, 132 n.6
Clash of the Titans 151
Cobra Kai 175 n.6
Codename: Wild Geese 138
 Cold War 109
 Collins, Roberta 37
 Confederate flag 115,
 Cook, Pam 25, 31, 46 105
Cops (tv series) 176
 Corman, Roger 18, 23, 25, 105, 116–17, 117 n.4
 Death Race 2000, 9, 18, 35–40, 42, 49
 Death Race 2050, 51–2
 Deathsport, 43–5, 45 n.3
Crabs (short story) 128, 130
- Crocodile Dundee* 21
 cult audiences 49–50, 111, 168–71, 174
 see Jenkins, Henry
 cult cinema 86, 104, 108, 108 n.1, 162, 163–4
 cyclical film production, see film cycles
- Daily Mail, The* (periodical) 183
 Dame Edna Everage 21, 61
Damnation Alley 40
Dawn of the Dead 52, 85 n.1
Day After, The 109
Dead End Drive-In 107, 128, 129
 drive in cinemas 129–30
 masculinity 133–4
 racism, depictions of 130–1
 and youth 132–3
Death Race (series) 9, 10, 52–3
 and *Mad Max* 13–14
 and television 73–4
Death Race 35, 46–50
 and *Blood Drive* 187
 and *Mad Max: A Wasteland Story* 180
 and television 46
Death Race 2 35, 48
Death Race 3: Inferno 35, 48, 157
Death Race 2000, 18, 35, 37–8, 50
 comparison to Castellari 115–16
 comparison to *Dead End Drive-In* 134
 comparison to *Deathsport* 43–5
 comparison to *Rollerball* 40–1
 inconsistencies 42
 and television 38–40
 transnationality 41–2
Death Race 2050 35, 51–2
Death Run 6, 110, 124, 136, 136 n.7, 138, 180
Deathsport 35, 43–5, 45 n.1, 114
Death Wish 29–30, 62, 67, 83, 170
Death Wish 3 114
 deep fake technology 186–7
 Demme, Jonathan 117
Desert Warrior 123 n.5
Diamonds Are Forever 35
 Didion, Joan 25, 27
Die Hard 139
 Digital aesthetic 151–2, 155, 162
 digital filmmaking 6, 142–4, 153, 155

- and artificiality 153
- fan videos on YouTube, 165–8
- and *Mad Max Fury Road* 10, 141–2, 143, 146–50, 153, 155–7, 163
- retrosploitation 145–6
- see Church, David; Manovich, Len; Prince, Stephen
- digital labour, concept 164–5
- Dirty Harry* 30, 62, 82
- Dirty Mary, Crazy Larry* 35–6
- Disney + 166 n.4
- Django Kill* 64,
- Doomsday* 139–40
- Dragged Across Concrete* 186
- Drive-in cinemas 25–6, 36, 111, 128–34
- Dukes of Hazzard, The* 36
- Dune Warriors* 116
- Eastman, George, see Montefiori, Luigi
- Easy Rider* 23–4, 26–7, 140
- Ebert, Roger 31
- Electric Boogaloo: The Wild Untold Story of Canon Films* 155
- Empire (periodical) 64, 66, 68, 187
- Empire of Ash*, see *Maniac Warriors*
- Empire of Ash II*, see *Maniac Warriors*
- Empire of Ash III*, see *Last of the Warriors*
- Empire Strikes Back, The* 161 n.2
- Endgame* 116, 119, 122
- Enforcer, The* 82
- Ensler, Eve 80
- Equalizer 2000* 116
- Escape 2000*, see *Escape from the Bronx*
- Escaped Lunatic, The* 70
- Escape from L.A.* 153–4
- Escape from New York* 113, 114, 120, 139
- Escape from the Bronx* 115–16, 119–21
- Everything Wrong with Cinema Sins – Mad Max: Fury Road* 171–2
- Everything Wrong with Mad Max: Fury Road* 170–1
- Expendables 3, The* 186
- exploitation cinema 39, 51, 53, 111, 138, 144, 157, 159–61, 164, 181, 187
 - justification of term's use 2 n.2
 - and *Mad Max 2*, 5, 8–9, 11, 20, 77–8, 105, 142
 - past, future and present 145–8
 - post-apocalyptic films 14 n.1
 - reassessment of the history 6–7
 - transnational exploitation cinema 5–6, 10, 19, 33, 58
 - vigilantism 30–1
- Exterminator, The* 29–30, 62, 83, 94, 142 n.2
- Exterminators of the Year 3000* 5, 115 n.3, 118, 122, n.123, 127
- fan critics 170–6
- fan films and productions 176–80, 181
 - fan edits 161, 163
 - see *Mad Max: A Wasteland Story*
- feminism 29, 79, 89–90, 92, 104–5
- feminist film criticism 29, 103, 105, 172, 181
 - see Cook, Pam
- Fight for Your Life* 29
- Film Australia 15
- film cycles 6, 8, 17, 30, 117, 145, 168
 - cross-fertilisation of cycles, 110
- Film News* (periodical) 15, 55
- First Blood* 61
- Fixer* 136 n.7
- Fonda, Peter 24, 26
- Ford, John 64
- Frankfurt school 84
- Freaks* 97,
- French Connection, The* 35–6, 74
- Frozen* 170
- Fulci, Lucio 17, 108, 114, 115
- Fury Road*, see *Mad Max Fury Road*
- Fury Road Fan Edit* 161
- Furiosa* (Miller) 188
- Future Hunters* 116
- Gallipoli 19, 21–2
- Game of Thrones* 187
- Ghost in the Shell* 152
- Gibson, Mel 2, 17, 61, 64, 141, 178, 185, 186, 187
- Gil, Vincent 28
- Girl Shy* 70, 71
- gladiatorial combat in films 37, 43–4, 50, 110, 113, 115–16, 121, 124
- Glickenhau, James 28, 126, 142 n.2
- Globe theatre (42nd Street) 6

- Godard, Jean Luc 95
 Golan, Menahem 136
Goldeneye 74
 Goss, Luke 45
Grand Theft Auto 36, 39
Great Silence, The 64
Great Train Robbery, The 70
 Grier, Pam 51
Grindhouse 142, 146–8, 152
grindhouse (cinema/theatre) 6–7, 11, 16, 59, 111, 142, 147
grindhouse culture 16, 20, 23, 59, 155, 160–1, 169, 181
 and the digital aesthetic, 152
 VHS, DVD and home viewing, 139, 145–6, 187
 vigilantism 82
Guardian, The (periodical) 79–80
 Gunning, Tom 9, 72–4, 117, 143–4
- Halliwell, Leslie 56, 56 n.1
 Haraway, Donna 80
 Hardy, Tom 7, 80, 166–7, 171, 186–7
Harlequin 17, 59
 Hartley, Mark 16–17, 27, 155
Haunting of Sharon Tate, The 157
 Hays Code 98, 129
Hazards of Helen, The 68–9
Hell Comes to Frogtown 174–5
 Hill, Jack 117
Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, The 4
Hobo with a Shotgun 143
 Hollywood cinema 1–2, 7, 13, 15, 27, 36, 55, 81, 98, 157
 relationship to Australian cinema 16–19
 relationship to *Mad Max* 7–8, 57, 62–3, 82, 102, 155
 relationship to MadMaxploitation 109, 136
 relationship to YouTube 170, 172, 181, 184–5
 homosexuality 97–9, 104, 122
 home video 59, 65, 111, 130, 135–6, 138, 139, 142, 147, 169–70
 home video era 111, 135–6, 146
Hot Box, The 117
 Hot Rod movies 8, 13, 25–6, 115
How I Met Your Mother 175 n.6
- Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* 69
Inga 130
 Interceptor 73, 117, 177–8, 180
Invasion USA 109
Iron Monkey 183
I Spit on Your Grave 29, 31
 Italian western, *see* spaghetti western
- James Bond (film series) 35, 39, 59, 157
 Jameson, Frederic 84, 92
Jason and the Argonauts 151
Jaws 161
Jaws: The Sharksploitation Edit, 161
 Jenkins, Henry 51, 160, 164, 169
 Jennings, Claudia 45 n.3
- Karate Kid, The* 175 n.6
 Keays-Byrne, Hugh 28, 60, 141, 141 n.1
 Kennedy, Byron 3 n.3, 180
Keoma 108
 Keystone Film Company 156
Killing Edge, The 139 n.8
 Kung Fu 13, 17, 59, 107, 111, 116
- Land and Freedom* 101
Land of Doom 123
Land of the Dead 85 n.1
Last House on the Left 29
Last of the Warriors 135
 Lathouris, Nico 141, 188
 Lee, Bruce 111
Legend of the Rollerblade Seven 41 n.2
 Leone, Sergio 18, 64, 166 n.4
 Lessig, Lawrence 165, 172
 Lloyd, Harold 13, 70–1
 Loach, Ken 101
 Lucas, George 39, 44, 114, 161, 161 n.2
 Lumiere, Brothers 150, 152
- Machete Kills* 186
Mad Jack Beyond Thunderbone 110
Mad Max (1979) 2, 18–19, 20, 23–4, 27–8, 32–3, 37, 38 n.1, 41, 41 n.2, 42, 43–5, 46, 49, 51, 56, 62–3, 65–6, 68, 72–3, 74, 77, 82–3, 98, 99, 107, 109–11, 114, 115, 120–1, 128–9, 130, 132, 134, 141, 148, 174, 177–9, 177 n.7, 180, 181, 186, 187

- Bubba Zanetti 60
 critical reception 56, 57–8
 dubbing 17, 59–61, 121
 funding 55–6
 as horror film 65
 Goose 60, 65, 67, 77, 84
 locations 59, 74–5, 82
 revenge motif 28–32, 67
 Toecutter 2, 23, 30, 60, 65–7, 77, 93–5,
 97, 98, 127, 141
 violence 9, 30–31, 56, n.56, 67, 74, 82–4,
 99–100, 101, 117
Mad Max (series) 1–4, 5–11, 12–15, 14 n.1,
 35–6, 69, 99, 103–5, 116, 117, 127,
 134, 136–40, 141–2, 144, 148, 154,
 156, 159–82, 183–9
 Australian national cinema 5, 32, 57–62
 bricolage 85–6
 capitalism 83–5
 exploitation cinema 5–8, 16, 57–62, 66,
 147–8, 164, 173–4
 film style 2 n.2, 8, 18, 60, 63, 74,
 142–4, 160
 genre cinema 62–8
 as metaphor or reference 3–4
 politics 4, 79–105
 politics interpretations 9, 81–3,
 86, 103–5
 salvagepunk 92–3, 96
 sex 97–100
 social class 86–90, 101–2
 transgressive 82, 97, 99–100, 104, 144
 video game adaptations 3, 160 n.1
 visual design 5, 9–10, 85, 117, 150
Mad Max 2, see *Road Warrior, The*
Mad Max: A Wasteland Story 180
Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome 3, 3 n.3,
 7, 37, 56 n.1, 59, 61, 63, 65, 77, 82,
 87, 94, 96–7, 100, 102, 124, 134, 142,
 159, 170
 Bartertown 83–4
 train 69–70, 75–7, 143
Mad Max Fury Road 1–2, 3–4, 9, 10, 19,
 58, 63, 73, 77, 87, 95, 97, 98, 100,
 102, 103, 108, 140, 141–57, 161, 162,
 163–4, 165, 170–7, 178, 181, 183–5,
 186, 187
 ‘deep fake’ technology 186–7
 feminism 1, 79–81, 86, 89–92, 103–4,
 105, 124, 181
 Furiosa 77, 80–1, 90–1, 95, 102–3, 124,
 165, 166, 171, 173, 188
 Immortan Joe 3, 66, 75, 80, 83, 84, 87,
 90, 91, 92, 94, 95, 96, 98, 100–2, 127,
 141, 147, 165–7, 171, 188
 location 58
 marketing 147, 150, 160, 163
 political interpretation 65, 79–81, 83, 87,
 89–90, 92–4
 relationship to exploitation
 history 145–7
 stunts 148–51, 153
 visual effects and CGI, 143–5, 150–1,
 153–4, 155–6
Mad Max Fury Road – Black and Chrome
Edition 145, 149, 163
Mad Max: Get to the Point Edit 161
Mad Max Renegade 177–81, 188
Mad Max: The Desert Road 161
Mad Max: The Wasteland 188
 MadMaxploitation 10, 14, 35, 46 n.1, 50,
 107–40, 141, 142 n.2, 157, 159, 169,
 173, 174–5, 178, 180, 183, 185, 188
 critical reception 108, 108 n.1
 home video 134–40
 post-cinema 111
 politics and gender roles 126–7
 relationship with Hollywood 109
 transnationality 13, 107, 110
 tropes and iconography 43, 52, 114,
 118, 127
Mad Sheila 183
 mainstream cinema 2–3, 7–8, 36, 59–60,
 62, 99, 111, 140, 142–3, 148, 164, 167,
 169, 170, 174, 176, 181, 187
 relationship to exploitation film 11, 58,
 72, 157, 160–1
Mandalorian, The 166 n.4
Maniac Warriors 118, 124, 135
 Manovich, Lev 150–1, 159–60, 162,
 168, 181
Manson Family Massacre, The 157
 Man with No Name, The (character)
 64, 111
Man with the Golden Gun, The 35
 Martino, Sergio 37, 108, 110, 114, 127

- masculinity 21, 29, 32, 80, 121–2, 124
 threat to, 130, 133
 sexual assault, 29
 mashups 159, 162–8, 174–5, 181
 Massaccesi, Aristide 108, 119
 May, Brian 60, 177
Maze Runner: The Death Cure 186
 McCarthy, Brendan 80–1, 108, 185
 Méliès, George 152
Michael Jackson's Thriller 136
 Miller, George 1, 2–4, 3 n.3, 5, 7–8, 13,
 14, 19, 30–1, 43, 55, 57, 58, 60–1, 63,
 66–7, 68, 69, 71, 73–5, 77, 79, 80–1,
 82, 83, 65–86, 87, 92–3, 95–6, 97–100,
 103, 105, 107, 111, 114–15, 128,
 130, 139, 140, 141, 143–5, 147, 148,
 149–50, 156, 159, 161–3, 174, 178,
 180, 187, 188
 Miller, Paul C. 177–80, 188
 Montefiori, Luigi 112
 Murlyn films 136, 136 n.7
 Murphy, Michael J. 110, 124, 136, 136
 n.7, 180
My Darling Clementine 64
Mystery Science Theatre 3000 169

 NASCAR 47, 50, 73
 Nazi iconography 24, 37, 42, 115, 119
 naziploitation 108
 Netflix 142
New Barbarians, The, 5, 112, 114, 120,
 123, 125
New Gladiators, The, 115
 Newman, Kim 5, 6, 43–4, 64, 68, 107–8,
 109–10, 111, 118, 127, 139, 185
 New York, as location and setting 14
 n.1, 17, 37, 82, 110, 113–16, 120,
 121–2, 127
New York Ripper 17, 114
 New World Pictures 25, 35, 37, 44, 45 n.3,
 46 n.4, 117
Night of the Living Dead 6
 Norris, Guy 73, 141, 149
*Not Quite Hollywood: The Wild Untold
 Story of Ozploitation!* 16–17, 22,
 27, 155
Nude Nuns with Big Guns 142–3
Number 96 23

 Ocker, archetype 20, 32–3, 36, 187
 Ocker movies 20–3, 25, 32–3, 57
Octopussy 69
On the Beach 10
Once Upon a Time in Hollywood 157
Once Upon a Time in the West 18
On Her Majesty's Secret Service 59–60
 Ozploitation 14, 15–23, 27, 42, 57, 141 n.1
 meets MadMaxploitation 128–34
 Ogilvie, George 3 n.3

 paracinema 6, 147, 185
Peep Show 4
 Peterson 23, 26
 Peary, Dennis 63, 65, 93, 107
Picnic at Hanging Rock 19
Pierrot le Fou 95
 political film criticism and interpretation
 9, 20, 25, 42, 43–4, 49–50, 64–5, 79,
 81, 85–6, 86 n.2, n.87, 92, 93–4, 101,
 103–4, 121, 126, 130–1
 polizioschetti 108
Poseidon Adventure, The 52
 post-apocalypse cinema (general) 4, 5,
 9–10, 14 n.1, 41, 44, 46, 50, 64, 83, 87,
 93, 107–8, 110, 121, 127, 130, 148, 159
 post-cinema (concept) 111, 130, 138
Prayer of the Rollerboys 41 n.2
 Prince, Stephen 152–4
Protector, The 126
 punk aesthetic 9–10, 52, 63, 85, 93, 98, 105,
 107, 115, 127, 129
 post-punk 146
 punks 2, 115, 126–8
 Max as 102

Quadrophenia 63

Raiders of the Sun 116
 Rambo, John (character) 61, 82
Rambo (film series) 61, 138
Rambo: First Blood Part Two 61
 rape-revenge movies 16, 29–31
Red Dawn 109
Requiem for a Village 26
Resident Evil 48
Return of the Jedi 161 n.2, 166
 Rhames, Ving 45

- revenge, as narrative motive 2, 9, 32, 67–8,
 82–3, 97, 120, 124,
 revenge movies 14, 28–32, 56, 94, 114
 Rialto 6
Road Furies 180
Road, The 46
Road Warrior, The (1981) 2, 3, 5–6, 7, 10,
 21, 42, 46, 46 n.4, 53, 59, 63–4, 66, 68,
 77, 83–4, 87, 95, 96–7, 98, 100, 101,
 102, 107, 108–9, 108 n.1, 110–11, 112,
 114, 115, 121, 124, 128, 134, 138, 139,
 141, 143, 149, 155, 174, 178, 180, 186
 Feral Kid 60
 Lord Humungus (character) 66, 84,
 85–7, 94–8, 100, 101, 102, 127, 180
 opening narration and prologue
 73, 93–4
 stunts 139, 141, 186
 Wez (character) 60, 66, 97–9, 118
 road warrior archetypes and characters 5,
 10, 14 n.1, 46 n.4, 53, 112–13, 117,
 118, 124–6, 134, 187
 contrast to villains 122
 DeGale, James 4
 female road warriors 115, 118–19,
 140, 183
Robe, The 81
Robocop 44, 120, 126
 Rockatansky, Max (character) 2–3, 23, 28,
 30, 38 n.1, 49, 60–1, 63, 64, 65, 67–8,
 73, 76, 77, 81, 82, 83, 84, 91, 95, 96, 99,
 111, 117, 120–1, 122, 124, 127, 134,
 161, 165, 166, 171–2, 175, 177–8, 180,
 186, 188
 social class 101–3
Rocky 41
Rocky Horror Picture Show, The 51
Rollerball 35, 40–1, 41 n.2, 44, 53, 115, 132
Rolling Thunder 29
 Romero, George A. 6, 52, 85 n.1
Ronin 74
Room, The 169
 Rossitto, Angelo 97
 Rothman, Stephanie 25, 46, 51, 105
Run! Bitch! Run! 146
Savage Sisters 126
 'salvagepunk' 92–3, 96, 104
 Santiago, Cirio H. 109, 116–17
 science fiction 5, 9, 14, 49, 52–3, 62, 65,
 103, 107
 dystopian science fiction 8, 14 n.1,
 56, 188
 hard/soft science fiction 103
 hierarchical societies 87–8
 Italian science fiction 119
Scorpio Rising 23, 27, 66
Searchers, The 64
 Semon, Larry 13, 69
 sexploitation, 16, 130
 sexual violence, depictions of 16, 29–31,
 63, 65–6, 98–100, 123–5
Shakedown 142 n.2
Shatter Dead 139 n.8
Show, The 69–70
 silent cinema 9, 13, 56, 68–72, 74, 117–18,
 126, 143–4, 155–6
Silver Streak 69
Sisterhood, The 116
Sleeper, The 146
Smokey and the Bandit 35–6, 39
 social class 20, 37, 49
 see working class, depictions of
 social media 1, 160, 166
Soldier, The 142 n.2
Spacehunter: Adventures in the Forbidden
 Zone 113 n.2, 173–4, 175
 spaghetti western 57, 64, 107–8, 119,
 166 n.4
Spectator, The (periodical) 61, 82
 Spielberg, Steven 3, 7, 69, 161
 sport in cinem, 9, 37, 39–41, 44, 46–8,
 49–50, 73–4
 Stanfield, Peter 8, 14, 24–6, 36, 65–6, 102,
 109–10, 112, 129, 134–5, 139, 140
Starlet! 130
 Stars and Stripes (flag) 51, 115
Starship Troopers 44
Stars of the Roller State Disco 132–3,
 132 n.6
Star Wars (1977) 44, 161, 161 n.2
Star Wars (film series) 73, 114, 116, 161,
 161 n.2, 166, 166 n.4, 176, 186
Star Wars: The Clone Wars 176
Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker 186
 Stallone, Sylvester 37, 82

- Statham, Jason 45, 47, 49
 'steampunk' 92–3
Steel Dawn 44, 113, 127–8, 142 n.2, 185
Stone 27, 42, 57, 67, 141 n.1
Stork 21
Stryker 116–17, 126, 127
St Trinian's (film series) 22
Summer City 17
Superman: Requiem 176
 surf movies 17, 24

Tank Girl, 4, 139
 Tarantino, Quentin, 27, 142, 146–7, 151, 157
 Taylor-Joy, Anya 188
Terminal Island 46, 51
 Terminal Island (prison) 46
Texas Chain Saw Massacre, The, 18
 Theron, Charlize 7, 80, 188
Thick of It, The 4
Threads 109
THX 1138 39
 Times Square (theater) 6
 train travel in cinema 68–70, 75–7, 100, 143–4, 186
 transgression 31, 32 n.2, 100, 144
 transgressive 25, 27, 67, 82, 97, 99–100, 104, 144
 Trash Arts 136 n.7
 Trejo, Danny 45
 Trenchard-Smith, Brian 107, 128–31, 148
Troops 176
 Trump, Donald 80, 100, 130–1, 167
 Tumblr 80
Turkey Shoot 129
 Turner, Tina 3, 61
Two Lane Blacktop 36

Ultimate Warrior, The 114
Ultra Warrior 6

Vanishing Point 35–6
 Verhoeven, Paul 44
 Vietnam war on film 29–30, 82, 127
VHS 65, 139, 142
 format 111, 134–6
 nostalgia 145–7
 vigilante movies 28–32, 56, 62, 67, 82–3, 114
 Vine (video app) 1, 1 n.1, 162, 166, 181
 visual effects 10, 149–50, 152–4
 see 3-D technology; CGI

Wake in Fright 22
Walking Dead, The 187
 Ward, Roger 28
War of the Stars: A New Hope Grindhoused, The 161
War Game, The 10
Wargames 109
Warlords of the 21st Century, see *Battletruck*
Warriors, The 113, 146
Warrior of the Lost World 5, 115 n.3, 169
Warriors of the Wasteland, see *New Barbarians, The*
Wasteland Weekend 188
Water Wars 116
Waterworld 4, 6, 116, 139
Weekend 95
 Weir, Peter 9, 17–19, 21, 59, 82
 western (genre) 13, 18, 29, 57, 63–5, 74, 107
 iconography of, 24
 quasi-western, 5
 see spaghetti western
Wheels of Fire 116
 Williams, Evan Calder 92–4, 96, 148, 153–5
Wild Angels, The 18, 23–4, 42
Wild One, The 23, 27, 63
Wild Geese, The 138
 Williamson, Fred 112
Wind That Shakes the Barley, The
 Winner, Michael 67
Women in Cages 117
 women in prison movies 25, 42, 46, 51, 86 n.1, 117
 working class, depictions of, 15–16, 20, 25, 84, 94, 100–3, 122
 see Ocker, archetype
World War Three 109
Wyrmwood: Road of the Dead 112

 Yedlin, Steve 152
 YouTube 11, 69, 163–81, 166 n.4, 175 n.6, 186–7

 Zahler, S. Craig 186
Zombie Flesh Eaters 114
 Zombie (genre) 5, 6, 85 n.1, 110, 112, 142, 146

