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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
RIVERSIDE

Omega Men  
The Masculinist Discourse of Apocalyptic Manhood in Postwar American Cinema

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

by

Ezekiel Crago

June 2019

Dissertation Committee:  
Dr. Sherryl Vint, Co-Chairperson  
Dr. Derek Burrill, Co-Chairperson  
Dr. Carole-Anne Tyler

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2019

The Dissertation of Ezekiel Crago is approved:

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Committee Co-Chairperson

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Committee Co-Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Omega Men  
The Masculinist Discourse of Apocalyptic Manhood in Postwar American Cinema

by

Ezekiel Crago

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in English  
University of California, Riverside, June 2019  
Dr. Sherryl Vint, Co-Chairperson  
Dr. Derek Burrill, Co-Chairperson

This study investigates anxieties over the role of white masculinity in American society after World War Two articulated in speculative films of the post-apocalypse. It treats the nascent genre of films as attempts to recenter white masculinity in the national imagination while navigating the increased visibility of this subject position, one that maintains dominance in society through its invisibility as superordinate standard of manhood. Using an interdisciplinary approach that employs methods of cultural studies, gender studies, and critical race theory, the dissertation argues that masculinity acts as a technology for being-in-the-world that can be used by subjects with bodies coded male or female. The films analyzed denaturalize masculinity by revealing the operations of this technology and the ways in which it defines the roles of men in a masculine masquerade. Post-apocalyptic films are instructive sites of articulations of apocalyptic masculinity through their narratives of fitness determining what kind of subjects will populate a precarious future.

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Chapter 1: “The End of the World as We Know It”</b> .....	37
<b>Chapter 2: “1970s: The End of the World as We Knew It”</b> .....	99
<b>Chapter 3: “The End of the Road”</b> .....	164
<b>Chapter 4: “The Clothes that Make the Man”</b> .....	235
<b>Chapter 5: “Apocalyptic Boyhood”</b> .....	299
<b>Coda</b> .....	353
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	378
<b>Films</b> .....	390

## Introduction

### “Real Men” and “Last Men”

*Society is not first of all a milieu for exchange where the essential would be to circulate or to cause to circulate, but rather a socius of inscription where the essential thing is to mark and to be marked.* (Deleuze and Guattari 112)

In her documentation of masculine crisis in the 1990s, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (1999), Susan Faludi observes that “the United States came out of World War II with a sense of itself as a masculine nation, our ‘boys’ ready to assume the mantle of national authority and international leadership. The nation claimed an ascendancy over the world, men an ascendancy over the nation, and a male persona of a certain type ascendancy over men” (16). As Michael Billig succinctly argues in *Banal Nationalism* (1995), when a nation tries to unify under a shared identity, “one part – one aspect of the cultural and linguistic mosaic – will become the dominant, metonymic representation of the whole” (87). In this way, hegemonic masculinity becomes national authority. As Faludi asserts, US nationalism imagined the rise of the country’s power as empowerment of a certain kind of manhood.<sup>1</sup> This ascendant hegemonic model of manhood posited a white man “controlling his environment,” and that “a man is expected to prove himself not by being part of society but by being untouched by it, soaring above it. He is to travel unfettered, beyond society’s clutches, alone—making or breaking whatever or whoever crosses his path. He is to be in the driver’s seat, king of the road” (Faludi 10). This ideal

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Kimmel argues that the crises of manhood expressed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be traced back to the formation of the nation itself (2). Americans have always attempted to define an ideal manhood because the nation is defined in manly terms, and definitions of manhood have always been in flux (Kimmel 5). He also observes that masculinity is always already in crisis, noting that it is driven less by the need to dominate and master than the “fear of others dominating” the masculine subject (Kimmel 6). This model of masculinity masters itself and proves its autonomous agency by not being mastered by others.



manhood was a continuation of wartime masculinity as well as a reaction to domesticity and wage-work. As Leo Braudy remarks in his examination of this kind of manhood, *From Chivalry to Terrorism* (2003),

Men at war are on the front line of a more exacting and more one-sided definition of what it means to be a man than ever faces men at peace. By its emphasis on the physical prowess of men enhanced by their machines, by its distillation of national identity into the abrupt contrast between winning and losing, war enforces an extreme version of male behavior as the ideal model for all such behavior. (xvi)

The ideal postwar man was not only imagined in such dominant martial ways, he was supposed to be master of his own destiny, and American democracy was supposed to supply him with the opportunities to rise along with the nation's fortunes.

In America, this concept of freedom and personal agency, an idealized autonomy, has been structured by racialization and the use of unfree people to both enable and define this freedom.<sup>2</sup> Andrew Ross notes a kind of American exceptionalism not often considered, that,

Unlike those countries where, historically and even now, nationalism is associated; a fear evoked originally by the prospect of extending tolerance, if not freedoms to seditious slaves, US nationalism emerged out of a fear of lower-class mobilization with populist revolt. In this respect, the structural history of US nationalism has been one of containment rather than one of self-determination" (*Strange Weather* 245).

Following this nationalist logic, and considering the gendering of the nation mentioned above, we can also see hegemonic white heterosexual middle-class masculinity as a form

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<sup>2</sup> In *Angry White Men*, Kimmel observes that "one has to feel a sense of proprietorship, of entitlement, to call it 'our' country" (35). Ownership is key to the sense of national pride and the freedom it entails in the US.

of containment instead of liberation for men, determining the limits of their behavior, and one that allows them solidarity against other men who do not fit this ideal model.

Definitions of race and nation cannot be disentangled, especially when imagining the figure of the “American man” referred to in Faludi’s title. Iowa Congressman Steve King recently tweeted, “We can’t restore our civilization with somebody else’s babies” (Resnikoff). Such fear of miscegenation structured much political debate in the mid-nineteenth century. Even Abraham Lincoln was accused of being part African (O’Reilly 48). Benedict Anderson notes that racism denies the racialized subject a nationality or history by reducing everything to biology, but this is a biology registered in aesthetic terms (148). He writes, “Nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies, while racism dreams of eternal contaminations, transmitted from the origins of time through an endless sequence of loathsome copulations: outside history” (149). But the two ideas of nation and race, operating on different scales, are entwined in notions of identity, both personal and national. Much is currently being written about the “resurgence” of the rhetoric of white supremacy in recent press, but nationalism has been bound to racism since the idea of nations first became what Anderson calls “imagined communities.”<sup>3</sup> Those who “belong” to the same nation as us are imagined as the “same” as us, and in America, with its history of slavery, this belonging is related to skin color as well as language and culture. As noted

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<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, in his *Politics*, deals with the problem of citizenship in the city-states of the time, noting that heredity cannot be the only criteria of belonging, because logically this would exclude the founders of the state. He instead posits that sharing in governance of the state allows for a more inclusive and logical standard for citizenship (Book III section 2).

by Anderson and Michael Billig, this is the homogenizing role that language plays in defining national subjects, and literacy plays a key role.

I am here conceiving of nationalism as a “common-sense” notion of identity described in great detail by Billig, who defines nationalism as a broad concept that defines “the ways established nation-states are routinely reproduced” in the imagination of the state’s citizens (16). This reproduction of national consciousness in the cultural imaginary makes both the “boundedness” of the nation-state and its “monopolization of violence seem natural” to those who identify with the nation (Billig 20). This naturalized discourse developed with modernity via colonialism and its incessant mapping and definition of borders, and this study argues that hegemonic models of masculinity share in this notion of boundedness and entitlement to violence, naturalized by hegemonic masculinist discourses.

Alys Eve Weinbaum, in her book *Wayward Reproductions: Genealogies of Race and Nation in Transatlantic Modern Thought* (2004), analyzes the racial aspect of nationalism, explaining that, during the formation of modern nations, “competing understandings of reproduction as a biological, sexual, and racialized process became central to the organization of knowledge about nations, modern subjects, and the flow of capital, bodies, babies, and ideas within and across national borders” (2). In order for the imagined community of a nation to rationalize itself as a cohesive polity, it needs to think of national subjectivity in terms of who counts as such a subject and who does not, and this discourse mobilizes the science, now seen as fiction, that determined “race” to demarcate the borders of this subjectivity, which must be guarded and reproduced in order to ensure

the future of the nation. This concern over reproducing the “proper” national subject renders women into the technology that reproduces the nation.<sup>4</sup> Weinbaum calls this complex of discourses the “race/reproduction bind.” Furthermore, nationalism can be hard to locate in America because “a nation that seeks international hegemony must deny that it is nationalist,” instead positing America as a universal standard for other nations as a mask for its own interests labelled as “progress” or the “spread of democracy” rather than nationalism (Billig 92). In this way, national identity is a form of identity politics that carries markings of race and gender because “its rhetoric habitually assumes that there is an identity of identities” and that identity *matters* (92).

A crisis for a hegemonic national identity, like that of white masculinity, is expressed as a crisis for the nation, and this anxiety is often expressed and articulated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s most extensive and pervasive mass media, film, a practice documented in great detail by Steven Cohan in his work *Masked Men* (1997), an examination of the performances and crises of masculinity in 1950s Hollywood film production.<sup>5</sup>

This study performs a similar investigation, focusing on the development of a now pervasive genre of speculative films in the postwar period, especially in the decade of the 1970s. These films imagine life after the “end of the world” as a crisis for the usually white

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<sup>4</sup> Helga Geyer-Ryan notes that the word “nation” came from the Latin *nasci*, “to be born,” “and thus sutures the arbitrariness of the social construct by its reference to biological offspring and sexual difference” (149). Nationalism naturalizes the imagined community into a kind of kin-group that conflates biology with culture.

<sup>5</sup> David Savran argues that popular texts of any medium, “because of their high entertainment value and their success in engineering consent [via realism], are decisive for the ongoing production of hegemony” (6).

men who serve as figures of hegemonic identity in transformation, and the solution to the crisis is often a return to an idealized past model of identity.<sup>6</sup> This “return” to past ideologies and practices is a way to ensure the future that stays the same as the past. As Weinbaum asserts, this concern over reproducing the proper kind of subjects to populate the future, ones imagined as white men, involves a race/reproduction bind and requires patriarchal control over the selection process of who lives and who dies. Thus, a national identity crisis in America is universalized as a threat to society as such by positing it as the end of the world solved by a return to previously hegemonic social structures that have been denaturalized by postwar discourses. These scenarios dwell on who gets to live and who dies, who is worthy of living, and who is allowed to perish, often reducing this to a racialized notion of “purity” and the need to defend boundaries as a test of masculine “fitness,” another expression of miscegenation anxiety.

This expression of anxiety is not only a “backlash” or reaction to social changes, like the “domesticating” of businessmen represented as the “Man in the Gray Flannel Suit” or the rise of feminism and anti-racism that challenges the centrality of white men, but also due to the proliferation of identities in an increasingly postmodern society that leads to questioning the essentialism of masculinity as such, for “the loss of certainty and the blurring of a sense of place have caused what Giddens (1990) terms ‘ontological insecurity’ . . . for the person today is a ‘nomad of the mind,’ living with a sense of homelessness”

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<sup>6</sup> Braudy remarks, “One important component of masculinity thus embodies a myth of historical connection with past models and exemplars, while another looks to a future that will be different. As the Greek hero had to die young in the midst of battle in order to be considered a hero in song and legend, so one powerful form of masculinity is perpetually nostalgic in its judgments and standards. All the good men are already dead” (6).

(Billig 136). Thus, the “end of the world” can be read as an end of certainty and clear narrative for a white man’s role in society informed by masculinist discourse and the race/reproduction bind structuring nationalist identity.

This research project focuses on cinematic narratives about the end of “civilization” caused by nuclear war, disease, climate change, or a combination of these. Although, as Yvonne Tasker reminds us, “As good products, efficient commodities, films are polysemic, speaking or not speaking to different audiences in different ways,” the following analyses attempt to trace the use of tropes that structure the narratives and suggest particular meanings (59). The end of “civilization” articulated by these films is read as the displacement of white men as fathers from the center of history, replaced by warriors unconcerned with reproducing the social and more interested in “winning” the game of masculinity by aggressively participating in a violent masquerade. As Vivian Sobchack notes in *Screening Space* (1987), science fiction films produced during the 1970s departed from the previous speculations about our possible future, instead positing no future at all or a future that was already past (226). Likewise, the films investigated here all have what Bruce Franklin describes as a “plot [that] centers on the adventure of a lone hero fighting, along with a helper or two, against near-impossible odds and overwhelming forces. . . . [And] he will win his minor victory in a hopeless world” (78). In addition to the change in American culture documented by Sobchack (the advent of postmodern late capitalism), these films articulate white masculine anxiety about the place of white men in the future of American culture, a centrality recuperated and solidified in many 1980s films.

## **Methodology: Gender Discourses and Masculinist Rhetoric**

*The very notion of the founding instance or origin of a genre is self-contradictory, because the work in question is in an important way not an example of the genre it establishes, but rather a peculiarly influential violation of some pre-existing set of generic expectations. (Rieder 19)*

The imagining of masculinity in fantastic crisis foregrounds the spectacle of manhood as performance and critiques the artifice that sustains it. It can denaturalize hegemonic ideologies about masculine identity and its position in society. As spaces for imagining the future, science fiction films are deeply invested in what Lee Edelman calls “reproductive futurity” in how they depict the future of humanity as a species and society, and, as a locus of technological concentration (science fiction films are often more concerned with technology than science), this genre foregrounds the role that technology plays in the reproduction of humanity and masculinity. As Sobchack argues, “SF has always taken as its distinctive generic task the cognitive mapping and poetic figuration of social relations as they are constituted and changed by new technological modes of ‘being-in-the-world’” (224-225).

These films reveal masculinity as a kind of technology, a tool for “being in the world” as a male in society, and also for reproducing “civilization” as hegemonic white patriarchy. My interdisciplinary approach uses gender studies work that includes sociological and anthropological sources, such as Michael Kimmel’s *Manhood in America* (1996) and the cross-cultural study, *Manhood in the Making* (1990), by David D. Gilmore. Pierre Bourdieu, in *The Logic of Practice* (1990), observes that a social agent needs to reconcile their value to society because society “defines what he [sic] is entitled to” (138). Masculinity enables specific valuations and the entitlements that come with them, allowing

for and often encouraging men to dominate others. Andrew Feenberg usefully defines the difference between power and domination distinguished by Michel Foucault: “Power is a kind of life-force that opens perspectives on the real in Nietzschean fashion, while domination is institutional closure, premature totalization” (73). Masculinity does more than distribute power to men in a patriarchal society, it institutionalizes domination. Complicating this analysis, the films analyzed here deconstruct this technology of masculinity, demonstrating the danger of its dominance while also paradoxically arguing for its necessity as protection from itself, a double-bind similar to the use of nuclear armaments during the Cold War. In these films, male bodies are figured as a crucial technology of reproduction while remaining a dangerous technology of destruction with the role of fatherhood threatened because it requires a passivity that makes fathers prey to violent men who have rejected their role as reproductive agents and instead embraced a model of manhood that proves itself solely through violent domination and control, a hyperbolic extension of Faludi’s idea of “ascendancy over men.” As Kimmel asserts, the patriarchal hierarchy is “a dual system of oppression” that affects both genders, so that being a man means being in constant threat of being dominated by a man more “fit” than you (285).<sup>7</sup> Masculine identity then, as asserted above, becomes a form of discrimination, exclusion, and containment instead of the autonomous liberty it supposedly offers.

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<sup>7</sup> This applies to the policing of masculine sexuality. Steven Shaviro remarks, “Heterosexuality is structural, superpersonal, and symbolic, not an intrinsic determination, but an external form of domination. It is ‘compulsory’ (as Adrienne Rich puts it), imposed on everybody; but this means that it is *only* imposed. The very fact that so much energy is invested in presenting it as the norm or *telos* of human sexual behavior and development points to its purely ideal function” (*Cinematic Body* 72).



Thus, the films act as masculinist discourses that, like all discourse, define “who can speak, who can be spoken to, and what can be ‘said’ as well as who and what must remain silenced” (Buchbinder 30). As David Buchbinder puts it in his book, *Masculinities and Identities* (1994), the social designations of gender “carry not only general *meaning* (this is how a man behaves, this is how a woman behaves), but also *power signification* (this is how a man controls, this is how a woman controls) and *valorizations* (such behavior is good or bad)” (2, italics his).<sup>8</sup> Steven Shaviro elaborates the effects of this identification, arguing that “we are imprisoned by our individuality, territorialized, fixed in place, in accordance with the superpersonal model of an ideal heterosexuality. We are held accountable for who we are, expected to conform to the image of ourselves, hounded into secrecy and tormented by an ascription of guilt because of our inevitable failure to do so” (*Cinematic Body* 76). These behaviors and their valorization or demonization determine a man’s “fitness,” often through his mastery over space and others, but also in his ability to make babies. Gender is discursive, and “discourse is a strategic and polemical game” (Foucault “Truth and Juridical Forms” 3).<sup>9</sup> This game is never settled. Feenberg notes how theorists prefer to refer to society as a game rather than machine, noting the value in this metaphor residing in the fact that “games define the players’ range of action without determining any particular move” which applies to any use or figuration of technology, but

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<sup>8</sup> As Foucault explains, “Power relations are rooted deep in the social nexus, not a supplementary structure over and above ‘society’ whose radical effacement one could perhaps dream of” (343). Gender is one of the vectors determining these power relations, one largely ignored by Foucault.

<sup>9</sup> Thus, a gendered subject is one “that constitutes itself within history and is constantly established and reestablished by history” (Foucault “Truth” 3).

the game is “biased” “toward the dominant contestant” (83). Citing Michael Buroway, he asserts that “playing a game generates consent with respect to its rules” (Feenberg 83) and this study is concerned with men who either refuse to play the game as it stands or attempt to play by the rules only to find winning impossible.

The men in the films analyzed here attempt to demonstrate mastery through the use of masculine-coded technologies, as all tools are coded in a variety of ways about intended use that “imply a whole system of . . . behavior” or performance (Feenberg 84); technologies of mobility represented by vehicles, allowing for the mastery of space<sup>10</sup>; technologies of violence, enabling the ability to dominate others, asserting individual autonomy through absolute control over other people; *techne* as epistemic privilege, as a gaze that both detects and understands through analytic mastery and the power of reason as well as specialized knowledge or power as the production of knowledge; and technologies of reproduction, usually in the form of women under their control or protection.<sup>11</sup> Derek Burrill notes that “the central mode of interaction between subjects and the external is not only through technologies, but also is itself technological, marked by a type of mediation or prosthesis” (139). Masculinity acts as such mediating prosthesis, but the need to prove manhood, “fitness,” makes this into a masquerade where such technology becomes a prop. Style of dress then becomes another technology mediating the masculine masquerade. By positing such technologies as enabling the display and practice of

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<sup>10</sup> Sandra Bartky observes that patriarchal society confines women while encouraging men to take up space (67).

<sup>11</sup> Monique Wittig observes that heteronormative patriarchy is not a social institution as much as “a political regime which rests on the submission and appropriation of women” (xiii).

manhood in American society, masculinity can be rendered as a technology, a tool for maintaining a position of power in society, a position under threat during the 1970s, which was recuperated in the 1980s and 1990s, a phenomena well documented by Yvonne Tasker, Susan Jeffords, and Robin Wood.

It is problematic to use the term “masculine crisis” as it assumes that there was once a cohesive masculine identity in danger of fragmenting, when, as Judith Kegan Gardiner explains, there has never been such, since masculinity is always in need of symbolic proof and is therefore constituted *by crisis*.<sup>12</sup> To identify the facets of crises articulated in these films, this study makes extensive use of the work of Sally Robinson and her assertion that one of the distinct aspects of the current conjuncture of masculine crisis stems from the increased visibility of white men that challenges both the centrality and universality of this model of masculinity. Burrill explains, “In the same sense that masculinity is a product of specific practices (some bodily, some social) that require an actor and an audience (and some type of ‘script’), masculinity can also be said to be performative in that the actor sustains character in the face of challenges to that character” (21). Robinson’s important point regarding this performativity reveals the anxiety of white men who are not used to having this performance critiqued *as performance* as opposed to some essential maleness. Masculinity is defined by constant testing, but who sets the rules for the test? There has never been one masculinity, but many masculinities in different contexts and different bodies, often considered divergent from a white hegemonic standard, and the films analyzed here approach this multiplicity through a variety of figurations of dangerous and

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<sup>12</sup> From the “Introduction” to *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory: New Directions* (2002).

deviant masculinities which often fail to assert the priority of a hegemonic standard and instead demonstrate the artifice that sustains such distinctions. Men often judge the bodies of other men because “the power to enact violence on another is the fundamental ruling concept in masculine status . . . the presence of threat . . . is how men define their masculinity in relation to others” (Burrill 21). Masculine “fitness” is constantly measured. As Robinson argues in *Marked Men* (2000), the added scrutiny of feminists, scientists, and popular media has led many white men to figure their status in society as victims, and the films under investigation here partake in this rhetoric.

As illustrated in books like Susan Jeffords’s *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (1994), Kimmel’s *Manhood in America*, and Faludi’s *Stiffed*, the decades of 1950s-1980s were a time of white masculine crisis due to a shifting of men’s symbolic roles in society, most notably their status in the family and workplace; more marriages were ending in divorce, more women were in the workplace competing with men, and men, both blue- and white-collar, were being “downsized” and losing their jobs as labor was either automated or relocated to be performed by cheaper workers outside of US borders. The threat of automation was often located in Asia, as American markets were being flooded by consumer electronics and vehicles manufactured overseas. Immigration, both legal and not, was also on the rise, and many menial labor jobs became populated by non-English-speaking immigrants, giving rise to a rhetoric of immigrants “taking jobs away” from white men.<sup>13</sup> This time period also marks the rise of the Republican rhetoric

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<sup>13</sup> In *Angry White Men*, Kimmel argues that “our sense of being deprived is measured not in an abstract calculus, but always in relation to those around us, those who are getting more but don’t deserve it” (22).

of “family values” that still informs political debates today, a figuration of family as mode of reproductive futurity under threat that imagines it as patriarchal, with separate spheres for the “breadwinning” father and home-keeping mother with no reproductive rights, and this analysis will articulate what these “values” are and why they are deemed so important to the social order.

Judith Butler notes that gender identity is more of “a normative ideal” than any “description” of a subject’s actual experience (23). These ideals become articulated as in crisis when their normative value comes into question.<sup>14</sup> Kimmel notes that the defeat in Vietnam indicated to Americans “that extending the frontier had consequences: the empire was striking back,” and the masculine model of the soldier/protector fell in status in the popular imagination (263). The films analyzed in this study critique this model of masculinity, often problematically.

Sandra Bartky notes, in “Femininity and Domination” (1990), that Michel Foucault’s theories of power relations in society disregard the difference between bodies coded male and female (and also, though she does not mention it, coded racially) and their different valuations by society (65). Bartky delineates three kinds of Foucauldian “disciplinary practice” that produce the female body as a docile object for patriarchal use, and in a similar way, this study draws attention to the disciplinary practices and the necessary tools that produce powerful masculine agents out of bodies coded as masculine,

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<sup>14</sup> Kimmel remarks, “These crisis points in the meaning of manhood [are] also crisis points in economic, political, and social life – moments when men’s relationships to their work, to their country, to their families, to their visions, [are] transformed” (10).

a practice figured as a game that men play against each other to win status and one operating as a technology of masculinity.<sup>15</sup>

Researching the decentering of white masculine subjectivity in society in his book *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Postwar America* (2000), Timothy Melley argues that modern discourses that disarticulate the concept of a possessive liberal individual subject (historically imagined as white and male, as Richard Dyer demonstrates in *White*) can induce a paranoid reaction in writers that he calls “agency panic,” an imaginary response to the loss of supposed agency that produces the fiction of a vast organization or apparatus imagined as having taken away the autonomy promised by the Enlightenment model of subjectivity and masculine position in society. This agency panic for men is not just due to newer discourses that challenge the idea of autonomy, but is also “equated with emasculation; economic dependence on wages paid by an employer . . . equivalent to social and sexual dependency” (Kimmel *Manhood* 31). Although he deals mostly with conspiracy theory, Melley’s research is useful for elucidating the paranoid subject position that informs many of the narratives that I will be discussing. I apply the idea of panic over lost agency to my analysis of reproductive anxiety as well as the increased visibility of white masculinity as performative and not essential examined by Robinson. As Burrill notes, “To be the object of vision, rather than the ‘modest,’ self-invisible source of vision, is to be evacuated of agency” (19). To have your identity

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<sup>15</sup> Butler argues that sex typing is “an act of domination and compulsion . . . that both creates and legislates social reality by requiring the discursive/perceptual construction of bodies” (147).

rendered as performance empties it of any essential qualities (Melley 15).<sup>16</sup> Melley notes how social control is often figured as “feminizing” and that this is so because the patriarchal system disempowers women (32-33). Patriarchy serves to suture this agency panic since, before the advent of paternity tests, men’s role in reproduction was always symbolic, and fathers’ authority over children sustained by cultural myth and physical force. The obsession with reproduction evinced in these films and Republican rhetoric acts as a case of agency panic in this regard, and the fear of miscegenation and contagion from nonwhite peoples expresses this panic of agency in reproductive selection elucidated by Weinbaum’s race/reproduction bind.

This study will not only address the ways that class and race change or challenge hegemonic masculinity,<sup>17</sup> but also how age delimits recognition of manhood, since young men have to cross the imaginary line from “boy” to “man,” and the older a man gets, the more he needs to prove his virile manhood.<sup>18</sup> Different masculinities are required to help define the hegemonic standard, as Robinson writes, “cordoning off difference” so that the normal can be delineated from the abnormal (“Pedagogy of the Opaque” 147).<sup>19</sup> As a

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<sup>16</sup> Melley also notes that, if one denies the social construction of identities and instead argues that they are structured by unconscious psychological drives, it amounts to the same thing, since this unconscious is always “outside of conscious control” (24). But I agree with Savran that psychoanalytic theory tends to universalize subjectivity to the point of dehistoricizing it (9).

<sup>17</sup> Thomas DiPiero remarks, “Whiteness and reason have in common the fiction that they are transparent and contentless; they also share the premise that they are without history and, like the real, simply there, with no cause or ground” (96). As Robinson posits, the new attention paid to whiteness has changed this notion.

<sup>18</sup> Gardiner observes that “age, like gender, is a social, not merely biological, category” (93).

<sup>19</sup> Robinson notes that one of the factors driving masculine anxiety in current society results from how white men used to be such a norm as an “unmarked individual,” but masculinity studies “marks” them, and this experience was very new to many men in the 1970s and 1980s (“Pedagogy” 150).

discourse, “gender is a relationship of hierarchy and power among individuals and *not* the property of separate individuals” (Robinson “Pedagogy of the Opaque” 151). Thus, men cannot be victims of feminism because its discourses have made their social position visible in its historical particularity and not an invisible standard of being, but ironically the victim mentality that subtends the agency panic of threatened masculinity is enhanced by such scrutiny.<sup>20</sup> The mastering gaze fears the oppositional gaze, since it can see that the emperor has no clothing, so to speak, by revealing the machinery enabling the masculine masquerade. This research concerns films that produce this oppositional gaze not only in the others on the screen, but through the camera, in the spectators.

In *White Men Aren't*, Thomas DiPiero takes Dyer’s analysis of whiteness and uses it to show that white masculinity relies on a hysterical identity structure, and this hysteria, combined with the social/psychological threats mentioned above to the place of white males in society, often leads to the phenomena that we now see daily on the news, which is embodied by the character of D-Fens in *Falling Down* (1993, Joel Shumacher): the “angry white man.”<sup>21</sup> The films under discussion here not only explain this anger, they show that this figure of white masculinity has always been with us and is not a recent

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<sup>20</sup> Harry Brod argues that “individuality” and the autonomy that it implies is neither a “natural right, nor is it an accurate assessment of [subjects] and their world, but it rather is a mark of their privilege and the blindness to broader social contexts that privilege tends to produce” (174). Demonstrating the fantasy structure that subtends hegemonic masculinity, as a counterhegemonic act, threatens the stability of the identity of any man who relies on such identification to make meaning out of social reality, thereby threatening his individual agency.

<sup>21</sup> Crucially, DiPiero argues that white masculinity “is less a thing, an entity, or even a position, than it is a response or a function” (231). It survives through the principle that “believing is seeing,” and this requires a constant repression of knowledge that may contradict the supposition of its hegemony (DiPiero 231).



product of history, but a recurring part of our national drama. Kimmel posits, in *Manhood in America*, that Andrew Jackson is America's first successful, famous, angry white man and notes the subsequent tragedy that this brought to the marginalized peoples targeted by his anger. After the abolition of slaves, whiteness became a form of legal property. DiPiero explains, "As the courts and popular imagination converted difference into antagonism, whiteness not only defined itself as the hierarchically valorized component of a complex network of identities, but externalized itself as a possession, and hence an entity with economic and social value meriting legal protection" (196).<sup>22</sup> Following nationalism's race/reproduction bind, this discourse and practice leads to miscegenation laws and eugenics programs to prevent the spread of what Weinbaum calls "wayward reproductions." We must remember that "cultures create morphological difference of all sorts, just as they create sexual difference by regulating reproduction and pair bonding and by defining kinship relations" (DiPiero 185). In the films examined here, this regulation often comes down to ownership and control over women as the primary technology of reproduction, ensuring the future of white masculinity as separate and "pure."

DiPiero's model of white masculinity demonstrates the impossibility of any actual male subject from ever achieving the cultural standards of manhood expected, and this "forms the crux of white masculinity's ideological grip, both on the culture and on the individuals who would aspire to that identity. . . . Which makes failure inevitable and hence

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<sup>22</sup> The KKK "encoded the end of legalized white male domination over chattel slaves as an assault on the sexual purity of white women, an assault that according to the racial logic of the time would have devastating contaminating effects on the white race as a whole" (DiPiero 189).

those fleeting ideals consistently valued and pursued” (185). The very impossibility, then, impels the need to keep trying to prove this elusive manhood perpetually.

Teresa De Lauretis makes a key assertion that “the term *gender* is, actually the representation of a relation, that of belonging to a class, a group, a category. Gender is the representation of a relation, or . . . gender constructs a relation between one entity and other entities, which are previously constituted as a class, and that relation is one of belonging” (4). Kaja Silverman notes that “hegemony hinges upon identification; it comes into play when all the members of a collectivity see themselves within the same reflecting surface,” which “is not a matter of rational agreement, but of imaginary affirmation” (24). Many of the films investigated in this study examine what happens when a man no longer sees himself in this reflecting surface, learning that what he thought was reality actually consisted of a dominant fiction that serves the interests of a particular class of people while excluding others, including him, often resulting in “a form of hyperindividualism that sees violent resistance as the only answer” to this exclusion (Melley 37). The man uses violence to reassert his agency and to prove that he is indeed a “real man.” Gilmore’s cross-cultural research into masculinist discourses finds that, “although there may be no ‘Universal Male,’ we may perhaps speak of a ‘Ubiquitous Male’ based on . . . criteria of performance” that he elucidates:

“Real” men are expected to tame nature in order to recreate and bolster the basic kinship of their society; that is, to reinvent and perpetuate the social order by will, to create something of value from nothing. Manhood is a kind of male procreation; its heroic quality lies in its self-direction and discipline, its absolute self-reliance—in a word, its agential autonomy. (223)

Silverman observes that a society's dominant fictions do not just interpellate subjects in the Althusserian manner into hegemonic identities, but also produce a national "reality" (41). This is why "family values" become a major discourse of national crisis during the 1970s-1990s. Silverman argues that "the family provides the dominant fiction with its primary image of unity" (75). The argument over the structure of the family is also about the reproduction of a dominant fiction in the national imaginary, one that places white men at the center of the family and social reality. Although my work will not delve into the Lacanian model of subjectivity used by Silverman and other theorists, her depiction of masculinity as fiction elucidates its function in the national imaginary as well as the reasons for a sense of crisis. DiPiero argues that this crisis is influenced by "the contradiction caused by the enduring historical weight of an identity no longer invested with the preeminence it once enjoyed, and the contemporary push toward opening up new raced, gendered, and sexual identities that do not take the white male as their normative ground" (2). I depart from Silverman's theory of film as a site of identity suture, and view it as more of an experienced, lived event for a viewer in which the spectator takes an active role in telling the story unfolding on screen, even while the apparatus imposes passivity and receptivity on the audience, which is why I think that genre films are uniquely suited to this investigation. This study approaches film from a multidisciplinary cultural studies perspective, not a psychoanalytic one. Genre films rely on the audience to do work by attending to intertextual genre references as part of the enjoyment, and I think that this activity can lead a spectator to what bell hooks calls an "oppositional gaze," allowing for denaturalization of hegemonic dominant fictions. Also, due to the collaborative intertextual

aspect of genre films, the filmmakers have less agency in the cultural work done by the film, which means that even in the nostalgic 1980s, when masculine posturing seemed to be necessary for the safety of society, the films still register a critique of what they ostensibly celebrate.

### **Methodology: Films and Genre, Meaning and Realism**

*As an endless sequence of images, cultural commodities seduce the consumer by offering up an infinity of surfaces that invite the effortless inscription and consumption of fantasy. Culture becomes just what we want it to be; we take from it what we wish. The consumer actively supplies the meaning and pleasure that are reflected—not reflected on him or her but rather back to him or her—or more accurately, that are refracted back to him or her. Mass culture could not work without this participatory dynamic. (Gunster 255)*

This study examines films as affective experiences that audiences seek out because they find such affects pleasurable, a space in which they can live out fantasies and work through anxieties. Steven Shaviro responds to Laura Mulvey's essay on the "visual pleasures" of film, disagreeing with the notion that an audience member commands a mastering gaze because "visual fascination is a passive, irresistible compulsion" (*Cinematic Body* 8). He elaborates: "Film viewing offers an immediacy and violence of sensation that powerfully engages the eye and body of the spectator; at the same time, however, it is predicated on a radical dematerialization of appearances. The cinematic image is at once intense and impalpable" (Shaviro 25-26). We experience films intensely, but they consist only of images and sounds. Films are affective rather than cognitive because "we respond viscerally to visual forms, before having the leisure to read or interpret them as symbols" (26). This claim applies to the sounds employed by films, both to evoke diegetic realism and to trigger affective states in viewers (Shaviro 36). The voyeurism or scopophilia of film watching is not an active perversion, "for the

overwhelming experience of visual fascination in the cinema . . . is one of radical passivity” (Shaviro 48).<sup>23</sup> Watching a film is an event, and “cinema produces real effects *in* the viewer, rather than merely presenting phantasmatic reflections *to* the viewer” (Shaviro 51, italics his).<sup>24</sup> He argues that films “infect” us, rather than how the experience of watching a movie “has been traditionally defined in terms of fantasy, idealization, and a dialectic between the pacifying stabilization of identity and the imaginative free play of indeterminacy” (Shaviro *Cinematic Body* 155). This is a primary reason that they function so well as ideological apparatuses, for, as Shane Gunster explains, “ideologies do not become effective simply through the dispersal of concepts, ideas, and signs that logically express the interests of certain segments of the population; rather, people must actively connect themselves to an ideological formation through the plane of affect” (227). Citing Lawrence Grossberg, Gunster argues that “culture does more than simply give meaning to lived experience. It also determines how and why certain beliefs or practices come to matter or to feel important to an individual or a particular group” (227). Cultural works define the mattering maps used by those interpellated into that culture, and films do this through content, narrative structure, and the formal elements of *mise-en-scène*. This is not a completely one-sided affair, however. As noted above, narratives, especially genre film narratives, require work on the part of the audience to understand and enjoy them, but mix

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<sup>23</sup> He elaborates: “There is no way to watch a film without allowing this to happen; I can resist it only by giving up on the film altogether, by shutting my eyes or walking out” (Shaviro *Cinematic Body* 49).

<sup>24</sup> Shaviro argues that film watching is inherently masochistic: “Perception has become unconscious. It is neither spontaneously active nor freely receptive, but radically passive, the suffering of a violence perpetrated against the eye. Images are immaterial, but their *effect* is all the more physical and corporeal” (*Cinematic Body* 51). It

this pleasurable labor with familiar tropes and conventions that make sure the narrative does not alienate its audience.

Speculative film genres offer a privileged space for critiquing this ideological work since the speculative point of view allows for imagining the race/reproduction bind and masculine crisis in spectacular imagery, making visible and legible the cultural logic of white patriarchal society that dominant fictions obscure and render invisible. Above, this was referred to as an “oppositional gaze.” Matthew Beaumont calls this effect an “anamorphic estrangement” because it requires a viewer to alter their position, like Holbein’s painting “The Ambassadors” and its anamorphic skull, a position that “constitutes the point from which the SF text looks back at us, radically estranging our empirical, social environment and revealing its arbitrariness, its basic fungibility” (36); anamorphic estrangement denaturalizes “common sense” discourses and ideologies. This is because, “once internalized, the anamorphic perspective irrevocably transforms the normal” (Beaumont 41). Which is to say, in the context of this study, the speculative and fantastic elements of such films reveal the necessity for manhood to be constantly proven while rendering the arbitrary means of that proof in often obvious and hyperbolic fashion by attempting to solve a problem of “fitness.” Thus, speculative genres of film examine the assumed realities of culture that more “realistic” films often conceal or disavow. As Adilifu Nama notes,

Class oppression and elite power are rarely discussed openly in the popular American press, and the shrill edicts of neoconservative political pundits and respected liberal scholars alike that proclaimed the end of racism in the post-civil rights era have marginalized and stigmatized discussions around white supremacy as outdated. As a result, class and racial hierarchies are a taboo political topic that instead finds expression in alternative cultural outlets such as the imaginative

medium of SF film as entertainment, sometimes art, and on rare occasions a critical rallying cry to the dispossessed. (122)<sup>25</sup>

Teresa De Lauretis calls film a “technology of gender” along the lines of Foucault’s notion of sexuality as a technology of sex because gender “is the product of various social technologies, such as cinema, and of institutionalized discourses, epistemologies, and critical practices, as well as practices of daily life” (2).<sup>26</sup> So, in my model of masculinity as a technology, like all technology, it is enabled by other technologies. She posits that “gender is (a) representation” and that “the representation of gender *is* its construction” which requires continual construction and deconstruction; it is a technology needing constant repair (3). I am not arguing for a naïve theory of films “reflecting” ideological discourses, but that they are sites of conflict over the construction of these discourses (Johnston 29). I historicize the articulations of the films to provide context for this constructive practice, for discourses are historically contingent. As Gunster claims, we must “analyze every articulation in its historical specificity, and not as an abstract, isolated phenomenon” (222). Following that notion, I think it apt to quote Christine Gledhill at length:

In this context [that of ideology and hegemony], the notion of a realist practice takes on a sinister aspect. On one level the issue is: what is the epistemological status of the “reality” that the realist artist represents? Given that the “representations” of bourgeois ideology attempt to present reality as a phenomenal, unified, naturalized entity to which the individual must adapt, there is clearly an ideological pressure

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<sup>25</sup> bell hooks, in *Real to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies*, argues that movies are designed to be a vacation from the norm, but they also teach us lessons and sometimes allow “border crossings,” letting the audience see differently from a new social/ideological position (2). They can help us question our mattering maps.

<sup>26</sup> Gunster usefully notes that “a unified ideology is constructed by clustering certain subject-positions into an associative chain in such a way that the adoption of any one position evokes all of the others” (219).

on the artistic producer to identify reality with the *status quo*. On another level, if we grant that this is frequently the case in so-called realist production, our task is to identify in particular realist practices those conventions and devices which serve both to reproduce an ideological sense of reality – masking and naturalizing contradiction – and to mask their own work of artistic production. (23)

This study takes up the task suggested here of investigating fantastic film texts as comments on and critiques of realist practices in other films that produce gender as a reality. As will be shown, even when using fantastic tropes to create anamorphic estrangement, films still attempt to create a sense of realism within the logic of their narrative, and this often means reproducing hegemonic ideologies.

Many of the films investigated herein have been studied by science fiction and film scholars before, and I diverge from or respond to these previous readings with my emphasis on technologies of gender and the race/reproduction bind that (re)produces white masculine hegemonic power. Vivian Sobchack examines the genre throughout the twentieth century with a historicist eye for what the films say about national anxieties at the time of their production, such as the recurring theme of atomic radiation that pervades the genre in the 1950s and the figuring of the “Red Scare” in many films produced at the time. In her analysis of the period that I am examining, she reads the films as expressing the postmodern subjectivity of consumers in late global capitalism.<sup>27</sup> She argues that “any understanding of the socially symbolic meanings attached to aesthetic changes in the SF film over the past decade must derive from an understanding of the changed cultural sphere in which the

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<sup>27</sup> In this reading, she sees many of the films as displaying a postmodern dislocation of space: “As a system of orientation, conventional geography has served to represent relative spatial boundaries predicted by differences not only of latitude and longitudinal ‘natural’ geophysical punctuation, but also of national real estate.” (Sobchack 232).



films were produced” (Sobchack 244). While I agree that these films make cultural change visible, I am adding to her analysis a look at the changing identity of white men during this period.<sup>28</sup> This study positions these films as masculine melodramas where the protagonist’s identity crisis is worked out in fantastic and spectacular ways. As Frederic Jameson elaborates in *The Political Unconscious* (1981), interpretation allegorizes a text, and this study treats the films under analysis as allegories of relations that are gendered, racialized, and classed, addressing a masculine audience and articulating apocalyptic thinking about gender and race (58). As Jameson elaborates in his theory, ideology operates on Utopian impulses, impelling allegiance through the offer of a more ideal reality, and this study examines these texts about the end of the world for the Utopian ideologies that structure hegemonic white masculine identity.

Recent scholarship has examined science fiction films’ treatment of racial coding. This study draws on the insights of Adilifu Nama’s *Black Space: Imagining Race in Science Fiction Film* (2008), but where he reads some of these films as presenting the structured absence of black and brown bodies in the imagined future, I will be examining the way that this depiction reveals a repressed anxiety about reproducing whiteness in a country structured by white supremacy that, over time, has become more diverse and inclusive. Nama’s analysis of the stressed class relations during this time also serves as a springboard for my look at the “downsizing” of white working men in America.

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<sup>28</sup> hooks argues that movies are a shared cultural experience in which audiences learn about “race, class, [and] sex” (2). To her, a good film does not just reflect the hegemonic dominant fiction, it outlines it and critiques it as a counter-hegemonic “oppositional gaze.”

Also, to use a concept developed by Monique Wittig, this study shows how the “straight mind” is operating in these works, which is a way of thinking about the world that relies on sexual difference as one of many binary constructions that are interlinked, where “man, woman, race, black, white, nature, are at the core of a set of parameters” denoting social subjectivity and agency in a world organized around white patriarchy and enforced heteronormativity (Wittig 57). The films analyzed here demonstrate how the assumed “normal” is actually only normative, and not universal, but reproduced by technologies of masculinity and enforced using masculine technologies. Richard Dyer’s cultural analysis, *White* (1997), explains the ways in which whiteness in the Western imaginary has come to symbolize light and that this white light that brought about the Enlightenment is figured as a universal absence. Like Dyer, this analysis decenters whiteness as well as masculinity from their universal status so that they no longer equate to a generic human but a cultural representation of difference that, by asserting universality, reduces nonwhite people to racial categories of otherness as well as othering women as a divergent and subservient gender (2). In the mode of John Rieder’s *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (2008), in which he argues that “science fiction exposes something that colonialism imposes” (15), this work argues that the speculations of post-apocalyptic films expose things that a white hetero-patriarchal system of gender imposes.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> This is not just “thematic,” but involves the intersection of “semantic fields” that give the films meaning; David Bordwell makes the distinction between these concepts by remarking that the theme of a text involves its “governing idea,” such as the pessimism expressed by these films, but the semantic field is “a conceptual *structure*; it organizes potential meanings in relation to one another” and the theme of the film is only “a node in a cluster of associated semantic features” (106). This study focuses on masculinity as one of these semantic features.

Since many of the earlier films that this study will canvass are motivated by well-known actors, I make use of Richard Dyer's book, *Stars* (1979), because the "star image" of the actor adds to and modifies the meanings created by his performance of masculinity for the camera. Stars are normative vehicles in films who "can have one of three different relationships to prevalent norms – *reinforcement*, *seduction*, and *transcendence*" (Dyer *Stars* 24). In other words, their performance either supports and reinscribes dominant values, transgresses these norms, "but in a charming way," or they would lose star status, or they define a new norm (24). They "reinforce aspects of ideology simply by repeating, reproducing, or reconciling them" in their performance both on screen and off (Dyer 27). They can also serve to conceal inherent contradictions and problematic logics of the norms they support. As we shall see, the figures of manhood in these films vacillate between being alienated from power in society and being anomic, or excluded from society as such (Dyer 52). The stars who perform in these films attempt to conceal the contradictions of individuality and hegemonic masculine models' reliance on it, for, as Dyer notes,

The notion of a pure individuality, untainted by common social characteristics, is unsound both as a theory of personality . . . and as a theory of characterization, since an utterly unique personality/character/star in a film would be indecipherable (since decipherment/comprehension of any meaning/affect depends on shared, and therefore to some degree generalizable, signs). (99)

Stars embody such contradictions and their performance of masculinity attempts to reconcile and even erase them from the masculinist discourse their characters inhabit.

### **Chapter Organization**

*It is very difficult anymore to talk about film's "reflection" of society according to the tired rules of mimesis; the hegemony of the media (and the changing relationship of mediation to consciousness) is a significant component of the apocalypticism producing panic discourses on all fronts. It is interesting also that when the cinema is discoursing*

*on certain postmodern theorizations . . . or merely playing out and exhausting tired genre conventions within postindustrial topography, it does so with unbridled negativity.*  
(Sharrett 4)

*In the most mythic sense, the contemporary state of affairs we deem so changed we term it “post-modern” is such because of the eclipse of the myth of progress. It is harder now to sustain the national myth of benevolent democracy, widely-shared economic prosperity, and stable cultural norms. With the optimistic myth of progress shaken, it becomes easy for us to turn to the alternative myth of the Fall, and seek either scapegoats or redeemer figures.* (Combs 20)

As the above epigraph from James Combs’s “Pox-Eclipse Now—The Dystopian Imagination” suggests, the failure of master narratives and dominant fictions results in the apocalyptic thinking that informs the imagined worlds of post-apocalypse film. The idea of a cinematic hero has shifted with these ideological failures.

He . . . has largely ceased to be a clear agent of the community who acts because he shares their values and wants to see justice done. Now the hero (or, if you prefer, anti-hero) is more likely to be a functional alienate himself, acting out of some private motive stemming from his alienation from society, if incidentally or unwittingly serving a social purpose. (Combs 21)

This study attempts to trace the emergence of this new kind of Hollywood anti-hero as a model of apocalyptic masculinity who often suffers, his body “violated” and “penetrated” like a martyr (Tasker 39).

Each chapter and each section will be framed by epigraphs, as they have been in this introduction, meant to be suggestive of the semantic fields under discussion. The chapters are organized around the investigation of recurring tropes and conventions used by the films, as well as chronologically, to trace the genealogy of the use and figuration of the tropes and conventions. Borrowing from Linda Hutcheon’s theories of film adaptation, the chronology investigates how later films borrow from and adapt the previous iterations,

becoming texts inherently “palimpsestuous” and intertextual, and both comprehension and interpretation of the films requires this semantic background (*Theory of Adaptation* 22).<sup>30</sup>

The first chapter begins with a look at the settings of the films, and investigates the *mise-en-scène* of the post-apocalypse produced in the 1950s and the masculine protagonists’ relationships with this location, discussing the way that the figure of masculinity is positioned within the narrative and cinematic space with the necessity that they assert control over this space and maintain a clear boundary between a safe private interior and a dangerous exterior. It also examines the display of male bodies, arguing that such spectacular demonstrations draw “our attention to the politicization of the body in patriarchal capitalism,” a site “where the power-bearing definitions of social and sexual normality are literally embodied, and is consequently the site of discipline and punishment” (Fiske *Media Matters* 73). This chapter also historicizes the period I am analyzing on the planes of national history and norms of Hollywood film production. It begins with a look at apocalyptic films that established many of the conventions and tropes which are investigated in later chapters, especially that of the “last man standing,” an alienated or anomic protagonist in a battle against the world. The chapter culminates in an analysis of *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil* (1959, Randal MacDougall), arguing that it troubles the conventions established for the last man on earth narrative with its use of an African-

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<sup>30</sup> Working with Gary Borlolotti, Hutcheon later compares the process of adaptation to evolutionary theories of biological adaptation as film texts adapt to newer “environments” (historical circumstances and social milieus) (see “On the Origin of Adaptations: Rethinking Fidelity Discourse and ‘Success’ — Biologically”).

American star as protagonist while also establishing tropes and conventions used by later urban apocalypse films.

In these films released during the affluent 1950s, a lone man fights to “stay human” (and a “real” man) while threatened by an incomprehensible threat that no one can resist; these protagonists no longer fit anywhere in society, but in the case of *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*, this was already the case because the protagonist is played by Harry Belafonte, a black man alone in New York City. The film establishes the urban apocalypse examined in the second chapter, setting up tensions based on binary oppositions besides just white and black, like private/public or civilized/barbaric, and much of the photography consists of long shots showing the tiny diminished figure of the protagonist dwarfed by monumental buildings, reinforcing the notion of alienation from hegemonic society. He ultimately proves his manhood by refusing to play the game in which he is expected to supply such proof, and the film ends, like the others made in the 1950s, with the suggestion of a new beginning, but unlike the nostalgic return suggested by other films in the decade, *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*'s new beginning suggests a radical change in racial and gender politics.

The next chapter examines representative urban apocalypse films produced in the 1970s. There were very few such films produced in the decade of the 1960s, as Hollywood stopped funding speculative works, and the science fiction genre was being reworked by other countries in Europe and Asia (Johnston 82). Such works produced in the US were more often made for television. Speculative works became more prevalent in the later decade due to the increasing financial crisis in Hollywood and the rise of the New

Hollywood as producers became more risky in order to attract viewers and compete with television. The decade also represents a tumultuous period of American history, and the films produced then articulate many of the anxieties of a populace confronting the demise of a Utopian American Dream that figured white men as ascendant over the world. The chapter investigates the second of a series of film adaptations of Richard Matheson's *I am Legend* (1954), *The Omega Man* (Boris Sagal, 1971), starring Charlton Heston. This film moves the urban setting of the apocalypse to Los Angeles and inverts the gender and racial dynamics of *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*, articulating the powerless rage of an angry white man confronting the possibility that he no longer acts as a standard for American subjectivity. This chapter performs close readings of this film and *The Ultimate Warrior* (Robert Clouse, 1975), starring Yul Brynner, examining how the protagonist in each film navigates and masters the urban space in which he operates. In the first film, Heston plays the savior of the human race who regardless dies at the hand of his nemesis as he attempts to conquer his urban space and cleanse it of infectious others. In the other film, the white patriarch (Max von Sydow) also dies attempting to civilize his urban space, killed by a mob of his own people, but his pregnant daughter escapes the city with Brynner in search of a safer space in which to raise her child. Both films present an ambivalent message about violence and domination while articulating masculine crisis and critiquing masculinist discourse, presenting the shift in American values of the time away from an ideal warrior masculinity towards the model of kinder and gentler manhood performed by the protagonists of many of the films the first chapter examines.

Michael Ryan and Douglas Kellner opine that “fantasies of the future may simply be ways of putting quotation marks around the present. They carry out a temporal displacement that short-circuits the implicit ideological censors operative in the reigning realist narrative regime of Hollywood” (53). Many films of this era articulate the rising crime rate and poverty in urban spaces, such as the popular “Dirty Harry” and *Death Wish* films, but the masculinist cultural logic that they rely on and perpetuate is taken to extreme lengths in the films where the social order has completely collapsed, turning the city into a lawless place usually depicted as a Hobbesian nightmare of brutality treated as a game violent men play to prove their manhood. The third chapter of this study leaves the urban space behind, using George Romero’s *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) as a transition because, following an opening sequence inside an urban tenement, the film relocates, and the band of survivors flies away from urban lawlessness as a literal enactment of “white flight,” and finds their way to a suburban mall, the new quasi-urban arcade populating most suburbs at the time. The chapter then examines a newer, and more popular, mode of post-apocalyptic film that leaves urban space for the open road in George Miller’s *Mad Max* (1979). This chapter looks at the use of a variety of technologies that act as props for the masculine masquerade, propping up the masculinity of the men who use them, focusing particularly on vehicles and firearms. The *Mad Max* films differ from their predecessors in their emphasis on vehicles and mobility as a symbol of masculine freedom while foregrounding the latent violence of automotive travel, showing vehicles of masculinity to also be vehicles



of murder.<sup>31</sup> In the second installment, *Mad Max 2/The Road Warrior* (1981), Max uses his ability to drive to save a post-nuclear family, including the feral child who narrates the story, providing hope for future fathers, but he supplies a role model of manhood for the narrator to *reject*. Max's performance of self-sacrifice keeps this child from becoming one of the violent road warriors like him who have embraced a fugitive masculinity that cannot settle and relate to others and instead remains always in motion as proof of individual agency.

The fourth chapter continues the analysis of the *Mad Max* films while extending the investigation of the masculine masquerade through a consideration of the costuming of characters in the films. The sartorial performance of gender in these films problematizes and frustrates normative notions of a gender binary and the "proper" behavior of men and women. These films, which, despite being Australian productions, became enormously popular in the US.<sup>32</sup> The films use leather as both protective armor and part of a masculine performance, and this becomes further emphasized in the sequel, wherein the gang of antagonists wears a combination of glam-rock, punk, and leather-daddy fashion as post-modern hypermasculine dandies.

The study then ends with an examination of the figure of the "Feral Kid" in the second *Mad Max* film as an articulation of apocalyptic boyhood, beginning with a

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<sup>31</sup> Automobiles are a liberating technology not only by increasing the space in which a man is free to move, but they also liberate time since their advent in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century liberated men from train and trolley schedules (Colavito 168). With a car, a man is supposed to be master of his destiny.

<sup>32</sup> Film producers, mostly in Europe, quickly followed the trend with movies like *Stryker* (1983), *Firebird 2015* (1984), *America 3000* (1986), and *Warlords* (1988), to name a few of the titles released in the post-apocalyptic proliferation that occurred after the success of *The Road Warrior*.

discussion of *A Boy and His Dog* (1975 LQ Jones), a film based on the Harlan Ellison novella *Vic Blood* (1969). This film begins in a post-nuclear-war desert wasteland where the boy must scrounge for survival, living off of the detritus from the previous world. He navigates this nightmare with the aid of his canine friend. His dog cannot sense food, instead sensing the presence of women, who have become abject sex objects in this future. The boy supplies him with sustenance while the dog finds outlets for the boy's sexual desires. Vic is lured away from this homosocial relationship with his dog by a beautiful woman promising paradise underground, but it is not Utopia for him because the community only needs him for his sperm to make new babies and treats him as an object in a similar fashion to the way that women are treated aboveground. Escaping this space, Vic returns to a surface world without responsibility or the necessity of reproductive futurity, a place where he can forever remain a boy. *The Road Warrior* saves its boy from perpetual boyhood as a rite of passage he undergoes to enter manhood, and the film is concerned with what kind of man he will become. Max saves him from the dangers of the road, both literally in the action sequences of the climactic chase scene, and also figuratively, by refusing his companionship and serving as a cautionary myth for the boy to remember and relate as the story he narrates, explaining how he escaped the cycle of road violence to become such a storyteller instead of warrior.

This research investigates the articulations of white masculine crisis across the latter-half of the twentieth century in this genre of film because it explicates the apocalyptic logic subtending such imagined crises, suggesting why the response to cultural change is imagined as the end of the world as we know it. Such logic has not gone out of style, but

seems to be more endemic since the turn of the twenty-first century, documented by Michael Kimmel in *Angry White Men* (2013, reissued in 2017 with an addendum about the election of Donald Trump). We need to understand and theorize this apocalyptic logic now more than ever, and this study traces its history through the spectacular imagination of post-apocalyptic film.

## Chapter 1

### The End of the World as We Know It:

#### Failed Mastery and Competing Masculinities in the 1950s

*Just because those in power are straight and white and male doesn't mean that every straight white man feels powerful. . . . But just because straight white men don't feel powerful doesn't make it any less true that compared to other groups, they benefit from inequality and are, indeed, privileged. (Kimmel, *Angry White Men* xiii)*

*If men are the masters of their fate, what do they do about the unspoken sense that they are being mastered, in the marketplace and at home, by forces that seem to be sweeping away the soil beneath their feet? (Faludi 13)*

Postwar American speculative fiction (hereafter SF) often works to problematize and subvert epistemological certainty about a variety of “common sense” assumptions, denaturalizing them through the process of speculation, demonstrating how they are historically produced by social relations and not intrinsic facets of human life. SF’s discourses can often be oppositional and counterhegemonic, philosophizing with a hammer to break down ideological certainty. Even though often considered “escapist,” this is also true of SF films made during this period. Susan Sontag, writing in the 1970s and looking back at the 1950s and 1960s, argues that “science fiction films are not about science. They are about disaster, which is one of the oldest subjects of art” (41). In this sense, she compares such films to the work of artists like Hieronymus Bosch and his depictions of plague. SF acts as disaster fiction because it imagines endings and beginnings through iconoclasm and speculation; it is often both eschatological and utopian. The SF genre often uses current historical circumstances as the text upon which it overlays possibilities,

“palimpsestously”<sup>33</sup> writing future history as a comment on the historical reality of the present.

The decade of the 1950s witnessed a proliferation of SF texts in print as well as celluloid, followed by television in the 1960s. As technological advancement promised both utopian abundance and total annihilation, these texts imagined possible futures as well as the possibility of no future. Although the 1960s are more commonly considered a radical period for American culture and politics, the 1950s were equally fraught, but the repression of activists and political radicals was less visible, with the exception of the HUAC hearings televised to the nation (their focus on Hollywood and television made them into a spectacle by definition). The SF texts of this period evince all of the ideological anxieties mentioned by previous scholars, such as fear of communist contamination, atomic science and nuclear war, and otherness as a threat, but they are also an active engagement in speculating on the role of manhood in society that foregrounds and examines the fantasm of masculine identity as always already speculative and fictional, a masculine masquerade, while also expressing the paranoid fantasy of “agency panic” through a rewriting of the history of fatherhood using the figuration of monstrosity.<sup>34</sup> 1950s SF films are, like all commercial

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<sup>33</sup> A term I am borrowing from Linda Hutcheon’s work on adaptation theory that combines the meanings of layered polysemous discourse in the figure of the palimpsest with the mixing implied by incest.

<sup>34</sup> Melley describes this panic: “As liberal humanism gives way to newer models of subjectivity, it seems unlikely to do so without a struggle. In postwar American culture, that struggle has been most conspicuous in the rhetoric of paranoia, conspiracy, and diminished human agency. At its best, this rhetoric offers a way of conceptualizing and resisting the controlling power of mass-communication systems, bureaucracies, and regulatory discourses. At its worst, it becomes coupled to an antisocial fantasy of autonomy, a vision that rejects the promise of collective resistance and sometimes even celebrates violent responses to ‘oversocialization.’ In either case, however, it tends to defend the notion of autonomous individuality against a more unsettling view, one that stresses the social construction and regulation of the self (201-202).

narrative films, structured by naturalized hegemonic discourses, but their speculative mode can undermine the dominant fictions of hegemonic myth by revealing the social production of such naturalized ideologies through the depiction of alternatives. Often in such narratives, toxicity and contagion become the monstrous metaphors for overdetermined gendered, racialized, and classed others who threaten the “pure” virility of white patriarchal authority, but in the post-apocalyptic scenarios that this study examines, this authority often fails to master a strange new world over which patriarchal power cannot assert control either physically or epistemologically.

The increased visibility of identity politics during the 1960s felt to some a liberating force for social justice, but to many white men it came as a displacement, even a disaster, and it felt like disenfranchisement.<sup>35</sup> This was due to a number of factors, including shifts in cultural paradigms of gender, civil rights legislative reforms (especially affirmative action), and later, the economic hardships of 1970s “stagflation” and the wealth redistribution of the neoliberal answer to this problem, but most importantly it was due to the role of mass-media in disseminating populist discourses of American individualism that conceived of these changes not as liberation but as regulating and limiting personal freedom and expression, discourses that subtend neoliberal doctrines as well as masculinist rhetoric.<sup>36</sup> The increasing visibility and inclusion of other subject positions besides the white male into popular discourse and entertainment, clamoring for recognition,

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<sup>35</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, in his work *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993), notes that the inauguration of a new “epoch by imposing a new, advanced position is accompanied by a displacement of the structure of temporally hierarchized positions” (60).

<sup>36</sup> David Harvey’s *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005) explains this logic of liberalism imagining all of society as a free market that he calls “neoliberalism” in great detail.

representation, and equal rights as part of the body politic, challenged the assumed universality and centrality of a straight white male standard (a “universal” standard that elides class difference), a standard based on exclusion disguised as universality. Additionally, as Melley documents, the individual autonomous agency that informs this standard was being disarticulated by discourses in both the humanities and sciences as personal identity slowly came to be understood as structured by historical social circumstances rather than innate universal traits, that individual agency itself acts as an Enlightenment myth which subtends any model of masculinity relying on proof of mastery.<sup>37</sup> Agency became irreversibly political.

This panic over an assumed loss of a fantasmatic agency that men are supposed to be born with is often depicted as a diminishing of white men in social status along with their exploitation by figures over which they have little control, and I will examine several films produced during this time that express a reaction to the knowledge that, as Kimmel puts it, “the era of unquestioned and unchallenged [white] male entitlement is over” (*AWM* xi). These films act as responses to these challenges that attempt to reassert white male agency. The films appeal to the aspirations of men across class lines, serving as a regulation of a masculinity in process of deregulation by a variety of discourses during the 1960s. The rhetoric of lost agency intersects in the 1970s with a new interest in Hollywood films depicting the “authentic” working class man as both fetishized *threat* to the professional

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<sup>37</sup> Melley remarks: “In postwar culture . . . an intending, monolithic agent still seems easier to comprehend and resist than a complex array of structures and communications, even if we know down deep that self-control is not an all-or-nothing proposition. If we have come to a moment when traditional ways of understanding human action and identity are no longer adequate to explain our relation to our social and technological conditions, many Americans seem nonetheless willing to disavow this fact” (202).

managerial class and also a figure of *desire* representing a nostalgic “natural” undomesticated manliness presumably lost by men who pursue middle-class intellectual labor, a model of manhood whose entitlement comes through “essential” aggressive traits and rugged individualism, a man who answers to no other man and is sufficient to himself.

Often, although the real threat to both working-class and professional men was in fact the new global economy of flexible accumulation leading to their obsolescence as a labor force, the films depict the threat as coming from racialized others, other angry, white, homicidal, working-class men, and powerful women. Derek Nystrom investigates this anxiety in a series of masculinist films from the 1970s such as *Five Easy Pieces* (1970, Bob Rafelson), *Deliverance* (1972, John Boorman), *Walking Tall* (1973, Phil Karlson), *Looking for Mr. Goodbar* (1977, Richard Brooks), *Saturday Night Fever* (1977, John Badham), *Smokey and the Bandit* (1977, Hal Needham), and *Cruising* (1980, William Fiedkin) in *Hard Hats, Rednecks, and Macho Men* (2009).<sup>38</sup> He argues that

the new visibility of working-class characters in the 1970s was generated by a series of *middle-class* concerns and dilemmas. Much as representations of homosexuality are often more concerned with stabilizing heterosexual identity (or, for that matter, as images of blackness are frequently produced by white anxiety), the decade’s cinematic renderings of white working-class masculinity tell us a great deal about the crises within . . . the professional-managerial class. (Nystrom 5, italics his)

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<sup>38</sup> Nystrom notes: “The worldwide economic slump that began in 1973, which ended what Eric Hobsbawm calls the ‘Golden Age’ of the post-World War II boom years and inaugurated the ensuing ‘Crisis Decades,’ marked a watershed moment in US class politics. As labor historian and activist Kim Moody puts it, the 1970s was the decade during which ‘business organize[d] as a class.’ . . . These strategies had the (intended) effect of disciplining the working class, a process that helped cause union membership to drop to only 16 percent of the private sector workforce by the end of the decade (compared to the postwar high of nearly 35 percent in 1953). . . . The current lopsided balance of power between a triumphant, mobile capital and concomitant strength of the professional middle class, find their roots in the economic transformations of the 1970s” (4).



In Nystrom's analysis, the figuration of masculine crisis in these films as white working-class men threatened by corrupt government and business interests appeals not only to those very working-class men being literally disenfranchised by down-sizing and deindustrialization, but also to the professional men and management bureaucrats caught in a privileged class position that nevertheless does not supply them with the autonomous agency hegemonic masculinity promises, a class position also becoming increasingly precarious with the rise of neoliberal deregulation and the financializing of every facet of life.

As part of this masculinist discourse, the latter half of the decade of the 1970s saw the emergence of a new kind of blockbuster film that was, as Thomas Schatz puts it, "increasingly plot-driven, increasingly visceral, kinetic, and fast-paced, increasingly reliant on special effects, increasingly 'fantastic' (and thus apolitical)" ("The New Hollywood" 29). Popular films became more action-centered than story-centered and subsequently less directly confrontational about social problems and more about the production of an enjoyable "ride" like an attraction at an amusement park. As Nystrom makes clear in his study, the fact that such films were less overtly political did not keep them from producing political messages and critiques, especially when it came to gender politics.<sup>39</sup> Three of the films produced in the 1970s examined here star an aging actor known for his hypermasculine roles, proving his manhood one more time on the screen. These films

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<sup>39</sup> Nystrom observes that there are generally two camps when it comes to discourse about the New Hollywood, one that derides the new high-budget spectacle of the late 1970s, and one that lauds the period between 1967 and 1976 as a moment of European-style auteurism, but they both "argue that the decade inaugurated the development of a 'postclassical' mode of film style," not to mention a different kind of flexible production style that often puts as much money into the marketing of a film as its production (3).

reveal the masculinist anxiety of both film producers and consumers, bound up in transformations of working conditions, racial relations, gender hierarchies, and the failure of the “breadwinner” model of “self-made” white American masculinity. In this series of films, these social changes are depicted as an apocalyptic end of civilization as such.

Apocalypse connotes and denotes many things, and I should pause to discuss the original meaning of the word in Greek as a revelation, an unveiling of history. It is a *way of viewing* history and hence a way of thinking about it. Apocalyptic films thus occupy a privileged place for an analysis of historical crisis and transformation not only because of their hyperbolic narrative conventions, but also for, as Brooks Landon claims in reference to SF in general, the “affective impact” of speculating about the end of late capitalist culture, a speculation leading to apocalyptic thinking (59).<sup>40</sup> Now repeated so often it has become somewhat of a cliché attributed to Frederick Jameson, we find it easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism, and these films conflate the two images. Such apocalyptic reasoning opposes the myth of progress and other dominant fictions such as the omnipotence of white men, imagining an apocalyptic model of masculinity and articulating how the ideal white man is always already apocalyptic. That this speculative positionality finds expression through apocalyptic anxiety and the threat of extinction indicates the confusion and displacement of the white male subject from a supposed universal standard and a fear of its erasure from history, a shift from being the *subject of*

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<sup>40</sup> According to Landon, what he calls “science fictional thinking” is that of a virtual subject able to speculate about postmodern technoculture through a recognition of the present *as* the future, a world so imbricated with fantastic technology as to make it ephemeral and invisible, a realization that one lives in a science fictional world. I am extending this idea to a realization that one lives in an apocalyptic world.

history to being *subject to* history. In his book, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (1989), Andrew Ross argues that popular fiction gives its audience “the pleasure of recognition and identification, of *knowing one’s place*” (4, italics his). It acts as a comfortable, familiar home, reinforcing ideologies that structure and suture hegemonic identity. The films I will be discussing demonstrate that many men in the latter-half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century did not know where this place was anymore, and these films act as melodramas working out the hysteria of this identity crisis.<sup>41</sup> I use these two terms, commonly associated with the supposed emotional fragility of women, intentionally to harness this sentiment and apply it to the men depicted in these films. Melodramatic film usually deals with the identity crisis of a middle-class, suburban woman as she finds herself powerless to change a social position which confines and subjugates her.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, the following analyses attempt to tease out the way these films address a crisis of powerlessness for hegemonic white male identity in the face of changing social norms that challenge its privileged status in society and the family even while the domestic space of the family is figured as confining and limiting this privileged agency.

Films that imagine human life after the end of “civilization” invite instructive speculation on alternative social structures, but often revert to a nostalgic feudal-style

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<sup>41</sup> David Savran argues that the circumstances of the 1970s hindered the advance of American liberal justice and evinced a backlash against liberation politics, but also “a sense of profound anxiety over the loss of the Vietnam War, and more generally over the United States’ role as an imperial power. . . . [resulting in] a whole-sale reconfiguration of white American masculinity, a reconfiguration that has proven a protracted and complex process” that produces competing models of manhood (193).

<sup>42</sup> Laura Mulvey examines this mode of film in her “Afterword” article that updates her seminal “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.”

patriarchy ruled through violent force, as if the façade of civilization was always only covering over the barbarism of patriarchal order.<sup>43</sup> Do these speculations about a world after civilization usually result in restoration of the status quo because the form of popular narrative film requires closure, indicating perhaps a failure of the imagination? It must be remembered that the civilization being defended is “our” civilization, a banal flagging of American nationality that, as Michael Billig observes, requires a selective remembering that defines the nation-state as natural, assumed, and which also requires a mode of forgetting: “once a nation is established, it depends for its continued existence upon a collective amnesia. . . . Not only is the past forgotten, as it is ostensibly being recalled, but so there is a parallel forgetting of the present . . . [through] routines of life, which constantly remind, or ‘flag’, nationhood” (37-38). Hence “our civilization” is naturalized to the point of not being readily noticed, so it is not surprising that these films cannot imagine a social system outside of this paradigm, only an opportunity to renew the nation in a “purer” form.<sup>44</sup>

Additionally, these films imagine a new social order that reiterates the previous patriarchal system of traffic in women as a central organizing principle of social unity, even when they take pains not to. This study begins with an examination of films produced in the 1950s that established the conventions and themes the later films, to use Linda

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<sup>43</sup> De Lauretis remarks that the usefulness of the Oedipus myth is not just Freud’s use of it, but how, “like the best of stories and better than most, [it] weaves the inscription of violence (and family violence, at that) into the representation of gender” (44).

<sup>44</sup> The “common sense” of nationality works as a form of “collective amnesia”; “our’ nationalism is routinely forgotten, being unnamed as nationalism. Nationalism as a whole is projected on to others” (Billig 49).

Hutcheon's terminology, salvage and appropriate. Most of these films are genre films, and such films, as Thomas Sobchack notes, are "made in imitation not of life but of other films" (105). They are intertextual by definition, each iteration of conventions representing the evolution of the narrative form of the genre, hence my use of Hutcheon's idea of salvage and appropriation that I have borrowed from adaptation theory; all genre films can be usefully viewed as adaptations of previous works. Indeed, Hutcheon's theorization of film adaptation as a process similar to biological adaptation applies well to genre films since later films can be seen as mutations of the previous work, some survive and others do not.<sup>45</sup>

The 1950s saw the emergence of the genre of apocalyptic film, often but not always based on nuclear war and evincing Cold War paranoia.<sup>46</sup> Most of them use a *mise-en-scène* removed from centers of capital and production. As Robert Yeates points out in "Gender and Ethnicity in Post-Apocalyptic Suburbia," cities became danger zones at this time due to the new kind of rocket warfare introduced by the atom bomb and it was thought the would not survive such a war (413). Cities also stand as icons of civilization that articulate all of the negative connotations associated with the history of colonial white supremacy disavowed through the myth of progress. Furthermore, during this period, many cities were being filled with a melanated population migrating from the Jim Crow south, making the city into a hyper-segregated space where the poor racialized people were confined to

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<sup>45</sup> She elaborates: "What we then end up with is the product of cultural selection; what have survived are mutations that allow the story to better fit (adapt to) its culture or environment" (Borlotti and Hutcheon 449) This also helps explain how genres "migrate" across cultures and mutate in their new environments.

<sup>46</sup> There were "end of the world" films in early cinema about comets destroying the world and such, and the adaptation of H.G. Wells's *Things to Come* (1936), but the disaster films were not concerned with the aftermath of the end of the world in the same way that 1950s films are, and Wells's narrative is a utopian imagining of cycles of cataclysm brought on by wars in which civilization as such never really goes away.

ghettos with little opportunity to ever leave. Thus, the urban space became doubly dangerous, both as a racialized and criminalized space and as the target of nuclear missiles.<sup>47</sup> That being said, one of the most interesting films produced in the decade was placed in the depopulated space of New York City, and this chapter will end with an examination of its apocalyptic thinking.

### **The End of Everything (I Know): from Destination to Disaster**

*The unintended effect of Mulvey's argument is to foreclose whatever potentials for resistance or subversion, or Deleuzian 'lines of flight,' are latent within mainstream, narrative film. (Shaviro Cinematic Body 12)*

*Each new genre film ingests every previous film . . . In order to understand the later films we must also know the earlier films that they contain. (Altman 25)*

As this epigraph from Steven Shaviro's *Cinematic Body* argues, we can investigate what these films reveal or disclose about the historical social conditions of the time of their release and what that revelation can teach us about current discourses of masculinity, but we can also tease out some of the ways that the films might offer alternatives to such discourses and dominant fictions. The decade of the 1950s serves as an apt time for such analysis because America seemed to be ascendant after the war and white American men were thought to be masters of their destiny. The third highest grossing film of 1950 in the US, *Destination Moon* (Irving Pichel) launched us into the space race, but it also inaugurated a spectacular, though realistic form of science fiction film with its attention to the realities and dangers of space flight that informed the actual mission to land on the

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<sup>47</sup> Some whites even saw this as an opportunity to cleanse the country of such a population of undesirables. This situation is documented by Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton in *American Apartheid* (1993).

moon taken up by the newly-formed NASA in the next decade.<sup>48</sup> Reality often imitates art.<sup>49</sup> This film emblemizes the hegemonic rhetoric of American ascendance in literal (through rocket science) and figurative form, opening the decade with a message of hope and progress and depicting nature, figured as the moon, as disciplined and conquered. The mode of conquest replaces this notion of journey or discovery five years later in *Conquest of Space* (1955, Byron Haskin), a film preoccupied with a crisis of fatherhood and patriarchal authority. Rocket technology offers the promise of the ascendancy of men, but, as Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) reminds us, they always return to Earth, often with explosive payload.

Producer George Pal's follow-up blockbuster, *When Worlds Collide* (1951, Rudolph Maté), did not fare as well at the box office as *Destination Moon*, possibly because of its less overtly triumphalist tone; using of the iconography of rockets as liberatory technology taken from *Destination Moon*, along with growing Cold War anxiety, this film posits a rogue planet hurtling toward Earth promising to destroy all life on the planet. It is structured by the racial politics of our doomed planet and fear of the "other" motivated historically by the increasing migration of black people from the South to urban industrial zones, especially that of Los Angeles, home of Hollywood, and it also serves as a rite of passage for a new generation of young white men, defining their manhood as the

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<sup>48</sup> Rushed through production in order to be released before Pal's blockbuster, the B-film *Rocketship X-M* (Kurt Neumann) also depicts a moon mission, but one that veers off course and lands on Mars only to find that it looks the way it does do to a devastating nuclear war fought there by a previous civilization.

<sup>49</sup> This influence on NASA operated through conceptual artist Chesley Bonestell who worked on the look of this film and then aided NASA in their rocket designs (Garrett). The film garnered an Academy Award for its innovative and spectacular production design.

willingness to face danger and become leaders of a brave new world. Melanated bodies are only marginal to this narrative of earned manhood and necessary authority, and none of them are saved from destruction at film's end. Nama notes that, "for the most part, black characters are absent from SF cinema, yet their omission does not eliminate blackness as a source of anxiety" (11). His analysis of this film points out the implicit message of choosing only white people to populate the escape rocket as an indication of "racial homogeneity as a requirement for the preservation of the American way of life and the rebuilding of a 'perfect' world" (Nama 15). Thus the film acts as an expression of white anxiety articulating the imagination of danger to America's northern cities as the decade saw the increasing presence (coded as invasion or the approach of "rogue" planet) of racialized others into previously white urban neighborhoods, a collision of worlds solved by "white flight" to a "better," more homogeneous world in the gated community of a suburb with its managed, cultivated, disciplined "nature" often including artificial lakes and golf courses, a pastoral figuration that imagines the natural as a space for middle-class leisure.<sup>50</sup>

In this film, the old world dies, but a newer, better (whiter) one is born from its ashes, and, significantly, the old scientist Dr. Hendron (Larry Keating) whose mastering gaze first sees the danger in the sky even though the power elite will not listen to him and

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<sup>50</sup> Yeates notes that "the term 'white flight' designates a 'wholesale departure of white folks from many formerly segregated communities'" which institutionalized the segregation of city from suburb (419 quoting Camarillo). Massey and Denton explain this process: "Middle-class households—whether they are black, Mexican, Italian, Jewish, or Polish—always try to escape the poor" (9). This *de facto* segregation was codified into law through the Federal Housing Authority, preventing the "wrong" kinds of people from moving into the "good" neighborhoods through restrictions called "red-lining" that kept African Americans from gaining financial help from the Home Owners Loan Corporation (Massey and Denton 51). This results in "poor blacks liv[ing] under unrivaled concentrations of poverty" (Massey and Denton 9).



whose mastery of technology creates the escape rocket, chooses to give up his seat on it and sacrifice himself so that a younger man can take the flight and perpetuate the species; the symbolic father abdicates his throne to make way for the son who will found a new all-white society in a pristine, pastoral, non-urban space, the patriarch's mastering gaze no longer necessary in this new world. The men founding this community, however, marked in so many ways by hegemonic white professional/managerial heterosexual masculinity, will, we can assume, only reproduce the same patriarchal system of privilege that props up their supposedly individual agency through the subjugation of women. The film is less about survival of disaster than, as in *Destination Moon*, the crossing of a new frontier by these men (played by Richard Dern, Peter Hansen, and John Hoyt). This trope of the older generation abdicating authority to young men becomes an essential part of many post-apocalyptic films, and I will return to it over the course of this study as a figure of generational conflict and the process by which boys become men and assume the responsibility and mantle of patriarchy. These Pal productions are populist blockbuster films that I will contrast with the following films.

The same year, 1951, to much less fanfare, the film *Five* (Arch Oboler) was released, confronting militant nationalism, racism, and fascism by using the event of a nuclear catastrophe to bring five disparate people together, including an African American (Charles Lampkin) who cares for an old banker (the figure of a failing patriarchal capitalist played by Earl Lee), a pregnant blonde woman (Susan Douglas), an English teacher (figuration of the professional-managerial class, played by William Phipps) and a white nationalist mountain climber (figure of fascist nationalism and ascendant manhood, played

by James Anderson), in a remote mountain home (owned by Oboler, who wrote the novel on which the film is based, and designed by Frank Lloyd Wright).<sup>51</sup> Linda Williams, in *Playing the Race Card* (2001), examines the role of the home in the melodramatic imagination of racial relations in America, noting that “melodrama needs a home” as a “space of innocence” that indicates the virtue of protagonist victims through “family values” (284). Gender relations and especially masculinist discourse require this space of “innocent” family domesticity that, when disrupted, erupts into an often violent hysteria of masculinist melodrama.

Like Pal’s film, this one is replete with masculine homosocial bonding and the gendered separation of labor and space, but it also foregrounds a conflict of masculine models through the figures of Eric, the athletic aggressive blonde nationalist, and Michael, the kinder, gentler teacher (who subsequently learns working-class physical masculinity, becoming a farmer instead of doing the “feminine”-coded intellectual labor that he practiced before), whom both compete for the love of the one remaining woman.<sup>52</sup> Michael must defeat the racist bully, but not before the villain kills Charles, the black man whose

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<sup>51</sup> Peter Biskind would label this film as “radical” in the 1950s, a film that foregoes direct political commentary to make “moral” statements and is therefore neither right- nor left-wing in political orientation (48).

<sup>52</sup> These tropes are expressions of masculine anxiety about the “feminization” of American society, what Kimmel calls a discourse of “masculinism” that he describes thus: “This resistance to feminization, whether in the form of real women (mothers and wives) or against those cultural qualities of modernity that spell enervation and feminization (religion, education, workplace responsibilities, doing ‘brain work’) . . . involves an effort to restore manly vigor and revitalize American men by promoting separate homosocial preserves where men can be men without female interference. Some masculinist efforts involve the symbolic appropriation of women’s reproductive power, by developing distinctively masculine forms of ritual initiation and nurture—initiations that displaced maternal care with manly validation. (*MIA* 384)

presence he despises,<sup>53</sup> conveniently eliminating melanated skin from the future like in Pal's film.

Kimmel notes, in *Manhood in America*, that, since the beginning of the twentieth-century, the *initiation* into “manly validation” has been through instruction in “the successful mastery of a variety of props” (210). Michael learns the use of such props, such as a firearm and shovel, as will many of the characters I will examine in this study, especially in the third chapter. Models of manhood are defined by which props produce manly validation and maintain a fantasy of unfettered agency free from social restraint. In this narrative, the future cannot be born until the violent past ceases being reproduced, and the less “fit” men like the old man and his servant die, while it also valorizes a return to an agrarian artisanal masculinity more at home with producing vegetables than prose as well as a rejection and repudiation of the hypermasculine warrior model of the post-war American patriarchal hegemony. By depicting this competition between differing forms of masculinity, the film reveals that aggression is not an innate masculine trait, but one used to prop up a toxic and dangerous form of manhood that proves itself through dominance. Violent conquest is figured as monstrous, but violence is still shown to be necessary for survival, if only to defend against such dangerous men.

*Five* also presents an alternative to the traditional model of the nuclear family with the depiction of a woman who has previously been a mother and is definitely *not* a virgin bride but also not treated as if she is tainted by this fact of her life. Like Pal's film, it locates

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<sup>53</sup> The coding that reduces this man to a servant and victim indicates what Nama calls “a state of perpetual historical stasis for black representation on film” (11).

the future outside of urban industrial society with a move into a cultivated countryside. The city is already lost to these men and doomed to destruction, contaminated by radiation, and they nostalgically revert to a previously validated form of manhood with its established set of props like the shovel Michael holds in the closing shot of *Five*. However, as Amy Ransom points out, the future of “rugged white individualism” that Michael represents requires the help of Charles, the working-class black man whom “has practical knowledge of agriculture and machinery that will be necessary to the group’s survival, and he teaches Michael how to farm” (136). Thus, the black man also props up the white protagonist’s masculinity and serves as a prop for his drama.

*Five*’s narrative examines the need to reproduce the future of the human race, using the logic of reproductive futurism and revealing anxiety over what counts as the right *kind* of person; it imagines a crisis over the production of a postwar American subject and the reproduction of the social, a problematic topic smoothed over through elision in the selection process of survivors in *When Worlds Collide*. This concern over reproducing the proper national subject has not abated as indicated by the Tweet by Steve King mentioned in the introduction to this study. Others have recently called immigration an “existential” crisis. King’s comment about how “we” cannot reproduce “civilization” with “other people’s babies” raises many questions that are answered by the context of American history out of which it emerged. The “we” indicated refers to his imagination of the white heterosexual Christian males who have been the understood subjects of American democracy since its inception, and the discourse of “civilization” he uses requires an

“uncivilized,” racialized other for its meaning, indicating by implication who he means by “somebody *else*.”

With an understanding of America’s imagination of national community as the melodrama of a family in crisis that plays the race card, as Linda Williams documents, a nation at risk of producing wayward reproductions, the “family values” that Republicans like King espouse thus address a “crisis” of reproduction built into the fabric of American nationalism while also addressing a crisis of sexual freedom for women that threatens patriarchal control over the production of national subjects fueled by anxiety over the miscegenation that this freedom threatens to produce. This rhetoric places white men in control over reproduction, asserting their individual agency over the sexuality of women in order to police the borders of the national imaginary.<sup>54</sup>

Symptomatic of this concern with reproducing the correct national subjects, Roger Corman copied *Five* with *The Day the World Ended* (1955), increasing the number of survivors to seven and placing them in a California valley in the home of a survivalist (Paul Birch) who saw the end coming and prepared for it, the *sine qua non* of the individual masculine subject at odds with society, a man on his own like Thoreau, ready to prove his manhood through suffering and survival. As my reference to Williams above demonstrates, both *Five* and *Day the World Ended* require a domestic space for their melodramatic conflict, in keeping with the way that, as Ross puts it, “Cold War culture . . . was crucially organized around the interplay between what was foreign, and outside and what was

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<sup>54</sup> As Melley notes, using Gail Rubin and Susan Bordo, this practice also reduces women’s bodies to “docile” “products” and little more than “raw material” (125). Indeed many of the films I will canvass use women as the raw material to rebuild “civilization.”

domestic, and inside” (16).<sup>55</sup> In *Five*, this interplay is foregrounded by the discussion of whether to let in newly arriving survivors, especially a racially marked man. In Corman’s iteration of this scenario, the survivalist father figure at first does not want to let any other survivors into his domestic demesne. He wants to maintain a definite border between his domestic space and what lies beyond it. This film presents some revealing differences from its predecessor that indicate themes that Corman believed were in demand by his targeted younger and less-sophisticated audience that pander to racist fears of otherness associated with both the criminality of the city and racist imagining of black men as monstrous and hypersexual. Due to its appeal to a broader, more juvenile audience, this film is much more emblematic of the dominant fictions produced by suburbanization and white flight than *Five*, a “social problem” film targeting an educated urban audience. Importantly for the rest of this study, Corman’s film is also the first iteration of a post-apocalypse mise-en-scène that structures the conflict of the story around a white man who treats his home as a besieged domestic space in danger of being contaminated by the outside world.

Unlike *Five*, this film depicts two women, one a glamorous burlesque performer (Adele Jergens) who arrives with a gun-toting urban tough-guy (Touch Connors), a couple seemingly transplanted from a film noir, the other an innocent, blonde, and helpless daughter (Lori Nelson) of the survivalist homeowner. The expecting mother of the previous film is replaced by a virgin/whore dichotomy that positions the liberated woman as a wayward production of the crime and immorality represented by the city.

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<sup>55</sup> As Schatz notes, the settings of genre films are “a cultural milieu where inherent thematic conflicts are animated, intensified, and resolved by familiar characters and pattern of action” (“Film Genre” 568).

This version of the apocalypse conspicuously lacks the figure of a subordinate black man present in the previous film, thereby eliding the discussion of racial hierarchy that structures much of *Five* through the racist discourse of Erik, the Aryan fascist. Instead, Corman's narrative dwells on the competition between three different kinds of white masculinity, displacing, like in film noir, the threat of blackness and its invasion of the urban landscape with a competition between white men differentiated by social class, education, and age: the survivalist patriarch, Jim, with his mastery of guns and practical knowledge,<sup>56</sup> his rival, Tony, the young thug from the city with his entitlement to violence and need to dominate and own women (a cipher for inner-city crime and immorality often blamed on the presence of black culture),<sup>57</sup> and Rick (Richard Denning), the kinder, gentler, intellectual, geologist boyfriend of the daughter, Louise. This latter man cares for and nurtures Radek, a sick man suffering from radiation burns whom he brings to the safety of the house. Rick belongs to the postwar ascendant professional-managerial class, but with his interest in rocks he is still marked as "down to earth" and able to, as Michael did in *Five*, learn how to master the props of agrarian manhood. Radek feels emasculated by this care and craves the contaminated meat of animals outside; he follows this call to the wild and wanders off into irradiated areas to eat from the detritus of civilization, somehow immune to the radioactive vapors, ultimately being slain by a mutant creature (Paul Blaisdell) that stalks them all.

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<sup>56</sup> Foucault notes that "it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge; it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power" ("Prison Talk" 53).

<sup>57</sup> Massey and Denton argue that blaming African American "culture" for the problems of ghetto life holds the victims of structural racism responsible for their status "rather than the social arrangements that created" the ghetto culture and formed its opposition to middle-class white culture (169).

The men in this film express their power to dominate and control others with firearms, the central prop of their manhood, one so important to the imagination of American masculinity that I will analyze it in further depth in the third chapter of this study. As with *Five*, the film also features a very old man (Raymond Hatton) who serves as foolish comic relief and foil for the functional masculinity performed by the other men only to eventually die like the banker from the previous film.<sup>58</sup> The past must again make way for the future, and it does not require the wisdom of old age, criminality, greed for wealth, or martial prowess, but instead the right kind of couple to carry on with the work of rebuilding the American way of life again nostalgically imagined as agrarian. This future requires useful men willing to work for their survival, and it does not challenge the binary division of gendered labor so important for reproducing patriarchal power and its control over women's bodies as the raw material for reproducing national subjects.<sup>59</sup>

When the future of humanity is at stake, fertile women become a valuable commodity in a patriarchal economy. They serve the function of cementing the bonds between men through their exchange value. In keeping with the model of heterosexual homosocial relations outlined by Eve Sedgwick in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985), the virginal daughter in this film becomes an object over which the men compete for ownership as a way to demonstrate status over each other,

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<sup>58</sup> Curiously, this old man, rather than a banker, is a gold miner and dies attempting to work his claim, destroyed by his greed.

<sup>59</sup> Butler notes that, since "one is one's gender to the extent that one is not the other gender" (30), this "binary regulation of sexuality suppresses the subversive multiplicity of a sexuality that disrupts heterosexual, reproductive, and medicojuridical hegemonies" (26). The last man on Earth requires a last woman to define his dominant masculinity.



serving as a mediating term in the relationships between the men, maintaining the heterosexual organization of male relationships and establishing a hierarchy. The ownership of women in patriarchy proves the virility of the possessing men as another prop. Women, from mothers to wives, might “*confirm . . . masculinity, [but] it is other men who confer it*” (Buchbinder 35). When the virtuous Louise spurns the advances of Tony, he colludes with Ruby, the floozy from the city, to eliminate everyone else and lay claim to all of the resources, but she betrays him, and he kills her in a brutal scene that takes place outside of the home.<sup>60</sup> Later beaten by Rick in a fist fight, Tony rejects them all and becomes a figure of the white male victim, disenfranchised and alienated by a society that does not put his needs first. This community of men fails to confer his masculinity, so he must prove it in other ways.

In a scene staged in the home’s living room, the two contemplative men, the survivalist and geologist, speculate that, in this irradiated (or newly illuminated) world, “a whole new set of laws” applies, and the film gives this idea spectacular form in a large, furry, black mutant creature with many horns, large claws, and multiple eyes. The specialized training and mastery over knowledge that these men command fails them when they try to understand this threat brought on by the new state of the world, a circumstance indicating anxiety over inclusion of radical otherness as a threat to the privileged status of

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<sup>60</sup> Segal argues that “male sexual dominance derives from the way in which the general social power of men sustains the symbolism of phallic power through encouraging or controlling how women and men may relate to their bodies. . . . The possibility of men’s sexual coerciveness towards women has been socially tolerated, often, indeed, both expected and encouraged” (216).

white men. Through this figure, the film becomes a racially-coded melodrama.<sup>61</sup> In a gesture replete with the threat of miscegenation implicit in the color-coded monstrosity of this creature, the patriarch decrees that the women need to be impregnated as soon as possible, thereby asserting his control over women as mastery over reproduction in order to combat the wayward reproductions caused by radiation, this uncontrollable monstrous threat from the outside. I read this radiation, as I indicated above parenthetically, as an illumination that reveals the knowledge of shifting social paradigms such as the anti-racist practice of inter-racial marriage, the historical nightmare this film attempts to rewrite. The older men subsequently become exposed to radiation and contaminated, the crusty prospector dying immediately while the survivalist patriarch holds on long enough to shoot Tony in the back when he threatens Rick as his final choice over who is fit for the future, leaving the monster outside as the only threat to the race/reproduction bind and reproductive futurism.<sup>62</sup>

This horny mutant, distinctly black, toxic, and unclean, “lives on contaminated flesh,” which would mean that it would not eat any of the uncontaminated humans and therefore poses no threat to their *lives*, but instead threatens the idea of a pure white future by the possibility of racial mixing. People are often differentiated culturally by what they eat, and often in speculative narratives the human requires the not quite human for its

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<sup>61</sup> I am using this term in the same way that Linda Williams does, indicating a “neither archaic nor excessive but a perpetually modernizing form that can neither be clearly opposed to the norms of the ‘classical’ nor to the norms of realism” (12).

<sup>62</sup> “Nothing is more sensational in American cinema than the infinite varieties of rescues, accidents, chases, and fights. . . . This realism of action should not fool us into thinking that the dominant mode of such films is realism. Nor should the virility of action itself fool us into thinking that it is not melodrama” (L. Williams 21).

definition so that this creature's monstrosity is reinforced by reference to its diet (Wolmark 78). Indeed, food also often demarcates racial and class distinctions, and the food eaten by marginalized classes is often denigrated as if it is toxic or in bad taste. Following the melodramatic American script of white womanhood threatened by black male sexuality, this monster coded as black man, or black man coded as monster, has a telepathic link with the daughter, and he "calls to her," absconding to the forest.<sup>63</sup> Although she seems to be hypnotized as the camera watches her somnambolistically wander out of the house and seems to follow the monster against her will, the film leaves open the possibility that she wants to be with this other, that in fact she is fleeing the racist patriarchy of the white men.

The racialization of this monstrous figure as an expression of the fear of miscegenation produces the horror of this situation for those invested in whiteness. Predicting the theme of *The Searchers* (1956, John Ford), released the next year, we watch Jim on his death bed in a medium shot over Rick's shoulder tell the younger man, that if it comes to it, he should kill *her* with his rifle rather than leave her to a fate worse than death at the hands of this terrible beast. In this sequence, Louise, wears a spotless white nightgown, signifying the racial melodrama of the situation and her virginal status. Rick pursues them into the forest, and, when a sudden rainfall kills the creature, Louise expresses confusion not only about how she came to be in the forest, but she also finds it strange that she feels sorry for the dead creature, puzzled by her white guilt for the death of this black

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<sup>63</sup> Linda Williams analyzes this trope, observing that race relations in America are imagined as melodrama, with white supremacy figuring the "race problem" as a threat to white women and anti-racists using the figure of suffering innocent black men, both scenarios meant to engage affective response from a white audience.

monster who did not hurt her and with whom she shared a strange telepathic bond. We are told that it was created by a “poisoned world,” and its demise due to the cleansing “purity” of the rain. This rhetoric uses the purity condition inherent in the racialization of whiteness as a universal standard that differentiates white people from racialized others while also positioning them as uncontaminated by the particular subordinate status of such definitions of otherness. The logic of this concept of purity produces this anxiety about contamination and the production of wayward subjects. Indeed, the notion of ideological purity motivated the Red Scare that dominated much of this decade, another articulation of anxiety about America overrun by wayward subjects intent on subverting the purity of democracy.

With this figurative racial cleansing accomplished, like its predecessor, this post-apocalyptic narrative ends with a white couple going “back to nature” and living a simple life, and Rick becomes the model of a white man in America “free in a free country, embodying republican virtue and autonomy” (Kimmel *MiA* 151). According to the apocalyptic thinking of these 1950s films, an intellectual man from the professional class must learn working-class values in order to survive in a radically transformed world; he must learn how to protect a woman from other toxic” masculinities, and the epistemic privilege of older patriarchs becomes obsolete, and the older generation must give way for the next to prosper. Furthermore, *The Day the World Ended* imagines the threat of contamination by racialized others through miscegenation as well as the fear that white men living new suburban professional lives might be too weak to reproduce the vigorous national subject required by a threatening future. Working-class masculinity, as we shall see in greater detail later, is figured as both threatening in its savage physicality through

the figure of Tony, played by a child of Armenian immigrants originally named Krekor Ohanian who was renamed as an actor by a film producer as “Touch Connors” who subsequently went by Mike Connors and rose to fame in the 1960s as the hard-boiled private detective Joe Mannix in *Mannix* (1967-1975) whose physical masculinity was a large part of his success, and also a more realistic proof of the fantasy of masculine dominance than the economic breadwinner masculinity of the professional man. These films suggest that men must change the props that prove their manhood from pens and swords to plowshares and shovels, but only after using the sword to stake a claim and define a peaceful private paradise, a homogenous home where virtue can be protected and reproduced.

The trend of post-apocalyptic films continued the next year with *World Without End* (1956, Edward Bernds), but before examining that film, which takes the genre in a new direction, I want to look momentarily at another SF from 1956 that combines a sense of the end of the world, at least as the protagonist (Kevin McCarthy) knows it, with the alienation of a professional white man. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Don Siegel), largely considered a metaphor for Cold War paranoia about communist indoctrination, can equally be seen as an allegory of postwar, white, military masculinity acting out against a society that expects it to conform to pacification (figured as a “feminizing” of the man) and lose its lauded individual autonomous agency.<sup>64</sup> It features a lone man fighting to “stay

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<sup>64</sup> Biskind observes that the anti-communist theme of many fifties film, especially those in the SF genre, is used as a “smokescreen” for polemic messages about domestic politics, “allowing the center to attack extremists, extremists to attack the center, and both centrists and extremists to quarrel amongst themselves” (111). An allegory of communism allowed for such covert political commentary about “Main Street.”

human” (thus a “real” man with the agential power that status grants him), threatened by an *incomprehensible* enemy imbedded within American society. Even though he is a medical doctor, he cannot diagnose the problem plaguing his small community, which seems to be psychological and ideological, and he fails to master the malady. He is labelled “hysterical,” indicating the feminizing of his subject position as he loses mastery over his world and becomes a passive victim of identity crisis; what is called his paranoid delusion becomes an uncanny reality while the people around him, including his fiancé, are replaced by duplicate “pod-people,” mindless drones with a collective mind and no personal agency. Significantly, all of this happens right after he becomes engaged to be married, to be tied to a domestic existence. Due to his ability to see what others cannot, this professional, heterosexual white man no longer fits anywhere in a society that has transformed radically around him almost invisibly because he will not abdicate his autonomy and become a “company man” or the iconic “man in a gray flannel suit,” represented in this film as becoming one of the “pod people” who all think with one mind.<sup>65</sup> Instead, he ends the film raging to a society that ignores him as we watch from a crane shot as he runs out into traffic on a highway trying to alert people to the danger by banging on their vehicles and shouting like a mad man.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> As Melley contends, this “agency panic may be understood as variation of Cartesian materialism: it cannot dispense with the notion of *centralized* control. Thus, in response to evidence that human behavior is not controlled entirely from within, it simply transfers the site of control to an external, ‘social’ headquarters” (156). In this case, an alien invasion.

<sup>66</sup> I am referring to the original ending which Siegel was forced to change by producers into one where federal authorities begin an investigation at the end of the film, suggesting a hopeful, happy end.

I bring this film into this analysis because the texts that I will discuss that were released in the 1970s largely take this theme of the last “man” on Earth and place him in a setting where nuclear war or other catastrophe has ended life as we know it. As above with *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, these scenarios are articulations of agency panic informed by a “masculinist view of selfhood—which dreads any ‘penetration’ of the self by a ‘domesticating’ social order” (Melley 152).<sup>67</sup> The imagining of apocalyptic masculinity, through the removal of society by cataclysm, frees men once more prove their manhood. These hysterical white men, often solving problems through violence, also serve as instructive figures for understanding the phenomenon of the “angry white man” in American society, a rage which, as noted by Kimmel, is driven by a *perception* of “dispossession” of entitlements and a lack of power over their lives (*AWM* 9). The figure of apocalyptic masculinity has been dispossessed of virtually everything that designates hegemonic manhood and violently protects what little possessions he has left, especially his individuality. The loss of this supposed privileged autonomy is depicted often in films through a form of disenfranchisement that unmans the protagonist in a significant way, often by taking away the props that determine and hail his masculine status.

Heteronormative gendered subject positions are often and easily conflated with sexuality in an attempt to reify the culturally-produced binary opposition of genders, and figures of a kinder, gentler manhood are often conflated with an emasculated “effeminate”

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<sup>67</sup> Melley reads the polemics of 1950s sociologists like David Riesman as expressions of agency panic that find the new social world of corporate work and suburban living as deindividualizing (48). Hence corporate and government bureaucracies become agential figures of centralized control taking away the agency of men.

homosexuality, a homophobic response that results in hypermasculine posturing as proof of sexual orientation and proper manhood (Kimmel *MiA* 366). The endings of *Five and Day the World Ended*, with the ascendance of a professional, intellectual, and nurturing man, work against this kind of masculinist discourse, but this man only becomes ascendant when he becomes aggressively protective of a woman and learns how to use weapons and work with his hands, proving his usefulness and how he is fit for the future by providing protection and food. This problematic and ambivalent binary opposition between a dominant and “weak” masculinity becomes emphasized to the point of parodic humor in *World Without End*. In this film, the “weaker,” comfortable, intellectual men of the future are depicted as a problem for society and a degenerate condition of manhood. A spectacular color film about four astronauts accidentally hurtled through time (featuring Hugh Marlowe and Rod Taylor), a trope copied from the Buck Rogers serial that *Planet of the Apes* (1968, Franklin J. Schaffner) also uses, the plot of the film is so like H.G. Wells’s *The Time Machine* (1895) that the producers were sued by the Wells estate for plagiarism. Interestingly, however, it reverses the dichotomy of evolved human species from Wells’s narrative; up is down and down is up, and the surface is controlled by huge mutant men with a single eye depicted as violent savages without reason or tools more complicated than clubs. These primitivist hypermasculine men dominate the world.

The utopian community in this narrative lives underground in technological comfort, which causes their downfall. Viewed through the lens of class conflict, like in Wells’s story, the brawn of working-class men is depicted as dangerous when not employed and constrained by a social order, figured as monstrous and too physical. The



ease and sloth enabled by technology is then rendered a force of pacification and “feminization” to the point of utter passivity and victimhood, taking away the individual agency of these future men and making them ineffectual. As with the films already canvassed, this narrative stages competition between different models of masculinity to determine the hegemonic form of manhood in the future and does so in terms of race and class and the props used in the masculine masquerade.

The men from the past learn that this underground society is dying; fewer children are born with each generation, and they are weak and enervated. The film positions the protagonist American airmen from the past as healthier and more useful than the smaller, effete, intellectual men who ostensibly run this society but cannot control their women, ultimately leading a revolt of the women to take back the surface from the giant mutants. In keeping with the rhetoric of American superiority so necessary to the Cold War, these alpha males also best the cyclopean brutes who dominate the surface world regardless of the physical superiority of the mutants. The racialized depiction of these barbaric others bears kinship with the “African Americanism” theorized by Toni Morrison, a myth which posits black men as overtly physical brutes so that white men can measure their “rationality” as naturally superior, making it logical that white men would need to control such physicality through violent containment. Thus does whiteness gain significance as opposed to its necessary racialized subordinate as always already both threatened by and in control of the brute force of others.

In the film’s climax, the astronauts’ leader, Borden, played by Hugh Marlowe, a popular character actor in the 1950s, challenges the leader of the cyclops mutants to single

combat as a test of his masculinity against his larger opponent, like David challenging Goliath in the Biblical story, commenting to his men that, even though the mutant's physicality may surpass his, *he* has superior "civilization." The concept of civilization requires an uncivilized other for definition; it produces the concept of primitive to define its superiority and to excuse its own violence and barbarity against such others. Defeating these not-quite human men, the astronauts win the love of the leggy pin-up models who portray the women and the human surface dwellers who were enslaved by the giants, and they live in harmony with their underground brethren, reclaiming the surface world and becoming an agrarian society.<sup>68</sup> Kimmel notes that hegemonic masculinity is not a possession of individual male subjects, but rather "an enactment among heterosexual men, and . . . homophobic fears of effeminacy ensure its heterosexuality" (*MiA* 366). The problem with the men of the future who refuse to leave the underground, according to the "can-do" Americans, lies in their effeminacy and lack of "guts, the courage to get out of their holes and fight!"<sup>69</sup> This celebration of military masculinity in the middle of the decade of the 1950s is as much a way of covering over the stalemate of the Korean War as

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<sup>68</sup> The characters in this future society are dressed by Alberto Vargas, and he was also production designer for the film, lending it the look of his artwork which foregrounds the spectacle of female sexuality in often exotic settings. Melley defines this as a "spectator function" in gender relations that "is ubiquitous and 'absolutely discrete'" which structures power dynamics so that every woman becomes a potential victim and every man a possible voyeuristic predator (116).

<sup>69</sup> Cohan, using Sedgwick's theories of homosocial dynamics, notes that it "has as much to do with power (*over* women as well as other men) as it does with desire (*for* other men as well as women), which is why it so readily takes the form of one man's domination of another, emphasizing independence, competition, and aggression as the hallmark features of virility, and usually going even further to manifest fear of alternate male behavior" (84). This film exemplifies all of these traits in the homosocial group of astronauts from the past.

posturing against Communism and Russia. The women are attracted to these men from the past with their big muscles because of the implied virility of their bodies, especially Ellis, played by Rod Taylor, a leading man throughout the 1960s, and they aid the men in their revolt against the lesser men.<sup>70</sup>

The film affirms the heterosexual desire of these men for the nubile women to cover over any concern that their homosocial and homoerotic interactions between them, often while shirtless, might indicate that they are more interested in the company of men.<sup>71</sup> The women in the film serve the function of sex objects for these virile men and, wearing low-cut tops and mini-skirts that display a great deal of naked flesh, the audience is encouraged to identify with the men in this objectification. As Tasker observes of the action film narrative, women become marginalized due to both the agency of the male figures and the fact that the men become visual spectacles as well, ones often more erotic than the women (16). This spectacularity threatens to make men into mere ornaments, so they must further emphasize their usefulness, usually by solving problems with violence.<sup>72</sup> The film, perhaps as a reaction to the ascendancy of a newer “Playboy” masculinity in America more

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<sup>70</sup> This formula was rehashed by Ib Melchior in 1964 with *The Time Travelers*, including the use of Vargas.

<sup>71</sup> Tasker elaborates: “Images of women seem to need to compensate for the figure of the active heroine by emphasizing her sexuality, her availability within traditional feminine terms” (19). Thus the women may be active in the plot, but only so that they can be sexually available to these “better” men from the future. She also observes that action movies are traditionally *male* spaces where problems with masculine status are “worked out over the male body” (17).

<sup>72</sup> This sentiment is noted by Faludi, and she argues that much of the acting out by the men she interviews in her book comes from a sense that they are no longer useful and have nothing left to contribute to society. In her analysis, our postmodern “image culture” leaves these men with “a caricature of a patriarchal image that may have come . . . largely from old movies in the first place. The guns were the props in what was essentially a performance of masculinity” (444). She thus recognizes that hegemonic masculinity needs its props in order to prove its usefulness and prop up the status of men.

interested in the comforts provided by leisure commodities and proving manhood through sexual conquest, depicts such men as weak and dangerous to the continuance of a healthy and vigorous society.

*World Without End* was released on a double bill with *The Indestructible Man* (1956, Jack Pollexfen), a crime thriller mixed with the Frankenstein story where an executed murderer (Max Showalter) is brought back from the dead by a scientist (Lon Chaney Jr.), resulting in his becoming nearly invincible. It takes flame throwers and the National Guard to put a stop to his subsequent rampage, brought on by his sense of being wronged and dispossessed. Kimmel calls this “aggrieved entitlement,” which stems from a “sense that those benefits to which you believed yourself entitled have been snatched away from you by unseen forces larger and more powerful” (*AWM* 18).<sup>73</sup> This B movie horror film acts as a cautionary tale, what Fred Pfeil calls “a warning sign reminding us that if, as activists and theorists, we find ourselves uninterested in the task of seeking to manage, mine, and redefine that white-straight-working-man sign, other groups and forces will certainly be more than willing to shoulder the task for us, and in ways we are unlikely to approve” (33). This figure of a hyperviolent, angry, white man reappears in films to this day, as well as his real-world analogue, the “mass shooter.” This rather obvious film positions the viewer oppositionally towards such a figure through its figuration of his monstrosity, but this changes in the decade of the 1970s when the figure of a rampaging

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<sup>73</sup> This sentiment is akin to the agency panic theorized by Melley if one considers agency an entitlement.

angry white man becomes the antihero protagonist of the narrative rather than horrific monster, a man with whom the audience is encouraged to identify, if problematically.

The men in *World Without End* are at first disenfranchised and emasculated by the older, effete patriarchy in power underground by having their guns locked away, limiting the extent of their dominance and taking away the props of their manhood. Not only, like in the previous films canvassed, do these men dominate by use of firearms, they take this imagery to its limit by manufacturing a rocket launcher for use against their giant mutant foes, demonstrating who has the bigger “weapon.” Their foes are limited to stone-age technology, lacking the superior “civilization” of the Americans. To this day, American military technology is figured in populist rhetoric as more advanced than any of its foes with the addition of casting these weapons as “smarter” as well as bigger. As I have been tracing, such popular action films operate as sites articulating ideological struggle, revealing the cultural production of race, gender, class, and sexuality while attempting to reify the hegemonic status of dominant subject positions. Additionally, genre films borrow the tropes of previous iterations, becoming intertextual palimpsests that complicate and trouble the hegemonic fictions they use to structure their stories. *World Without End*, as in Corman’s film and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, in depicting normative humanity and a model of a “real man,” requires the not-quite-human, unmanned, and monstrous to position this norm against and prove its valiant superiority. Following American Africanism’s positioning of slaves as brute animals and the colonial gaze that informs this marking of subordinate bodies, the iteration of racialized others in this film is imagined as bigger and faster, more “naturally” physical and superior to the white men, but they are defeated by

the military technology of “civilization.”<sup>74</sup> This newly civilized space then reproduces the hegemonic heterosexuality that patriarchy requires for dominance. Two of the central protagonists from the past are fathers who have lost their wives and children to the past, and the new world gives them a new family to head and a new frontier to conquer, certifying their manhood; as in the political rhetoric of the Cold War, patriarchy asserts itself as a doctrine of peace through strength. The film does not imagine a new communal structure for this society, but, as in the other films that I have examined, it depicts a return to a nostalgic agrarian past and the hegemony of the heroic artisan. With the threat removed, we can assume that the men will put away their arms and now prove their virility through fatherhood and the cultivation of land. The crisis of reproduction for this future society is solved, and American servicemen become fathers of a new virile future while civilization is equated with military hardware and training, leaving the women as technologies of reproduction and props for masculine virility as sexualized objects of the gaze.

These films demonstrate an anxiety and ambivalence about the role of white men in a drastically altered postwar world, indicating a lack of certainty and a crisis of identity. They position white masculinity as more civilized and moral than racialized others while also demonstrating the danger of violent white men who feel like society has taken something away from them. The spectacular figuration of this crisis reveals the ways in which white male dominance over society is produced by violence and fictions of purity

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<sup>74</sup> As Walter Benjamin notes in many of his essays, every document of civilization is always already a document of barbarism. Western civilization is dominant not because of some innate property like “reason,” but simply because of technological superiority.

and not innate superiority. Imagining crisis via reproduction and the threat of either miscegenation or the decline of a “fit” population, they imagine women as the necessary technology for reproducing the “correct” national subject who fits this new world. The “world” in many of their titles indicates both the banal nationalism defined above in the introduction to this study, a flagging of American nationality as a world system, and also a worldview, or episteme, coming to an end, and the older men, whose mastering gazes fail to prevent or sometimes even diagnose the crisis, are rendered obsolete and disposed of in various ways. In order for there to be a future, these films argue that the older generation must step aside and hand the reigns of civilization to younger men. The new world has new rules, and the older episteme is no longer valuable or at all useful, but the new episteme requires a realignment of class values and invigorating manual labor.

These narratives present a threat to a private space from outside, and the men in the films solve their problems and protect their private properties through the use of firearms. In later films like *World without End*, the male body becomes a visible site of both erotic and violent potential, a way to ensure entitlement and a desired subject position. The intellectual masculinity of the professional-managerial class in these narratives must learn working-class physicality in order to prove its usefulness to the future, but what happens to the idea of civilization without intellectuals? These tropes will be central to the following analyses of post-apocalyptic films of the 1970s as the privileges of straight white manhood, challenged in the culture at large, are depicted under siege, but before moving on to these texts I need to examine their use in an important film that depicts another lone

man surviving atomic death living in New York City who ultimately struggles with another man for the last remaining woman.

**Post-Apocalyptic Temptations of the Last Man on Earth: *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil* (1959, Ronald MacDougall)**

*The World, the Flesh, and the Devil tackles two of America's most visceral social fears in one film. The cold war paranoia about radioactive contamination is combined with a fear of racial contamination. (Nama 44)*

*If there was no fictional black and white melodramas with anything like the galvanizing appeal of the civil rights movement, that is because this struggle was itself a galvanizing racial melodrama beside which mere fiction seemed to pale. (L. Williams 220)*

*The elaborated nature of our society means that racism is never exerted or experienced autonomously, but is always interwoven with other axes of power. . . . If racism can be recoded into discourses that are not explicitly concerned with race, it can be spoken silently . . . invisibly. (Fiske Media Matters 37)*

The decade of the 1950s ended with the release of what the promotional material for the film called “The Most Shocking Film of All Time!” Since the post-apocalyptic film genre was already established at this point, the advertisers predicted shock because, in this take on the genre, the last man on Earth is not white, threatening the idea of an all-white future presented in the previous films. Fiske argues that “black ‘otherness’ is so necessary to white America’s sense of its own nationhood that the racism inherent in it has become a permanent and ineradicable part of the American way of life” (*Media Matters* 157). The ascendance of this racialized man to being the “last man” comes at the cost of social collapse, and the film predicts the abysmal social, racial, and political landscape of the decades that follow.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> It prefigures much of the melodrama that will follow: “Increasingly . . . it is within the irrational, fantasmic, and paranoid realm of the melodramatic ‘text of muteness’ that race takes on a heightened



Urban space in the mid-twentieth century was racially contested space.<sup>76</sup> This conflict between a working-class migration of melanated people and a white urban population of working-class and upwardly-mobile members of the professional/managerial class informed the seedy paranoia and the darkness of the film noir cycle of films wherein the city becomes a dangerous “concrete jungle.”<sup>77</sup> Peter Biskind remarks on the plethora of urban “jungles” in 1950s films, calling it “a favorite epithet for the world outside society, as well as for the pockets of primitivism that lingered on within society” (106-107).<sup>78</sup> The application of a jungle metaphor onto urban space evinces anxiety over the presence of black and brown bodies and their supposed animal brutality and arboreal origins. As Fiske writes, “whiteness . . . is not an essential racial category that contains a set of fixed meanings, but a strategic deployment of power. It comprises the construction and occupation of a centralized space from which to view the world” (*Media Matters* 42).

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mode of expressivity as a dialectic of feelings—of sympathy and antipathy—that dare not speak its name. The mere appearance of the black male body on the film or television screen, for example, creates a heightened expectation for the expression of extreme good or extreme evil. This expectation exists at the level of the mute signs of bodily expression, gesture, and demeanor. All the expressive means of melodrama are brought to bear upon the hyperexpressive body of the black man, in melodramatic configuration with the body of the white woman, and the white man.” (L. Williams 300)

<sup>76</sup> Fiske, in *Media Matters*, notes that “blackness (and non-blackness) is as much a matter of social alliances as it is a visible identifier of racial identity. As a signifier, skin color indicates simultaneously genetic identity, racial history, and political-position, and it is this last that gives the first two meaning” (160).

<sup>77</sup> This figuration of the city was not new and operated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the first mass migration to cities. Walter Benjamin, in “Convolute L” of his *Arcades Project*, quotes Hugo in this regard: “Cities, like forests, have their dens in which all their vilest and most terrible monsters hide” ([L5,4] 415).

<sup>78</sup> The list includes *Blackboard Jungle* (1950, Richard Brooks), *Juvenile Jungle* (1958, William Whitney), *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950, John Huston), *The Garment Jungle* (1957, Vincent Sherman), and the “chromium jungle” in *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1956, Nunnally Johnson), as well as the descriptor for the general milieu in which Mike Hammer operated (Biskind 107).

Thomas Sugrue, in *Origins of the Urban Crisis* (1996), notes that this crisis was not only blamed on the African American population as a contaminating presence, but it also pathologized this population in primitivist ways using a logic that presaged the rise of neoliberalism in the 1970s in which the culture and family structure of these people was asserted as the reason for poverty and crime: “To solve the problem of unemployment meant behavior modification” and not a readjustment of the racial privilege accorded white people in the urban economy (156). A political problem was thereby transformed into a personal problem.

In an article examining the phenomenon of “white flight,” Eric Avila explains how this process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization produced a series of urban science fiction films often only considered to reflect Cold War paranoia but which also evinced the anxieties of urban migration. Instead, he argues that these films about invasion depict the transition of urban spaces from the mostly-white industrial nineteenth century into the multicultural postindustrial metropolis, resulting in “racial polarization of the city between its dark core and white suburbs” (Avila 89).<sup>79</sup> During the period between 1945 and 1960, New York saw its black population more than double. Coming at the end of this period of migration, *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil* presents the curious case of New York imagined as being invaded by a black man who basically owns the whole city, but only

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<sup>79</sup> During this time, “‘invasion’ became a key metaphor, central to understanding larger social processes in postwar America, including the urbanization of African-Americans” (Avila 89). We must be mindful of using such color designations. This color coding acts as an ontological double-bind since, “as socially categorizing, race shorthands itself as color, while color makes itself a proxy for racialization. Though the mainstream understanding of race is that it is already color, and vice versa, this is insufficient. If race is a social categorization, it cannot be understood as a bodily characteristic; it can only be what is signified by bodily characteristics. . . . The difference between bodies and social categories must be kept in mind” (Martinot 226).

because it has been emptied of everyone else, altering its social value and highlighting the alienation of this man from the imagined community of American social life.

The film figures enclosed spaces as the private realm of this engineer, while the wide open and empty spaces of the city dwarfing his figure in long shots emphasize the missing people in these once public spaces while foregrounding the presence of this black man as last representative of humanity. Without people, the categories of public and private no longer apply, and the film uses this speculative *mise-en-scène* to critique racial segregation in public urban space. The trailer that comes with the DVD of the film emphasizes this sense of emptiness in its montage of these shots while calling this “the most unusual picture ever filmed” and “the most daring idea attempted in motion pictures.” Nowhere in the trailer does it indicate that Harry Belafonte will be the central character motivating the plot and that *this* is the daring idea to which the trailer alludes, almost as if the distributors of the film were too timid to hint at why the film is so “unusual.” The truly daring thing the film does is to make Belafonte’s character, Ralph, not only an articulate, autonomous, motivated professional, in keeping with the hegemonic model of 1950s white masculinity, but more importantly a civilizing presence in the film, as his actions demarcate the divide between civilization and brutality. By subverting the stereotype of black masculinity as brutish and animalistic, instead portraying him as a kind, gentle, caring, and non-violent person, the film attempts to counteract America’s history of racial mythology while also resisting the melodrama of racial relations analyzed by Linda Williams that imagines racism in the terms of either the abolitionist figure of a sympathetic black man

suffering from oppression or the white supremacist image of a white virginal woman menaced by a lusty black man.<sup>80</sup> The film attempts to rewrite this melodramatic script.<sup>81</sup>

As in the films I have analyzed already, the film is structured by a discourse of fitness, and it is necessary to remark on the polysemous meaning of this term. It uses a logic of worth that is linked to one of health and vigor, and these meanings are entwined in its other designation; to “fit” is to be assimilated, to fit into a social body and to add to that body’s fitness. Hence, the discourse of racial contamination operates as a danger to this notion of fitness as both indication of sickness and otherness. In this logic, the racialized other is regarded as abject and not fit for the body politic. This rhetoric of fitness also subtends the crisis of masculinity that I have been tracing, delimiting what kind of men fit in the community of manhood which is intimately linked to racial coding in America. A black man starring in a Hollywood film was still new to American audiences in 1959.<sup>82</sup> Belafonte, already an established entertainer accepted by white audiences and therefore a safe choice, is given top billing in the credit sequence as a sweeping Miklos

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<sup>80</sup> Linda Williams argues that “melodrama has proven key to understanding the ways in which American mass culture ‘talks to itself’ about the relations between race and gender. It is through the Manichean logic of good and evil and of victim and villain that melodrama recognizes virtue, expresses the inexpressible, and reconciles the irreconcilables of American culture” (299).

<sup>81</sup> As the Civil Rights movement played out over the next five years, this melodramatic schema would be reproduced on the nightly news as, “for the first time in American history, [blacks] became the ‘authors’ of black and white melodrama by self-consciously orchestrating the spectacle of their victimization at the hands of white supremacist authority. . . . It was also the moment when the melodrama of black and white moved from the domain of fictional text to historical events” (L. Williams 298).

<sup>82</sup> This was especially true of genre film. Sidney Poitier had begun to portray the lead in social realist films, but his and Belafonte’s stardom would rise in the next decade along with the crisis of civil rights.

Rosza score establishes the melodramatic epic scope of the narrative with a blaring brass section.<sup>83</sup>

The first shot shows Ralph in the confined space of a coal mine, and this black on black photography emphasizes his status in American society, linking him visually to the coal, the main resource and generator of the industrial revolution, alluding to the role that black people played as resource and property that fueled American capitalism, even though coal mining itself was a job reserved for white immigrants. He is immediately established as a master of this space when his expert gaze diagnoses a leak in the mine. Two things are indicated here about his social position as a black man: the fact that he is a highly-skilled employee, but is also assigned a hazardous task,<sup>84</sup> and the fact that he is confined to, and trapped in, this position with little hope of rising to a better one.<sup>85</sup> But then the mine collapses, and he is trapped alone and seemingly forgotten by society, a position against which he rages, shouting at an outside world that cannot hear him. He survives this ordeal due to both his training as an engineer and his steadfast resolution and pulls himself out of

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<sup>83</sup> L. Williams explains that “melodrama is organized around a paradoxical quest for a full articulation of truth and virtue at precisely those junctures where truth and virtue are most vexed. It operates, as Peter Brooks notes, in the register of the special eloquence of the ‘text of muteness’—in metaphor, picture, and gesture” (300). It attempts to “articulate a virtue that lies beyond the power of words” (300). This is why music is so intrinsic to the idea, embedded within the word itself.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas Sugrue observes that black laborers, if they could break the color line and get a good job in urban industry, were often then assigned to “the least desirable jobs, disproportionately in unskilled and semiskilled sectors, usually in the dirtiest and most dangerous parts of the plant” (99).

<sup>85</sup> Sugrue notes that black men were usually the last hired and the first to be laid off, resulting in their inability to gain seniority, which would protect them from such status (104).

the wreckage in a sequence of claustrophobic, dark scenes in which he jokes about this predicament of being buried alive. He refuses to give in to the weight of the world.

His emergence into daylight evokes a sense of liberation that cannot be disentangled from his status as a black man in America. It performs his emergence into America's national imaginary and history, a becoming visible as a social subject. He is not only a survivor, but has proven himself useful. The camera follows him in medium and long shots, emphasizing his presence in a space empty of human bodies but filled with the detritus of twentieth-century consumer culture as well as his confusion about the circumstances of this cataclysm. Finding a Geiger counter and a pistol, he uses the former as a register of invisible radioactive danger and only uses the gun to make noise in his search for other survivors, like a flare gun. For him it is a communication device, not a weapon, but this remains one of the most "shocking" sequences in the film because it depicts a black man discharging a firearm in the public spaces of New York City without repercussion.<sup>86</sup> Acquiring a huge luxury town car, he makes his way east to New York; fuel and supplies are in plentiful supply along the way. During this sequence, the film shows us no corpses, and this only reinforces a reading of this as not only a figuration of what white flight looks like for a racialized American subject, but also the desolate landscape of race relations and the apocalyptic thinking that would shape the coming

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<sup>86</sup> Considering how often unarmed black men are shot by police officers in contemporary America, this scene demonstrates that, even when a black man is holding a gun, it does not necessarily make him a danger to others and that such reasoning, called "racial profiling," is just the ideological racializing of black men that interpellates them as dangerous criminals. I owe this line of reasoning to suggestions made by Josh Pearson from class conversations he has had screening the film.

decades.<sup>87</sup> The people are not so much dead as just gone, and he is left to fend for himself with no help from society.<sup>88</sup>

With the bridges to the island city clogged with vehicles, a remarkable shot that emphasizes the stagnant, vacant state of the world, he takes a boat to Manhattan, and we watch him walk down avenues in extreme long overhead shots that demonstrate his miniscule presence in the canyons of buildings. This adds to the sense of alienation as he shouts, "I'm alive!" to the echoing dead monuments of modernity. Intercut with his search for others are close shots of several lion statues that populate the city posed in mid-roar, such as those at the public library. Their mute wails duplicate the futility of Ralph's cries. As he wanders into a church and breaks down into tears, the audience is invited to identify with him in his solitude and grief.

The film reminds its audience of its responsibility as spectators when he pauses in the street and shouts in frustration, "I know you're there! I can feel you all staring at me!" He delivers these line directly to the camera. The audience is forced to confront their fascination with the plight of a suffering black man, this established trope of racial melodrama, while also embracing his humanity and vulnerability, and this scene attempts

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<sup>87</sup> When, in a later scene, Ralph listens to the last radio broadcast, one of the voices states that it is too late, there is nowhere to which one may escape, and if we read this as a comment on the invasion of blackness into the city, it indicates the flaw of white flight into the suburbs and perhaps alludes to the logic of mass incarceration that followed this process as a form of urban vaccination. If escape is no option, containment of the invading contagion is the only other answer.

<sup>88</sup> Sugrue responds to sociologists who wrote about the urban crisis of the 1960s as being ahistorical in their analysis. "Although they correctly emphasize the importance of white discontent as a national political force, [they] err in their over-emphasis on the role of the Great Society and the sixties rebellions in the rise of the 'silent majority.' To view the defection of whites from Democratic ranks simply as a reaction to the War on Poverty, Civil Rights, and Black Power movements ignores racial cleavages that shaped local politics in the north well before the tumult of the 1960s" (267).

to elicit sympathy from the audience while also making it complicit in his plight by acknowledging its mute presence, alluding to the necessity of an audience for this suffering to have any meaning at all. Counteracting racial stereotypes of black men and alluding to his middle-class civility, when he camps out in the middle of the road, he disposes of his garbage in a trash receptacle, regardless of the lack of civic code ensuring this and in contradistinction to the racial stereotype of urban ghettos as dirty places because the denizens do not care about their surroundings (the dirtiness being more a result of a lack of city services).

Ralph cannot simply discard the role that he has been assigned in America as a black man, regardless of how his new freedom allows him to inhabit parts of the city previously inaccessible due to urban segregation.<sup>89</sup> Sugrue reminds us that

the ‘ghetto’ was not simply a physical construct; it was also an ideological construct. Urban space became a metaphor for perceived racial difference. Whites created a cognitive map of the city based on racial classifications and made their decisions about residence and their community action in accordance with their vision of the racial geography of the city. (229)

I would add to this that, as a tactic of survival, the racialized subjects of urban spaces also learned this cognitive map, and it is just such a map that Ralph has difficulty discarding in this film.

Later, feeling lonely, he brings a couple of mannequins home to keep him company and pretends to have a relationship with them as a model white couple, posing them about

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<sup>89</sup> This is an instance of Bourdieu’s *habitus*, succinctly described by Billig: “patterns of social life become habitual or routine, and in so doing embody the past. One might describe this process of routine-formation as *enhabitation*: thoughts, reactions, and symbols become turned into routine habits” (42, italics his). This is also a good model of how gender performance becomes routine, habitual, naturalized practice; our bodies are inhabited and through this we inhabit a gender role. Nationalism and racialization, as I have argued above, are imbricated in this *enhabitation*.



the apartment and treating them like people by conversing in a jocular satire of small-talk. He gives the male-shaped one the silly-sounding name of Snodgrass. The use of these mannequins, so akin to human and meant to represent a standard form that can display clothing, highlights the fact that, in America, the standard is white skin. He remains an outsider to this married couple in the luxury apartment that he has fixed up where everything else is white, making him an outsider in his new home. Not liking how Snodgrass constantly smiles at him without authentic affect, he throws the mannequin from the balcony in an act of rage. This acts as a way for him to again address the white audience who watch the film to be entertained by his suffering, especially when he states in the scene, flatly, echoing Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man* (1952), "You don't see me; you look at me and you don't see me." He implores the audience to look beyond his racial marking and see him as a person just like them, but one whose personhood is obscured by such marking. The film repeatedly remarks on his invisibility with such scene while he remains the primary object of the camera's gaze, inviting the viewer to address whether they see him as object or abject subject. Insisting on his subjectivity and citizenship was a progressive and transgressive act in Hollywood at this time, in keeping with the growing Civil Rights movement for which Belafonte was an important member and spokesperson.

Like the audience, he also must bear witness to the sorry state of American society. A sequence in a radio station places the audience in the room with him as we listen to a recording like eaves-droppers while the world ends in a matter-of-fact manner that echoes Orson Welles's infamous *War of the Worlds* broadcast from twenty years before. Walter Benjamin argues that "history deals with connections and with arbitrarily elaborated causal

chains. But since history affords an idea of the fundamental citability of its object, this object must present itself, in its ultimate form, as a moment of humanity. In this moment, time must be brought to a standstill” (“Paralipomena to ‘On the Concept of History’” 403). This is another scene establishing Ralph’s basic humanity, above and beyond his status as black man, in a moment when the narrative stops for a moment to empathize with him. The quiet intensity of this scene as the camera closely documents the effect of the broadcast on Ralph’s tear-filled face elicits pathos not *for* him, but *with* him as he mourns the absurd loss of life and the end of society and meaning, the radio announcer finally signing off because there is no one left to listen to his broadcast. Climbing to the top of one of the city’s towering skyscrapers, he surveys the urban space, his gaze enhanced by binoculars, but he sees no one, only more emptiness, the buildings standing like barren tombstones; time has been brought to a standstill at this historical moment that shows the ascendance of a black man in America.

Ralph’s penthouse apartment becomes his new home, and the film, by presenting a black man living in this Playboy bachelor space, even though he does not follow the lifestyle of this model of masculinity, uses the class status of such conspicuous consumption to comment on Ralph’s precarious status in the society that just ended. Fiske observes that “class is better conceived as a scale of privilege that is primarily, but not exclusively, economic, and that has objective and subjective dimensions that may coincide more or less closely,” and that this class privilege provides greater “access to political power, to the media, and to the best table restaurant” (*Media Matters* 65). He adds that “there is . . . a systemic tendency for class privilege, whiteness, and masculinity to pull in

the same direction” even though they are autonomous from each other (Fiske *Media Matters* 66). Bill Osgerby, in his study, *Playboys in Paradise* (2001), examines the history of the figure of the Playboy bachelor from the end of the nineteenth century throughout the twentieth. This type of masculinity redefined the gendered connotations of “private” space: “the penthouse’s connotations of *à la mode* luxury safely displaced the ‘feminine’ associations of the ‘private’ that had been pivotal to the doctrine of ‘separate spheres’” (Osgerby 131).<sup>90</sup> In a conspicuous dinner scene, Ralph takes the dishes into this kitchen only to drop them out of the window. He explains that this is because of the lack of water, but it can equally be seen as his refusal to do a “woman’s” job.

The demarcation of private from public in a city devoid of a public is an entirely arbitrary and symbolic act on the part of Ralph, but it is important for him to preserve such codes in his civilizing function in the narrative. As a member of the professional/managerial class and a bachelor, Ralph fits well into this milieu, and his manhood is shown to be the same as any white man’s in the same class position, enabled and proven through the use of consumer goods as indications of his usefulness and creative problem solving. That being said, his racialized status at this historic moment in America marks him as an “other” in this domestic space and challenges the stereotype of the Playboy, revealing the assumption that this masculinity is coded white. This is not a restoration of status quo, but a queering of it.

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<sup>90</sup> Significantly, *Playboy* magazine made cooking, traditionally “women’s work,” into a masculine activity, a chance to prove manhood through the display of mastery over tools (Osgerby 130).

Ralph's upward mobility from the depths of a coal mine to a high-rise swinging bachelor pad is a fantasy, a reality unavailable to the majority of black men living at that time, even those who had entered the professional/managerial class and enjoyed some level of economic privilege. As Osgerby documents, during the urban crisis that began with black migration to northern cities in the postwar boom,

the mores of black, urban communities became symbols of social pathology, while racism and economic inequality worked to exclude African Americans from the developing universe of hedonistic consumerism. The relative marginality of African Americans to the discourses of individuality, leisure and self-realization through consumption shows that the reach of postwar consumer culture was not nearly as pervasive as its advocates claimed. (172-173)

Although *Ebony* magazine was attempting to bring this market segment into the fold by offering a consumer lifestyle, it must be remembered that conspicuous consumption by black people in this country was often met with ridicule and even, as in the case of the "Zoot Suit Riots," overt violence. Thus, "white racism and the resilience of economic inequalities dictated that the playboy ethic of high-living fun remained out of reach for most African Americans," even to such luminaries as Sammy Davis Jr., who was a kind of side-kick or "mascot" for the Rat Pack; his role was comic relief, not Playboy (Osgerby 174). Placing Harry Belafonte, not only a black performer, but the exotic "King of Calypso," in such a role was meant as a shock for a typical film audience of the time by its incongruity, and the fact that this feat is only accomplished because there is no society left to prevent him from assuming such a position alludes to the structural racialization that excludes melanated bodies from certain private and public spaces, which makes this such a "daring" film. This man is not, as African Americans were often thought of at the time, an invasive parasite, moving into the city and using its resources; he is a productive,

creative agent of cultural preservation; his bachelor pad becomes a refuge for books as the film progresses, rather than a space for him to display the props of his virile manhood. He is not unemployed but self-employed in his tasks. However, his “restoration” of civilization is problematized as it is shown to reproduce heteronormative white supremacy as well.

Adding to the shock value of his new social position in urban space, the narrative then abruptly shifts to the theme of reproductive futurism with its race/reproduction bind and fear of miscegenation. Midway through the film, in a medium shot of Ralph standing under an awning during a rainstorm, an empty baby carriage rolls past in the foreground. The film then cuts to a medium shot of a blonde white woman (Inger Stevens) leaning against a wall, also sheltering under an awning. Then it cuts to a rear-view of her as she watches Ralph surreptitiously and, by doing so, she joins the audience in making him the object of her gaze, and becomes a mute white spectator fascinated by this new urban figure. When Ralph later throws the mannequin from his balcony, she mistakes it for *his* falling body, interpreting it as suicide, and she screams, alerting him to her presence. In a reenactment of what Linda Williams calls the “anti-Tom melodrama,” wherein racist paranoia is figured as the threat of black men to virginal white women, she runs away from him and shouts, “Don’t touch me,” even though all he wants to do is talk to her and does not approach her personal space. Ralph is not a threatening presence, so her over-reaction serves as a melodramatic moment that makes the racial drama of what follows clear to American audiences.

Eventually, she begins to trust him, and they become friends, but he will not let their relationship become too intimate. He continues to keep his distance. When she

suggests that she move into his apartment for convenience, he tells her, “People will talk.” The fact that there are no people in the city to do any talking makes this joke about the film audience instead, addressing the racial bias of viewers who might feel very uncomfortable seeing this mixed couple in a domestic situation.

Nama argues that the film works at cross purposes, trying “to recast interracial relationships as an archaic social taboo and get beyond the constraints of race” while also “having Ralph and Sarah, ostensibly the last two human beings alive, choosing to live as far apart as possible” (46). I agree with this assessment of ambivalence, but must point out that their segregation is encouraged by him and not her, as an echo of her first retreat from him. Although social systems of racialization no longer function in this new world, the two seem unable to give up the older comfortable scripts that clearly determined their social roles instead of creating new ones, and this requires a social hierarchy, not equality between them. When he cooks Sarah dinner for her birthday, using a restaurant into which he would probably not have been admitted during this period of history, he serves it to her as an employee, taking the roles of host and waiter (as well as entertainer when he plays a song that he recorded for her, a metatextual reference to Belafonte’s subordinate role in society as an entertainment commodity), which offends her, but he insists that this is his role in society, and it would not be proper for him to share a meal with her in such surroundings. Nama attributes this to standards in Hollywood filmmaking that could not be transcended at that time, even noting that a black man’s desire for a white woman could at that time be fatal, as the case of Emmett Till made so tragically obvious four years earlier (47).

Also, Sarah's logic for pairing with him is inflected by her previous privileged status, as she states, "I'm free, white, and 21, and I am going to do as I please," alluding to her power to choose him.<sup>91</sup> This is another transgressive moment in the film that recognizes and validates a woman's sexual desire, but it does so while also recognizing the privilege of her skin color. *His* agency seems less important in this scene, and this is a direct blow to his masculinity, since, as Thomas remarks, women are supposed to function, in a phallogocentric patriarchal system, as a "mirror" for men in order to give them back a "reassuring reflection" that affirms identity as a man by demonstrating "his subjectivity, his agency, his desire" (100). He is unable to express his desire due to the racial relations alluded to above, and he cannot imagine a new world where they are allowed to desire each other.<sup>92</sup> He cannot decolonize his cognitive map of the city and its demarcations of social order. Paul Williams remarks on the line that Sarah delivers alluding to racialization, "I know what you are," arguing that "Ralph's involuntary visceral response to Sarah's phrasing indicates how deeply those pre-apocalyptic codes are embedded in him, while Sarah has not had to reflect on her words before" due to her white privilege (121). Williams asserts that "Ralph cannot fulfill their relationship romantically precisely *because* he feels

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<sup>91</sup> DiPiero notes that whiteness is a malleable discourse in both law and science which is "at once a measure of morphological variety and an arbitrary indicator of social origin and privilege . . . nevertheless [it] encodes a great deal more than the color of one's skin" (57).

<sup>92</sup> This inability to think outside of relationships where one person has power over another is a central part of America's imagination of freedom. As Martinot notes, the institution of slavery was an intrinsic part of American nationalism, and "proslavery advocates claimed that slavery was the way in which whites had attained freedom, that servitude was a necessary condition for democracy, and that non-freedom was the necessary condition for freedom" (222). By this logic, in order to be free, white, and 21 someone else must be made subordinate to this freedom. Morrison makes a similar argument with her notion of American Africanism.

it is only possible now the old social codes have been wiped clean” (121, italics his). Recognizing that he and Sarah would never have had a relationship before the catastrophe, he cannot act like this logic does not affect their current relationship since she was always “free” and “white,” and his freedom only pertains in the absence of a white society. The familiar script of such institutions is safer than the improvisation their relationship requires. Later, her assumption of agency is also called into question when Ralph essentially gives her to another man in an exchange that cedes masculine power to white patriarchy.

Ralph is established as a civilizing influence on his surroundings, but also one that is more conservative than would first appear. He saves books from destruction when the library floods and performs a kind, gentle, educated masculinity, but this passivity is foregrounded as part of his subject position as a black man in a white society when Sarah convinces him to cut her blonde hair. Not only does his anxiety in this scene stem from his proximity and intimacy with a white woman, but he seems significantly unmanned when he proves to not be a master of this simple tool that she has coerced him into employing and uses the scissors to angrily chop off locks as a reaction to her urging him on. This scene must have been filmed in one take due to the obvious damage he causes her hair. Placed in service to her vanity, he becomes angry. The quotidian scene becomes violent as he leaves her hair a mess and finally addresses the racism that prevents him from becoming intimate with her as he points to the privilege of her supposed color-blindness that allows her to so easily jettison the institution of racism because it has never affected her. He is also marked as a civilizing presence in his usefulness, fixing a generator for power and reestablishing telephone connection between them. He daily visits the radio station to broadcast a message



for survivors. But his status as civilizing man is challenged when he hears another voice on the radio, and subsequently he ceases to associate with Sarah anymore. He leaves her for long stretches to search for supplies.

The film culminates in a duel over ownership of Sarah that perpetuates patriarchal authority over her body and its capacity to produce more bodies that might be wayward reproductions while addressing the fraught relations between white and melanated people in urban spaces of the time as a violent and potentially deadly struggle. When Benson (Mel Ferrer), a working-class white ex-father who in the film stands as an everyman for the white male audience,<sup>93</sup> arrives on his boat, the couple defer to his authority, and after he recovers from the journey, he issues instructions. Close shots of Sarah during interactions with the men show how conscious she is of her position as the last woman, and the film highlights the tension between the characters with expressionistic noir-style lighting that emphasizes shadows, using chiaroscuro to draw attention to the contrast between light and darkness. Sarah has been rejected by the black man that she desires because he chooses to follow a familiar racial script, but this older white man is clearly not desirable to her. They have a picnic together, inviting Ralph who declines, and Benson displays feelings for her that are not reciprocated. Sarah is well aware of her position now that there are two men, finally shouting at them, “Is anyone ever going to ask me what I want?” Finding the situation untenable,<sup>94</sup> Benson challenges Ralph to a duel to the death where they stalk each

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<sup>93</sup> A problematic coding for an actor whose father was a Cuban surgeon and mother a wealthy New York socialite.

<sup>94</sup> Kimmel, in *Angry White Men*, notes that “gender and racial equality feels like a loss to white men: if ‘they’ gain, ‘we’ lose. In the zero-sum game, these gains have all been at white men’s expense” (16).

other through the urban jungle, and Ralph only reluctantly uses the technology of dominance that he has been issued for this role. As Paul Williams observes, Ralph does not treat this contest as one driven by racism, but instead motivated by masculinism (124). This contest is necessary if the man who gains ownership over Sarah is to be considered a “winner”; in other words, it is necessary to prove their manhood and the masculine rhetoric of strength that posits manhood as a technology of power over society through the threat of violence. This sequence depicts a struggle of models of masculinity for hegemonic dominance. Cohan cogently defines hegemonic masculinity as

‘the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.’ . . . [And] as it underwrites positions of power and wealth, a culture’s hegemonic masculinity has to appear to accommodate competing masculinities, too if for no other reason than to define itself in opposition to these other models. (35, quoting sociologist Bob Connell)

This scene depicts Ralph as what would become a stereotype during the 1980s and ‘90s, that of an endangered black man hunted by white men with guns, which, as Linda Williams shows us, depends on its significance to a melodramatic script that goes back to abolitionist literature and Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). Mirroring the opening sequence in the collapsed coal mine, this latter sequence shows that Ralph’s life is in danger from the social structures around him, structures in danger of collapsing. Nama notes the significance of the firearms used here: “The phallogentric symbolism encoded in Benson’s solution to his sexual frustration with Sarah is blatantly apparent when he acquires a rifle but gives Ralph a small pistol to defend himself” (45). I need not belabor the significance of the racialized masculinity at work in this difference between each weapon’s size and the privilege

accorded the white man in this conflict, who stalks a black man from rooftops, even though Ralph eventually takes the moral “high ground.”

In a long shot of him standing in front of the United Nations building, a post-colonial allusion that these problematic racial relations are a global and not local phenomenon, Ralph throws down his gun, disgusted by the display of masculine dominance, instead proving *his* manhood by disavowing such performance and contradicting the melodramatic stereotype of the angry black man that poses a danger to law and order, a racialized model of masculinity that would gain the label in the 1980s of “super predator.”<sup>95</sup> In doing so, Ralph aligns himself with the non-violent protest of Dr. Martin Luther King, much as Harry Belafonte had during the decade. This setting, with its row of national flags flying behind Ralph, flags the United States as participant in international violence subtended by racism.<sup>96</sup> It reminds the viewer of the American flag, one so ubiquitous to American life (the daily salute in classrooms is one example, as well as that before sporting games) that nationalism is often used a pejorative for other nations or national movements, never “us” (Billig 58). Billig reminds us that “violence is seldom far from the surface of nationalism’s history. The struggle to create the nation-state is a struggle for the monopoly of the means of violence. What is being created – a nation-state – is itself a means of violence” (28). Such violent history is one of the aspects hidden by the collective amnesia worked by banal nationalism. By flagging American nationalism,

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<sup>95</sup> Paul Williams also notes that this ending is as much about the Cold War as it is about racism, a meaning coded into the sequence through Belafonte and his well-known anti-nuclear activism (124).

<sup>96</sup> Billig asserts that “nationalism is an international ideology. The nation-state system abhors a territorial vacuum; every space must be corralled behind official national boundaries. Thus, the boundary-consciousness of nationalism has itself known no boundaries in its historical triumph” (22).

with this conflict arising over “ownership” of a woman, the film reminds viewers of a violent past while also indicating the role of masculinist discourse in the securing of boundaries, especially in policing national subjects and the reproduction of such, insuring against wayward reproductions by controlling women as a technology for reproducing the nation.

Since he cannot “win” if Ralph refuses to play, Benson also disarms, and the film argues that such systemic problems as racialization and discrimination cannot be solved with firearms or other weapons, that, in fact, such violent posturing indicates only the masculine insecurity of the aggressor. Benson’s use of the larger weapon and decision to settle the conflict through violence indicate weakness, not strength, a frantic attempt to determine a hierarchy through access to a woman, and when Ralph refuses to play along, it marks a moment of recognition that this conflict is only a social game, a symbolic struggle that no longer has meaning in a world that no longer has the culturally naturalized categories of nation and race.

The film ends on a rather optimistic conciliatory note that Nama finds problematic and “discordant” (46) because it attempts to solve the issue of miscegenation through integration, as the three of them walk away from the camera, hand in hand with Sarah in the middle, and instead of rolling “The End” over the image, the film, like *The Day the World Ended*, displays “The Beginning,” but this raises the question, the beginning of what? Having given up their previous games to determine who “wins” or who is fit for the future, we can hope that they will choose to play new ones that are not zero-sum, but it is unclear whether this “beginning” places Ralph on an equal standing with the others, even

though the last shot hints that the men will share Sarah, she being the medium through which they can have an equal relationship and a buffer to their conflict. She is the one who reaches out to them in this last scene, and they seem to accept her agency in a nod towards the sexual freedom that women would struggle to attain in the coming decades. We are to assume she will produce offspring for both men, and they do not evince anxiety over the future of this mixed society. The future will not be white, and will likely be darker; the film endorses a utopian ideal of a raceless future that requires it to be post-white. The figure of white womanhood becomes the mediating factor for race relations in America as opposed to the divisive role that it plays in the melodrama of white supremacy via the threat of miscegenation and threatened virginal “purity,” rewriting this script by making miscegenation necessary for racial reconciliation through the agency of a woman.

Nama suggests that this shifts integration rhetoric from a discourse of containment and segregation to one of surveillance, since Ralph’s relationship with Sarah will be “monitored” by Benson, but the terms of the narrative mean that he cannot have a productive relationship with Benson without Sarah, and he in turn will monitor *their* relationship (47). Nama underplays the role of Sarah in this triad. By implying with this utopian ending/beginning the *necessity* of producing wayward reproductions for the continuance of humanity and peaceful resolution of conflict, the film confronts the purity condition central to the imagination of whiteness as a racial category, and by the end, the story is no longer organized around Ralph’s relationship with whiteness, but also addresses Benson’s and Sarah’s relationship with whiteness and its definitions of blackness.

The “beginning” indicated at the film’s end then serves as a line of flight from patriarchal white supremacy even as it reinforces the heteronormativity of reproductive futurism. That being said, the film also presents a counter-hegemonic figure of black masculinity<sup>97</sup> as the moral center of the narrative, which may have contributed to its box-office failure, for, as bell hooks observes, “until both colonizer and colonized decolonize their minds, audiences in white supremacist cultures will have difficulty ‘seeing’ and understanding images of blackness that do not conform to the stereotype” such as that of an angry black man, poor, suffering, and criminalized (72). Just because the characters in the film are able to decolonize their minds by the end does not mean that the audience follows them into uncharted territory. Counter-hegemonic films do not automatically deterritorialize; they require willing participation. Belafonte’s performance as Ralph Burton demonstrates the efficacy of an intellectual, empathic, cultivated, educated, and even pacifistic black masculinity much like the work of his contemporary Sidney Poitier, and both were important participants in the Civil Rights movement that was gaining momentum as the decade ended.

### **1960s: The Beginning of the End**

*To be a visible victim in black and white racial melodrama is . . . to be worthy of citizenship. . . . The minoritized body is caught up in a rhetoric of injury in which the quest for liberation often translates to an opportunity to show one’s wounds.*  
(L. Williams 293)

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<sup>97</sup> This is an important positioning since this undermines the hegemony of white supremacy. DiPiero notes that “the hegemonic narrative that does the work of allowing the articulation of morphology and intellect in the first place is the one that, stealthily, articulates as a fundamental gesture reason with whiteness” (92). Ralphs figure of a black intellectual decouples this articulation.

Although, as Roslyn Weaver observes, the idea of apocalypse is “vital to the American story of nation,”<sup>98</sup> and perhaps due to the threat presented by the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, fewer post-apocalyptic films were released during the decade of the 1960s, and none depicted urban spaces as sites of struggle. The film industry underwent financial crises during the decade as the studio system was dismantled, replaced by the “New Hollywood,” and competition with television informed the choices of producers making new films, resulting in less SF films being produced. The genre migrated largely to television.

Cities were seen as targets for missiles. The lack of iterations of an urban apocalypse is also perhaps due to the condition of struggle in urban ghettos and the violent uprisings of the decade that made such spaces seem already like post-apocalyptic landscapes that suburban and rural Americans could view on the nightly news. The country was simultaneously dealing with the threat of “mutually assured destruction” from nuclear weapons and a confrontation with its institution of white supremacy while also sending increasingly larger amounts of men overseas to fight a losing war in Southeast Asia. Often, the nuclear catastrophe was displaced temporally in films into the distant past like in Pal’s adaptation of *The Time Machine* (1960) and *Planet of the Apes* in order to make it an historical event on which the film need not linger.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> She notes that colonists coming to America associated it with a “utopian hope that ended in disappointment” as they faced the hardships of colonial life (30). Also, the colonists brought apocalypse to the indigenous population, so they are both victims and agents of apocalypse.

<sup>99</sup> The aforementioned *The Time Travelers* is another, as well as *Creation of the Humanoids* (1962, Wesley Barry).

The plight of a white family and the future of America were removed from cities and displaced to the countryside, like in *Panic in the Year Zero* (1962), a film directed by and starring Ray Milland (and produced by Roger Corman) who plays a father attempting to protect his family after Los Angeles is attacked by a nuclear weapon while they are conveniently away in the mountains on a camping trip.<sup>100</sup> Ultimately, he is unable to keep his daughter from being raped by juvenile delinquents when she wanders off alone and hunts them down with his son and kills them in revenge. This situation will find itself repeated in rampage films during the 1970s, most notably Charles Bronson's *Death Wish* (1974-1994) series. The angry white man seeks vigilante justice after being disenfranchised of his role as father and protector, reasserting his mastery through brutality, and the young rapists are removed from the social order. But these older men, by seeking revenge, become tainted by the same toxic masculine entitlement to violence.

As I will discuss in the next chapter, there were some film adaptations of “last man on Earth” stories during this time that placed the action in the newly populated zones of suburban space, such as *The Last Man on Earth* (1964, Ubaldo Ragona and Sidney Salkow), an Italian production released domestically by Corman's American International Pictures, adapting Richard Matheson's novel, *I Am Legend* (1954). Although he lives away from the poverty and crime of the urban space, however, the protagonist of these films commutes, like any other suburbanite, to the urban center, thereby erasing such a divide in

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<sup>100</sup> Similarly, in *Where Have All the People Gone?* (1974, John Llewellyn Mooney), Peter Graves plays a father on a geological vacation in the mountains when a solar flare kills most of the people on the planet, and he must protect what remains of his family, his wife having died, while giving them a reason to carry on as a cohesive community. *The Day After* (1983, Nicholas Meyer), the most realistic of these films in treating the horrors of radiation, presents a number of fathers who are shown to be impotent in the face of this new incomprehensible threat and unable to protect their wives and daughters.



the narrative by collapsing the space through the use of motor vehicles and the protagonist's mobility (Yeates 427).

The main purveyor of "last man" post-apocalypse stories during the decade, television show *The Twilight Zone* (1959-1964) explored the genre in a variety of ways. The pilot episode, "Where is Everybody," presents a man wandering an empty small-town, eventually breaking down when he realizes his isolation, but we find at the narrative's end that he was only undergoing a test as a possible astronaut to see how he would react to being alone in space for lengths of time: not well, apparently. "Two" adds a woman to the narrative and uses the paranoia of both characters to discuss confusion of gender roles. "The Old Man in the Cave" presents a post-apocalyptic 1974 where a small village struggles on through the wise advice of the man mentioned in the title whom none of them have seen as he remains behind an impenetrable metal door. This balance of power shifts when his authority is questioned by the arrival of young military men who forcefully gain access to the cave only to find that the old man is really a supercomputer, and the villagers then die from eating contaminated food the old man had warned them not to eat. Again, the narratives are structured by failing patriarchs, confused gender roles, and the overthrow of an outmoded episteme, but none of these stories include a frank discussion of race as in *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*. Such discussion was left to allegory as in *Planet of the Apes*.

These tropes and antagonisms become more focused and desperate in the following decade, and the next chapter examines three of the most representative of the films while speculating about why the post-apocalyptic scenario returns to the city.

## Chapter Two

### 1970s: The End of the World as We Knew It

*Is masculinity secured by manly restraint of primitive impulses, or the expression of those impulses? The male body becomes the text on which this contradiction is played out.*  
(Robinson “Emotional Constipation” 140)

*Rather than being addressed as equal and active participants in the fantasy of lavish high living . . . women were constructed as the objects of male consumption. There is, therefore, an important measure of truth to Sheila Jeffreys’ (1990) arguments that the ‘sexual revolution’ was heavily mediated by patriarchal discourse.* (Osgerby 146)

During the 1970s, with the combined cultural crises produced by the previous two decades represented by the Black Power movement, feminism and women’s liberation, the national fatigue of the war in Vietnam, the Watergate scandal and impeachment of Richard Nixon (as well as his policy of violent structural racism called the “war on drugs”), increasing gay activism, a massive wave of new immigration, and economic decline,<sup>101</sup> a wide variety of films in many genres addressed the social upheaval and contestation of values expressed by liberationist discourse, class conflict, opposition to governance, and urban racial unrest. As scholars such as Robin Wood, Brian Baker, David Savran, Derek Nystrom, Fred Pfeil, and Sally Robinson have noted, the decade’s films often respond to this confusion of normative hierarchies by portraying liberation discourses as dangerous to the capitalist hetero-patriarchal white power structure which these discourses were attempting to change. The response to this anomie embraced during the decade is called neoliberalism by scholars like David Harvey, a reimagining of liberal discourse as

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<sup>101</sup> Documented in such books as *One Nation Divided* (1980) by Richard Polenberg (282-285); the economic down-turn was hardest on the urban black population (274-276).

competition in a capitalist marketplace which is partnered with the authoritarian coercive apparatus called neoconservatism.<sup>102</sup> This involved not only the recognition of, but also a realignment with the working class. It was another wave of capitalist enclosures, and such events are always enabled by violence. Nixon's war on illicit drugs used by black people is a clear example of this apparatus in use. This cultural shoring-up of white capitalist patriarchy's borders (coded as an argument for neoliberal individualism), which made necessary a neoconservative apparatus of state violence, is articulated in a series of post-apocalyptic urban action films in which white fathers are figured as in danger of being erased from history. The way this threat is depicted, as well as overcome, reveals the problematic position of privileged white masculinity in the national imagination at the waning of the twentieth century.<sup>103</sup>

Patriarchal authority has been disarticulated by many discourses since the 1960s, primarily feminism, but it is also under threat from the men who have been continually frustrated in the achievement of ideal American manhood by a procession of failing father

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<sup>102</sup> The discourses of liberation were replaced in neoliberalism with a circumscribed freedom that made subjects free agents in a supposedly "free market." As David Harvey notes, "this neoliberal debasement of the concept of freedom 'into a mere advocacy of free enterprise' can mean, as Karl Polanyi points out, 'the fullness of freedom for those whose income, leisure and security need no enhancing and a mere pittance of liberty for the people, who may in vain attempt to make use of their democratic rights to gain shelter from the power of the owners of property'" (183).

<sup>103</sup> I am positioning this argument not as a mere exposé of these films as reflections of their historical moment, rather, I argue that, as Barbara Klinger puts it, they act as "neither 'knowledge in the strictest sense' or unadulterated ideology; rather, [they provide] a particularly valuable epistemological 'halfway house' between the two" (76), revealing historical discourses that attempt to recuperate the challenges to white male privilege that liberation movements raise while also revealing the limits of this hegemonic standard for masculinity.

figures during the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>104</sup> Such rhetoric uses the double-bind of gender identity that makes of it both the cause and result of gender performance. The hegemonic model of masculinity offered the kind of freedom defined by neoliberalism, the false promise of autonomy in a “free market.” Many men felt betrayed because they had so little actual control over anything in their lives, and many of these men blamed feminism, women, and racial others for this lack of control, rather than the unachievable masculine ideals and the steady process of deindustrialization and financialization of the American economy, a process encouraged by the federal government (Sugrue 140).<sup>105</sup> They felt disenfranchised, as if they were denied the privileges enjoyed by their fathers, who were mostly absent, working and enjoying said spoils.<sup>106</sup>

These films locate this imagined patriarchal national crisis in a threat to reproduction, or more specifically the threat of wayward reproductions overcoming the “right” kind of “fit” reproduction of a national subject, consumer, and “real man.” As in the films investigated in the first chapter, the end of civilization acts as a space in which to determine what kind of subject “fits” in postmodern America; in this decade the narrative

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<sup>104</sup> This failure applied across class boundaries after the gains of the previous decades. For example, the 1950s union jobs offered “a level of comfort that few . . . blue-collar counterparts in the American past had been able to achieve” (Sugrue 149).

<sup>105</sup> Faludi notes, “Both the feminist and anti-feminist views are rooted in a peculiarly modern American perception that to be a man means to be at the controls and at all times to feel yourself in control” (9). When feminists blame men for social ills rather than the patriarchal order, they fall into the trap of assuming that men *are* in control.

<sup>106</sup> Sugrue notes how the practice of overtime was used as a weapon by the management of industrial centers; it “allowed managers to reduce the costs of hiring and training new workers, as well as benefits packages, while maintaining high production levels. It also diluted union strength by reducing membership” (142). It thus not only kept these working-class men from their families, it also contributed to unemployment.

becomes explicitly one of identity politics. The crime in urban ghettos and increased immigration of racialized others threatened the popular imagination of America as a nation of white Christians run by men while also increasing the population of poor people, adding to the growing precariat of the body politic, especially those who, because of the Immigration Act of 1965, which severely limited the influx of people from Latin America, came into the country illegally and therefore were doubly marginalized and had no recourse or protection from exploitation. As Sugrue reminds us, “central-city residence, race, joblessness, and poverty have become inextricably intertwined in postindustrial urban America” (3). Following the practice of Savran, this chapter’s analyses reveal “that racial, gendered, and sexual identities are not stable, transparent positions [but] always in the *process* of being produced” (321, emphasis his). Like him, I hope that a focus on conflict over the reproduction of such positions will help to denaturalize these historical cultural processes, revealing possible lines of flight from white capitalist hetero-patriarchy.

During this decade, many alternative social systems were experimented with in communes such as the one in Fresno, California in which I was born, places that members of the community chose to join in order to reject the normal capitalist social order, often because they had adopted apocalyptic thinking (in the case of the one I was born into, a particularly Biblical apocalypticism), and films produced during this time explore populist ideas of these social alternatives as well, one of the most famous being *Billy Jack* (Tom Laughlin, 1971), one of the top five films released that year in box-office sales. It tells the story of a half-Native American man, played by the writer/producer/director of the film, trying to protect a hippy commune from a corrupt racist sheriff. Like this story of a besieged

utopian community, the urban apocalypse films produced in this decade evince the apocalyptic thinking of urban dwellers during this troubled time while trying to imagine a place in this devastated landscape where a man can still assert his authority and autonomy and maintain the pretense of absolute control over himself and his home.

The films I will examine, rather than supplying a rite of passage for a new generation of men to prove their virility by facing danger, instead depict old men played by aging actors known for kinetic roles trying to prove their virility one last time in a hopeless situation, but one must wonder for whom this performance is intended. Rather than handing the world over to young men as in the films from the 1950s canvassed in the last chapter, these men seem afraid of this next generation and reluctant to hand the reigns to possible wayward reproductions. The sense of hopelessness increases as the decade progresses and these white men fail to master the world over which their social position promised dominance while the nation fails to “win,” in Vietnam, economically in the oil embargo, and domestically with growing poverty and drug addiction. As Sugrue aptly states, the ideology that this inevitable decay espouses uses a logic that claims business interests in the country had no choice but to move to other locations or down-size, and this argument “is wrongly based on an ahistorical argument about the inevitability and neutrality of technological decisions” (129).<sup>107</sup> This imagining of national decline was coupled in these films with a sense of emasculation, a feeling that the nation was not strong enough to protect its citizens, so individual men needed to act.

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<sup>107</sup> Andrew Feenberg, in *Transforming Technology* (2002), calls this the “*paradox of reform from above*”; since technology is not neutral but fundamentally biased towards a particular hegemony, all action undertaken within its framework tends to reproduce that hegemony” (63).

The men in the films under analysis here, *The Omega Man*, *The Ultimate Warrior*, and *Ravagers*, demonstrate masculine mastery and the efficacy of masculine force as a useful technology for the nation, coded as harmonious community, through the use of props that support and enable the apparatus of masculinity to master its environs elaborated in the introduction to this study, including especially women, positioning mothers as necessary vessels for reproducing masculinity and its likewise “necessary” mastery over said mothers in order to produce only “pure, good stock” in order to strengthen the nation, an indication of reproductive anxiety that requires the purity condition of the race/reproduction bind for its logic.

Complicating this analysis, the films also denaturalize masculine performance by displaying its artifice and revealing it to be an always already speculative identity and subject position, demonstrating the danger of violent masculine domination while also arguing for its necessity as protection from itself (the double-bind of the patriarchal order that positions women and children as victims in need of protection by and from the very men who threaten them). They expose the paradox of dominant autonomous masculinity as both problem and solution to the problem. I am not arguing that these films are “progressive” so much as instructive, for, as Steven Shaviro argues, “It is high time we rid ourselves of the notion that we can somehow free ourselves from illusion (or from ideology) by recognizing and theorizing our own entrapment within it” (*Cinematic Body* 9). Instead, I view these figurations as historical articulations that continue to shape and inform discourses of race, class, and gender in our present time. As Jon Cook notes, technology, usually depicted as “either what threatens to enslave or reduce the human or

that which, properly thought, can become an instrument of human will,” is in actuality neither of these because it is “not external to the human, but implicated within it” (324). These films reveal the paradoxical invisible hegemonic reproduction of white masculine dominance a gender *relationship*, demonstrating that “the survival of a *dominant* fiction of masculinity means that *some* people are reproducing, acting out, performing it . . . [thus] dominant masculinity . . . keeps reproducing itself” (Robinson *Marked Men* 151). The films under discussion imagine the possibility that this cycle of reproduction might cease.

In these films, male bodies are figured as a crucial technology for the reproduction of normative (white) humanity while also remaining a dangerous technology of destruction and dominance depicted as obsolete in a world destroyed by violence.<sup>108</sup> Using Lee Edelman’s terminology, these men become queer figures who reject their role in reproductive futurism and thereby reject the idea of the future as such. Robert Neville, protagonist of *The Omega Man*, never recognizes that he has failed as a father, that he has rejected that role and instead embraced a model of manhood that proves itself through acts of conspicuous consumption and the drive towards death of revenge. He himself has become a threat to society, a lesson learned by previous iterations of his character in the novel and first film adaptation and originally intended for the more recent adaptation, *I Am*

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<sup>108</sup> I refer to these bodies as “male” for the reason expressed above by Robinson that the male body does not “possess” manhood, it is marked by it and conforms to this marking. Such visions of apocalypse, as noted by Ana Moya and Gemma López in their recent analysis of 21<sup>st</sup> century additions to this genre, “Looking Back: Versions of the Post-Apocalypse in Contemporary North-American Cinema,” although depicting the failure of the nation and “law and order,” “at one and the same time . . . reveal the extent to which they are still trapped in a discourse of binary opposites where borders are inevitable in the construction and definition of individual and social identity, even if they are only to distinguish between good guys and bad guys” (n.p.). The films I analyze attempt to erect just such clear boundaries in a society whose discourses were rapidly shifting, resulting in the shifting and even erasure of boundaries considered essential to white masculine identity.



*Legend* (Francis Lawrence, 2007) but changed when test audiences did not like an ending that painted Will Smith, playing Neville, as a monster. Heston's Neville, in *Omega Man*, remains oblivious to this fact like Smith's more recent version of the last man. Carson, the action hero of *The Ultimate Warrior*, must maim himself in order to save the pregnant woman he protects, figured as the hope for humanity via reproductive futurism; ultimately this last warrior must turn his blade into a surgical instrument and a tool of reproduction to aid in the birth of the child, and the film suggests that he has now become the ultimate father figure instead of warrior. Richard Harris as Falk, in *Ravagers*, fails to either protect or inseminate his wife and only begrudgingly takes on the mantle of "shepherd" to a flock of homeless people at the film's end; having the patriarchal pastoral role thrust on him by the community, he leads his people on a quest to find "Genesis," the fabled place where things still grow out of the ground and reproduction can continue, a place that alludes to a new beginning. These films are deeply concerned with which model of masculinity will best serve the future, and they weigh in on the side of pacifism even while they show a need to repel brutal men who treat the world as a place for their unfettered consumption.

There has never been one monolithic model or mode of masculinity, but many masculinities in different contexts and different bodies often considered divergent from the white hegemonic standard that exists, as Judith Butler elaborates, "before the law" in the sense of being both under the law's authority and existing prior to its inception (xiv). As I asserted above, it acts as both cause and effect, which is why she labels it "performative." The male body can be usefully examined as a technology used to both signify manhood and hail society as a subject position and also to ensure the central and dominant place of

men in the social order; it is an apparatus and habitus used to both establish and defy standards of masculinity, to establish both a limit and to claim that ideal manhood cannot be limited. Richard Dyer observes that genres like the Western regularly display black male bodies as a passive object for the audience's gaze and notes that slaves have always been a form of technology owned by the wealthy and powerful, but the possessive individualism and autonomy imbricated with hegemonic white masculinity and encouraged by the neoliberal order renders *white* bodies as technology as well, the biggest difference being one of ownership or autonomy in the sense of self-governance, being a law unto yourself by choosing who masters you, like a medieval knight swearing fealty. This also usefully explains the exploitive relationship of paid labor as a renting of this body as well as the equation in masculinist rhetoric of unemployment with emasculation.<sup>109</sup> Masculinity, in such a model, acts as a register of usefulness. Dyer examines the display of white male bodies in the series of Tarzan films produced in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Italian *peplum* films like the Hercules series, and recent action films like those of Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger, observing that, besides pornography, these are the only kind of films that constantly display the nude white male torso (*White* 287). This display demonstrates the masculine performance of these men as a useful technology as well as a physical ideal of virility that off-sets the "feminizing" objectification of the display.

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<sup>109</sup> Kimmel argues that "women (as prostitutes), blacks (as slaves), and European peasants (as indentured serfs) served as the screens against which late nineteenth-century 'artisans' sought to reconfigure their claims to independent manhood" (*MiA* 106). The concept of freedom requires the unfree for its meaning. The post-apocalyptic film genre, with its nostalgic reimagining of manhood as artisanal, in this way brings such rhetoric of free enterprise back into play. As Kimmel remarks, a resistance to civilization often means a "retreat to a bygone era" (89).

Heston made a career of taking off his shirt, and Yul Brynner was often cast as a spectacular exotic man displaying his muscled torso. These displays are performances of virility even as they make the men into the object of a desiring gaze. The hard body on display, rather than revealing vulnerability, proves the dominance of the man, even when being punished, due to his ability to withstand pain. The bodies of Heston and Brynner are both sites of discipline and violence in their films, but also the producers of such, meted out on the bodies of other men.<sup>110</sup> Furthermore, the casting of recognizable masculine actors is an important part of their value in cinematic narratives as well as the culture they reproduce and on which they comment.<sup>111</sup>

This time also presented a crisis for film producers as they saw less people attending their exhibitions. Attendance reached “an all-time low by 1971,” and many of these lost audience members were young, so the big studios desperately tried to appeal to this demographic (Nystrom 24). It is interesting, then, that they would employ such older men as the heroes in these films. Both of these actors as well as Harris represent a stoic, unemotional (unless angry), quiet, independent, and proud masculinity, with Heston usually playing some sort of savior role, and all of them often playing perennial

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<sup>110</sup> John Fiske argues that spectacular bodies draw “our attention to the politicization of the body in patriarchal capitalism. . . . The body is where the power-bearing definitions of social and sexual normality are literally embodied, and is consequently the site of discipline and punishment” (73).

<sup>111</sup> In *Stars*, Dyer quotes Michel Mourlet at length regarding Heston, noting “that Heston ‘means’ Heston regardless of what the film is trying to do with him” (131). Mourlet calls him “an axiom,” arguing that “the contained violence expressed by the somber phosphorescence of his eyes, his eagle’s profile, the haughty arch of his eyebrows, his prominent cheek-bones, the bitter and hard curve of his mouth, the fabulous power of his torso: this is what he possesses and what now even the worst director can degrade” (131). Notice how his body acts a collection of signs that all point to his masculine virility in this description.

outsiders.<sup>112</sup> Grant notes that iconographic casting of recognizable movie stars in genre film locates in the actor “in concrete, physical form society’s values at particular historical moments . . . [because] stars and genres reinforce each other” (19).<sup>113</sup> These stars and their spectacular bodies can then be seen as part of the cinematic apparatus of Hollywood as well as models of American manhood, pieces of movie technology used to tell an on-going story about masculinity in America,<sup>114</sup> and in this epic fiction of national dominance Heston, Brynner, and Harris played key roles, proving their individual manhood by being at odds with society, suffering and surviving to remain “real” men.

### **The End of Manhood or the Birth of a New Man?**

*White discourse implacably reduces the non-white subject to being a function of the white subject, not allowing her/him space or autonomy, permitting neither the recognition of similarities nor the acceptance of differences except as a means of knowing the white self.*  
(Dyer “Matter of Whiteness” 544)

*The free man and the military state are not two alternative poles in American ideology, nor are they merely a recent symbiosis. Their marriage goes back to the beginning.*  
(Cohan quoting Michael Rogin 133-134)

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<sup>112</sup> Heston played Antony in *Julius Caesar* (1953, David Bradley, 1971, Stewart Burge) and *Antony and Cleopatra* (1972, Charlton Heston), Buffalo Bill in *Pony Express* (1953, Jerry Hopper), Moses in *Ten Commandments* (1956, Cecil B. DeMille), Mike Vargas in *Touch of Evil* (1958, Orson Welles), El Cid in *El Cid* (1961, Anthony Mann), John the Baptist in *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965, George Stevens), George Taylor in *Planet of the Apes* (1968, Franklin J. Schaffner); Brynner played the King in *The King and I* (1956, Walter Lang), Ramses in *Ten Commandments*, Dmitri Karamazov in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1958, Richard Brooks), Chris Adams in *The Magnificent Seven* (1960, John Sturges), Pancho Villa in *Villa Rides* (1968, Buzz Kulik), and the relentless robotic Gunslinger in *Westworld* (1973, Michael Crichton).

<sup>113</sup> Like Amy Ransom I am asserting that “the star image is a *sign*, an icon loaded with meaning” (7).

<sup>114</sup> We must also keep in mind, as Cohan remarks, that, “far from reproducing the original person, a star image on film is itself always a copy of a copy, a mask or persona meant to authenticate a social, racial, and sexual type in the theatricalized settings of a movie and its promotion” (26).

*The Omega Man*, the second film adaptation of Richard Matheson's novel *I Am Legend*, depicts Heston as Robert Neville, the last man on Earth, struggling against a counter-cultural "family" of people infected with a virus that has killed most other people on the planet, turning the survivors into creatures of the night whom resemble an inverse KKK. He ultimately wins the love of an uninfected black woman who nurtures and protects several uninfected multi-racial children (until she herself "crosses over," as they say in the film, and shows symptoms of the disease, joining the Family). Neville rejects the Family but becomes the Father of the future by saving the human race from the contagion with his own "Anglo-Saxon" blood, calling on the purity condition that subtends racialization, and in heavy-handed Christian symbolism, salvation requires the martyring of his "miraculous" immune body.<sup>115</sup> Nama reads this film as "possibly the most strident example of the mounting white backlash against Black Power politics and the pressing paranoia associated with the declining status of white male patriarchy from its post-World War II position" (67). This anxiety imagined America as contaminated by color. This discourse of purity and blood, as noted by Nama in his analysis of the film, is historically linked to the "one drop rule" for determining racial purity and the anti-miscegenation laws that used it as a

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<sup>115</sup> Neville is immune in the film due to being inoculated just when the epidemic was killing everyone else; scientific research saves his life, aligning his "pure" blood once more with the white Western world (Ransom 28). In the novel, however, Neville was exposed to an earlier version of the virus by being bit by a bat when on a military operation in South America. The novel's version of Neville, then, is far from "pure," but rather is immune due to being contaminated, and this contagion is linked to the racial South.

standard (49), but, as Steve Martinot documents, such a concept of purity was necessary for racialization to operate from the beginning.<sup>116</sup> Nama writes,

Take, for example, the harsh critiques of the impact of black popular culture on white American youth, the demands on academic standards posed by multicultural education, or the ‘white flight’ of the American middle class from urban areas to the safety of the suburbs. These issues, once distilled down to their core element, reveal that the familiar trope of racial contamination underlies the discourse. (67)

Moreover, the use of a white man’s “pure” blood to “cure” the human race indicates that whiteness and masculinity are an answer to the country’s problems, both racial and gendered, eliding the way that a racist capitalist economy produces such subject positions and the social problems caused by segregation and heteronormative patriarchy.

Michael Billig usefully argues that “nationalism involves assumptions about what a nation is: as such, it is a theory of community, as well as a theory about the world being ‘naturally’ divided into such communities” (63). He notes that “it could be said to have brought about a transformation of identity, even bringing into the popular vocabulary the notion of ‘identity’ itself” (Billig 61-62, citing Giddens). When this naturalization of identity is considered in light of Weinbaum’s assertion of the race/reproduction bind that subtends nationalism, it becomes clear how protecting such naturalized identity becomes a primary function of discourse about American subjectivity. Furthermore, since this identity is also traditionally gendered as masculine, definition of hegemonic masculinity becomes imbricated in this discourse about national identity.

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<sup>116</sup> “The great flaw in miscegenation law from a white-supremacist perspective was the fact that the pure ‘blood’ that works so hard in this system to essentialize race is not itself visible. The invisibility of ‘blood’ could permit a person . . . to pass until her true genealogy was exposed” (L. Williams 182).

The film presents white masculinity as a crucial technology for reproducing “civilization” as hegemonic white patriarchy. In this narrative, “the foundations of civilization” (according to Neville) are threatened by *contagion*, an invisible and ubiquitous threat that the Family considers a kind of Biblical Judgment on humanity. Notice how the idea of civilization as such requires a purity condition for Neville to imagine it, thereby placing it under threat of contagion. The sickness that threatens this purity is horrific because unclassified but also because it removes the “free will” from its victims, much like the “pod people” of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. This fantasy of disaster attempts to articulate clear boundaries for a society whose discourses were rapidly shifting due to competing visions of American culture and what it means to be American, resulting in the shifting and even erasure of boundaries once considered essential to white masculine identity, relying as it does on a central privileged status in society, enabling the neoliberal proof of manhood through economic mastery.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> I understand that the term “neoliberal” has many competing meanings, but one of the most useful definitions that I have found comes from Steven Shaviro’s *No Speed Limit* (2014). He defines this term as meaning “a specific mode of capitalist production (Marx), and form of governmentality (Foucault), that is characterized by the following specific factors: 1. The dominating influence of financial institutions, which facilitate transfers of wealth from everybody else to the already extremely wealthy (the ‘One Percent’ of even the top one hundredth of one percent). 2. The privatization and commodification of what used to be common or public goods (resources like water and green space, as well as public services like education, communication, sewage and garbage disposal, and transportation). 3. The extraction, by banks and other large corporations, of a surplus from all social activities; not only from production (as in the classical Marxist model of capitalism) but from circulation and consumption as well. . . . 4. The subjection of all aspects of life to the so-called discipline of the market. This is equivalent, in more traditional Marxist terms, to the ‘real subsumption’ by capital of all aspects of life; leisure as well as labor. . . . 5. The redefinition of human beings as private owners of their own ‘human capital.’ Each person is thereby, as Michel Foucault puts it, forced to become ‘an entrepreneur of himself’” (*Hermeneutics* 7-8). In this logic, we “invest” in ourselves, and everything we do becomes like a financial an “investment.” Hence our use now of terms like “social capital” and “cultural capital,” “as if our knowledge, our abilities, our beliefs, and our desires had only instrumental value and needed to be invested” so that everything we do becomes Marx’s “dead labor” (Shaviro 28).

As the “omega” or “last” man, the city belongs to Neville. The film begins with a long shot of downtown Los Angeles that closes in on him driving a red luxury convertible. A point-of-view shot shows us his hand as it puts an eight-track tape into the car’s stereo system, and we hear the strains of banal lounge music. It looks like a leisurely “Sunday drive” until we notice the lack of traffic, and he runs a red light. This opening sequence sets up his status in the city; he has the freedom to move about as if he owns it, but the many long shots that show his figure dwarfed by the buildings reinforce his isolation and diminished status as the last man on Earth, much like similar shots used in *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*. Dyer asserts that “film and especially performance in film fabricates a relationship to, rather than a telling about, the characters” (*Stars* 134). This sequence diverges from the way the previous adaptation, *The Last Man on Earth* (1964, Ubaldo Ragona), begins in significant ways.<sup>118</sup> The earlier film begins by showcasing the devastation of the urban environment with a montage of the desolation of empty buildings and open spaces littered with corpses *before* we are introduced to the protagonist. He appears in a close shot within the boredom of his bedroom, awakened by his alarm clock, similar to how the novel begins, with a voice-over stating in the tortured voice of Vincent Price, “Another day to live through.” In this lower-budget, black-and-white Corman-produced version, he is passive and less dynamic than the Neville we see on a Sunday drive in the 1971 version, and the Corman adaptation begins by reinforcing that his narrative is one of endurance, not conquest. Price’s performance is brooding and depressed rather than

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<sup>118</sup> He is renamed Robert Morgan. This version’s ending is closer to that of the novel, making it clear that posthuman mutants have inherited the world, and humanity has ceased to exist (Ransom 94).



the angry man described in the novel and depicted by Heston in the later film. That being said, Price's portrayal as more emotional than Heston's is more faithful to Matheson's character, who, as Ransom notes, "becomes hysterical" because "grief appears to be his predominant emotion; perhaps because of the apocalyptic situation he is allowed to express feelings that 'real men' in the 1950s should not" (46).<sup>119</sup>

Although the action of the opening sequence in *Omega Man* loosely follows that of the script's original draft, still titled *I Am Legend*, the setting was changed from the suburban locations of the novel and Corman adaptation to urban Los Angeles. In Heston's version of the story, Neville abruptly stops his car and brandishes a sub-machine gun, shooting at movement in a building.<sup>120</sup> Heston's last man is a man of action, not the brooding man of the previous film and novel. The script emphasizes the weapon even more, with a close-up of it that obscures Neville's face. Only after establishing Neville as a trigger-happy man-about-town do we then see shots of detritus and corpses, indicating the end of civilization, but also hinting that some of these corpses are the result of Neville's violence.

In cultural works, the threat to a dominant hegemonic masculinity like that of white middle-class men is often depicted as a clash between civilization and its other. Urban

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<sup>119</sup> Ransom argues that, if we consider Price's star image through queer theory, his performance "can be read as an expression of contemporary anxiety about homosexuality spreading like a contagion" (60). This is clearly not an issue for Heston's portrayal.

<sup>120</sup> In the script, Neville was to shoot at the camera, an act of violence against the audience echoing that of Haskell Wexler's *Medium Cool* (1969), which ends with him sitting behind a camera, shooting the audience, implicating them in the film's politics, making the film contagious by disrupting the fourth wall. This shot of a man pointing a gun at the camera was used by John Boorman at the beginning of *Zardoz* (1974) when Sean Connery shoots the audience.

apocalypse films, such as *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*, use recognizable urban spaces as contested icons of civilization, and, as Moya and López argue, “They attempt to envision new spaces beyond culture and the nation as we know it [in which] the whole planet has become a borderland” (n.p.). They gesture towards a postmodern national subjectivity that escapes the demarcations of civilization, racialization, and even capitalization (and its antecedent, financialization) but, unlike *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*, they remain confined to a social system with a white man in charge, although they remain hopeful that this man has left behind the violence of dominant military masculinity. Such recognizable urban spaces in these films can be read as genre icons, which are, like religious icons, full of meanings and act as what Grant calls a “visual shorthand” for a long history of iconography that extends beyond the genre, such as the city standing in for civilization as such (12).

Beginning with *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*, the city became a post-apocalyptic mise-en-scène for the end of civilization coded as the end of commerce and industry just as, in that film, it was being occupied by a resourceful, upwardly-mobile black man. Since the end of WWII, urban spaces have been contested places of racial division where the working-class black population is treated as a danger to commerce and property.<sup>121</sup> The anxiety about urban populations was exacerbated in the 1970s due to the

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<sup>121</sup> Justin Sully investigates this genre of film from the discipline of geography, noting that “the familiar pulse of the city flooded and emptied of people becomes the means of projecting a structural misalignment where the daily cycle of the reproduction of industrial labor in some sense retains its rhythmic consistency, but at the same time is inverted, causing the representation of the modern industrial temporal order of labor/leisure and public/private to become itself reversed and upended” (110). A city without people troubles the notions of property and propriety, becoming an indeterminate space that has lost its function and meaning. He links this cycle of films in the 1970s to a growing fear of population growth at the time coupled with urban racial antagonism, a resurgence of Malthusian logic

ghetto uprisings that occurred with regular frequency which, as Martinot asserts, “while they generally represent mass outrage at social betrayal, they are rarely seen by whites as responses to broken promises or fairness, because the white sense of fairness equates to white entitlement” (229). This inability to understand the frustrations of melanated communities was further exacerbated by the vilifying of affirmative action legislation which attempted to address the inequalities of segregation, resulting in, as Linda Williams says, “a peculiar instance of an advantaged racial majority finding it possible to perceive themselves as if they were an aggrieved minority” (290). Thus was born the “silent majority” of white “victims” that Richard Nixon used to win his presidency in 1968. Robert Neville acts as a figure of this white entitlement and victimization operating in complete ignorance of why the Family hates him.

*The Omega Man* is not interested in *how* the world ended as much as Neville’s place in it. Significantly, although the novel presents Neville as a working-class enlisted man, the film adaptations make him into an officer and scientist, a member of the professional/managerial class (Ransom 49). The script has a montage sequence roll behind the film’s opening credits that serves as exposition explaining how viral warfare with China brought about this state of affairs. Significantly, in the film, the montage is truncated, leaving it ambiguous as to who was at war with whom, and is located later in the film. Instead, as the credits roll, we watch Neville’s red car pass in a panning shot from within a

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brought on by a new consciousness of global population and the many fears of the other that this brings with it. In Aristotle’s *Politics*, he observes that “a state then only begins to exist when it has attained a population sufficient for a good life in the political community; it may indeed somewhat exceed this number. But . . . there must be a limit” (267). This limit is imagined not only as amount of population, but also *type* of population. *Z.P.G.* (Zero Population Growth), released in 1972, and *Soylent Green* in 1973, are examples of the fear of uncontrolled population explosion disrupting the functions of the city.

ruined, dusty, cob-webbed schoolroom, indicating the end of reproduction, the end of a reproductive future. The script contains more details that stress such a reading: “CAMERA points out OPEN WINDOW- with a broken blind hanging alongside. In left frame, next window has Easter bunnies, eggs, etc. made by children. In right side of frame, teacher’s desk with small flag, rotten apple.” The inclusion of Easter eggs acts direct reference to reproduction, as well as the theme of sacrifice and renewal that subtends the narrative.

Neville acts as a problematic father figure in this narrative. Rather than positioning him as civilized, and his enemies as barbaric others, he is depicted as dangerous and violent. He loots and kills, but his social position as a white professional man marks his activity as “survival” rather than criminality. Robert Yeates, in his examination of Corman’s first adaptation of *I Am Legend*, argues that “nuclear frontier stories, a genre of which *Legend* might be considered a part, incorporate the ‘frontier imagery of the nineteenth century,’ [quoting Patrick B. Sharp] with survivors needing to ‘battle the manifestations of savagery in order to establish a new America out of the wreckage of the old’” (423). This film troubles the easy distinction between savagery and order. This difference is produced by definitions of spaces as places, with Neville’s bachelor penthouse apartment positioned as civilized *place* and opposed to the Family’s “nest,” a space they occupy at the courthouse, an abomination of the social order that does not recognize older laws and represents a new order; the nest acts as one of the deterritorialized liminal *spaces* of this new city (dis)order.<sup>122</sup> In this model, places have clearly defined social roles and meanings, whereas

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<sup>122</sup> The nest of the Family can also be usefully read, along with all of the coding of blackness, as a denigration of urban public housing, which, as Sugrue puts it, has always been equated with “Negro housing” (81). Such ghetto areas are hegemonically imagined as problematic spaces because of those who

spaces are open to interpretation and operate more ambiguously. In both novel and the previous adaptation, *Last Man on Earth*, Neville ultimately realizes that he has been killing living sick *people* and that his legend is one of a *monster*; *he* is now the abnormal, marginal, abject subject in the city, rather than the minorities confined to the ghetto space. Heston's Neville never learns this truth, and the film's positioning of him as savior of the human race rather than its exterminator attempts to rescue his position from the dustbin of history.<sup>123</sup> Neville's isolation signifies his individuality as master of his own destiny while the Family's nest invokes the fear of losing personal agency to the mass will of the common people. The population of the city becomes a threat to his status in it. Amy Ransom argues that Heston's "ruggedness" worked against Price's previous portrayal of the character as well as the "effeteness sometimes attributed to the scientist or intellectual" (100). He virilizes the professional/managerial man. His violence can be read as a panic reaction to the threat to agency represented by the Family, demonstrating that he is an agent of death, the monstrous product of his historical position, an angry white man enacting revenge on those he blames for a situation he cannot understand and over which he has little power.

The concept of the city as a space of human habitation can be usefully elucidated using geographic city/body theory, wherein cities are recognized as being shaped by bodies while those same bodies are shaped by cities in a dialectical process. According to this theory, the relationship between bodies and cities ideologically renders both into hyperreal

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are forced to live there, and the degradation of civil services follows this logic of dis-placement that produces the ghetto space.

<sup>123</sup> This change in Neville's character was the result of Heston's control over the production. He brought the novel to the producer to be adapted, collaborated on the entire project with him, and even suggested the film's scriptwriting team (Ransom 98-99).

“modes of simulation” that map the imaginary onto the corporeal, producing the city as a Baudrillardian simulacra (May 287). The idea of a city and its citizens becomes more real than the lived reality of the people who reside there. This model of the city helps explain the behaviors of Ralph and Sarah in *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*. Ralph cannot imagine the place as anything but the simulacra of the city coded as a segregated place, determining the identity and behavior of white and black bodies, largely because the city was still around them, structuring their lived reality. Likewise, Jude Davies posits a “Los Angeles symbolic” which is engaged in “the erasure or ‘forgetting’ . . . of ethnic and classed spaces and histories” (217) that uses the automobile as a “safe, interior space” from which a middle-class white subject can view the city without engaging in its politics (220).

Examining this phenomena in recent zombie films, Jeff May observes that, when emptied of bodies, the city becomes what he calls “an ‘other’ space that results from the destruction of hegemonic and ideological spatial codifications,” such as the codes separating public from private and black from white (286). This deterritorialized space lacks clear boundaries or social meanings, like a borderland, troubling notions of property and propriety as there ceases to be a distinction between public and private in a world without commerce.<sup>124</sup> Neville’s daily journeys about the city reterritorialize it temporarily, maintaining his subject position by his one purpose of finding the Family, but the city streets in *Omega Man* are only empty during the day, becoming populated and

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<sup>124</sup> As Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have written, deterritorialization involves the displacement of a sign from its context, a lack of subjectivity resulting from a lack of purpose, the disintegration of a culture’s definition of place, or a disturbance of relations (Moya and Lopez n.p.).

detrterritorialized by the Family when they emerge at night. By day the city acts as Neville's private domain; at night it is open to this new public community.<sup>125</sup> The city becomes a menacing threat for Neville then, and he remains within his heavily fortified territory, master of his domain through use of technology, but vulnerable to invasion and imprisoned by his safety.

Neville desperately maintains boundaries. As Melley observes, "Discourses of agency and determination usually rely on a strict rhetoric of inside and outside" (99), and, as May notes, "The dualistic thinking which produces us/them dichotomies produces rigid private/public spaces as well" (291). Neville has militarized his home, a luxury penthouse, to keep the Family out and preserve his private place of refuge filled with commodities from the previous civilization. In the previous versions of the narrative, both novel and Corman film, Neville lives in a small suburban home<sup>126</sup> that once housed his nuclear family before the disease took his wife and daughter, and his failure as father causes his constant anguish and subsequent drinking problem. His existence is extremely practical in these versions; he drives a station wagon, which serves as his hearse for transporting bodies, a

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<sup>125</sup> As Thomas remarks, "Questions of ownership, (private) property, and the proper—in all the many senses of that word—become [after Hegel] the crucial matters of modernity. . . . This is particularly the case when the bourgeois philosophical metanarrative of self-repossession (with Hegel as its major repo man) is aligned with and compounded by a capitalist rationality of production, acquisition, and profit maximization" (46).

<sup>126</sup> Significantly, he lives in South Central Los Angeles, which would rapidly become a black suburb and the epicenter of the Rodney King riots forty years later. Los Angeles, at the time, had the largest black suburban population in the country, but the suburbs were also segregated, forcing racialized others into the less-desirable areas (Massey 69). "Segregation is not simply a matter of uneven settlement patterns and racial isolation within specific neighborhoods; it also matters where black neighborhoods are located [leading to] hypersegregation" (Massey 74).

sign of how this domestic technology has now become one of sanitation against infection. Heston's Neville "drives a Ford Mustang convertible, a military jeep, or a Land Rover," indicating a different class status as well as more aggressive masculinity (Ransom 100). Adding to this sentiment, the Family leader, Matthias (Anthony Zerbe), calls Neville's possessions "the tools that destroyed the world."

Neville's superiority over the Family is demonstrated in many ways. Aside from the many firearms that he owns,<sup>127</sup> he has preserved a collection of fine art with the ostensible purpose of retaining European traditions, but his apartment is also full of current luxury commodities, like a stereo hi-fi system and whiskey served in crystal glasses, items less about traditional civilization than offerings in *Playboy* magazine, items of conspicuous consumption in a world where the only people watching him are members of the Family who specifically despise such commodities.<sup>128</sup> He maintains the appearance of a continuing commodity culture and the status that it brings him, even stopping to see a movie that he has seen so often that we watch him in a tight close-up as he quotes the dialogue along with the revelers at the Woodstock festival, asking, "What's really important?" One of the things these mostly white men do not address as important in the film is the structural racism fueling the yearly uprisings occurring at the time in cities across the country.<sup>129</sup> The

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<sup>127</sup> The film looks ahead to Heston's career as NRA spokesman and the assertion that you can pry his weapon "from his cold dead hands" while also capitalizing on his star image as savior of civilization as well as his recent work confronting racism in *Planet of the Apes*.

<sup>128</sup> Osgerby observes that "the penthouse's connotations of á la mode luxury safely displaced the 'feminine' associations of the 'private' that had been pivotal to the doctrine of 'separate spheres'" (131).

<sup>129</sup> "During the 1970s, black-white segregation was maintained at high levels in most US metropolitan areas, yielding high levels of racial isolation that were particularly intense within central cities" (Massey 73).



counter-culture was more interested in black culture as an oppositional identity to be appropriated by middle-class whites (Savran 121-122). His sneer while mouthing these words expresses the cynicism that had become of the hope represented by the Woodstock happening as well as his position against the counter-culture and its pacifist message, instead embodying the privileged individual fighting to remain that way as a wounded white male victim.

Racial isolation is also cultural isolation, and Neville's lonely existence stands in contrast to the reality of inner-city life, since "blacks living in the heart of the ghetto are among the most isolated people on earth" (Massey 77).<sup>130</sup> The infected Family are depicted as freaks like the hippies in the *Woodstock* film, including their androgyny, as they all dress alike; Neville, on the other hand, is still a "real man." As Sully observes, "the last man is never the last Frenchman, nor the last German; rather, the distinctive condition of the genre assumes a capacity to imagine plot and character at the scale of species" (102-103). He is the last human imagined as a white man. Neville's struggle to remain a "pure" and independent man imagines the national struggle over purity and individualism and the threat of contamination, sickness, and weakness for this body politic threatened by melanated people. In his study of military masculinity, *From Chivalry to Terrorism* (2003), Leo Braudy observes how "individual corruption and national decadence" are often equated as national crises, and that, "like people, societies [are thought to be able to] sicken

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<sup>130</sup> This is exacerbated in LA because it had a small black population until 1940, and it rose by eight hundred percent "from 75,000-600,000" after the war (Avila 89). It continued as the city saw an influx of immigration from the south. "In the largest Latino barrio in the United States . . . the *poorest* Hispanics were less segregated than *the most affluent* blacks" (Massey 87).

and die” when contaminated (326).

Toni Morrison notes that, in our national imagination, “average” Americans are white skinned (5). The consistent disavowal of this image of a white national subject demonstrates that the idea of “racelessness” is itself a “racial act” performed by those always already privileged by racialization as unmarked universal subjects, like Sarah in *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil* (Morrison 46). Thus, the concept of “integration” means different things to black people and white people (Massey 93). For the ideology of whiteness, integration results in an assault on the purity concept. The ideology of color-blindness also belies the fact that, when black people move into a neighborhood, the property values drop (Massey 94).<sup>131</sup> Unlike in the novel, where he is shown to be the real monster of the horror story and dies only to continue as a horrible legend, Neville in *Omega Man* is posited as the pure standard for all humanity, acting as a symbol of individuality, but, as Kimmel asserts, “power is an expression of the distribution of rewards and resources in a society; as such it is the property of *groups*, not individuals” (365, emphasis mine). Neville would not be able to position himself as a “real man” without a figure against which to measure and indicate his superior “real” purity and individuality like the Family, and he relies for this continuing status on his “tools that destroyed the world,” the props for his

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<sup>131</sup> This trend is largely driven by the belief that, rather than neglect by property owners or poverty, black people allow their homes to fall apart and that, rather than poverty and hopelessness leading to crime, they are inherently prone to violence (Massey 95). Also, “black entry leads to neighborhood racial turnover not simply because of the interaction of white and black preferences but because the model implicitly assumes a racially segmented housing market maintained by discrimination” (Massey 97). Not only real estate agents, but banks also participate in discrimination based on racial attributes (Massey 105). Many black people have grown accustomed to this situation, expecting it and therefore not trying to find a new home (Massey 109). Racial segregation results in “some whites [being] better off and all blacks [being] worse off” (Massey 122). It “undermines the ability of blacks to advance their interests because it provides ethnic whites with no immediate self-interest in their welfare” (Massey 160).

masculine masquerade.

As Matthias says, Neville has many “cars, guns, and gimmicks” at his disposal. Los Angeles offers itself to Neville’s needs and desires as his own limitless resource. He treats the city as a place of “unfettered consumption” (Sully 99). When his red convertible blows a tire, he simply chooses a new luxury vehicle. The script for this scene reads:

NEVILLE

There was a Mercedes agency on Sunset. Or was it Wilshire?

MED. LONG SHOT - NEVILLE WALKING

Ahead is the agency. Windows are broken. A 230SL convertible sits in the showroom. Neville walks through the broken window, walks around car.

NEVILLE

The color's not right, but ... how long did you say it takes to get a new one from Germany...?

He walks to another car.

NEVILLE

How about this one? One careful Pasadena driver in tennis shoes? What's her phone number?

He banters with an imaginary car salesman as a man-about-town. He wears designer clothing and, to while away the long nights, plays chess against a black bust of Julius Caesar on whose head he has perched his old military hat while himself wearing a green velour smoking jacket and looking like Hugh Hefner. In *Manhood in America*, Kimmel notes that, “in the *Playboy* philosophy sexually alluring and available women were the reward for adventurous masculine consumerism,” making such available women, as opposed to wives and mothers, another toy with which the boy can play and display as an act of conspicuous consumption (254). Neville soon acquires such a toy when he meets Lisa (Rosalind Cash), a beautiful black woman in the mode of the action film “macho goddess” that, as Yvonne Tasker observes, depicts such a woman as having an “animal” sexuality (21). She also becomes an audience for Neville’s performance of masculine

mastery and a victim for him to save.

Neville's rejection of the idea of "family," and, by way of this, his rejection of communal familial belonging in order to maintain the illusion of autonomy and individual agency remains one of the central differences between the previous versions of this narrative and *The Omega Man*. This was the stance of Playboy masculinity, and it needed women to prove that this was not a queer subjectivity, but instead a kind of viable heterosexual economic masculinity. Unlike the previous versions, both novel and film, which dwell at length on his grief for his lost wife and daughter, (as well, in the case of the novel, on his forced celibacy) *Omega Man* instead barely mentions the previous existence of Neville's family, and then rapidly replaces them with a black girlfriend and her younger brother (Eric Laneville), an ersatz urban family with a white middle-class patriarch. But Lisa serves more as his Playboy Bunny than as his wife.

When Neville "goes shopping" for new clothing, he meets Lisa, and, in a quotation of *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*, she runs from him. Later, after rescuing him from being burned alive by the Family, she takes him home, and they sleep together. The audience is treated to her nude body for no diegetic reason, but this nudity serves the function of displaying her as a sexual object, proving Neville's status as virile man-about-town. Significantly, also echoing *The World, the Flesh and the Devil*, he first mistakes her for a mannequin. The script emphasizes how much this scene centers around his masculine gaze. The film cuts to close shots of mannequins throughout the scene that seem to be watching him, including shots from a mannequin's point of view. After establishing this *mise-en-scène*, the script reads:

CLOSE SHOT - NEVILLE'S FACE

He has stopped in relatively light portion of store. He is looking up, face filled almost with reverence.

MED. UP ANGLE SHOT - FEMALE MANIKIN [sic]

This manikin wears a very brief bikini. She is remarkably life-like. Her hips jut forward provocatively, her eyes point down toward Neville, and her long brown hair falls about her tanned shoulders. She wears the smallest of smiles.

MED. SHOT - NEVILLE LOOKING UP AT MANIKIN

This SHOT is past the head and shoulder of another manikin across the aisle from where Neville stands.

It is as if his moment of passion and remembrance is overseen.

The sequence alludes to both Neville's and the viewer's desiring gaze, and the mannequin becomes a sexual object for this gaze, but his being "overseen" critiques this gaze, implicating both he and the film viewer in a sexual politics that devalues women's agency. This sets up both Neville and viewer for the introduction of Lisa's character as just such an object for the gaze and another toy for his home. When she darts away, and Neville gives chase, the script calls for a shot of him "through a group of male manikins, well dressed, grinning at Neville as he runs." Thus he is approved in his sexual mastery by the idea of other men, by the system of patriarchy as such. Neville's ability to replace his previous family and become protector of a new one, although he fails in this regard with Richie, indicates his privileged status as well as the fact that *who* his family is matters less than his place as its protector and provider as proof of his rugged manhood.<sup>132</sup>

*The Omega Man* attempts to work out what kind of culture we can have in a future without consumer capitalism and patriarchal authority by positing the opposing vision of technoculture represented by the rhetoric of Matthias in the deterritorialized space of Los

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<sup>132</sup> Yeates argues that Neville is a figuration of "the insecurity of postwar masculinity" that "seeks to dominate women at any opportunity" (417).

Angeles. The film evinces concern for population crisis with its depiction of the Family as a cautionary retrogression from capitalism, practiced by counter-cultural communes throughout the country at the time. The film deals with the infected much more than the previous adaptation, which spends almost half of the screen time in an extended flashback that explains the course of the disease and Morgan's failure as a father to protect his family from it. *The Omega Man*, in treating population as both in decline and in uncontrolled riot, makes the distinction between the right *kind* of population that needs to be preserved and the wrong kind that needs to perish, utilizing the apocalyptic trope of a logic of fitness.<sup>133</sup> Sully notes that the discourse of population growth as a problem in the early sixties became by the seventies an "overriding emphasis on the differential *decline* of a genetically 'fit' population" (88). He argues that population crisis films like this involve a new imagination of a global population coupled with a new environmental consciousness of the effects of capitalist industry (Sully 91). Significantly, this film registers dual concerns about population, "the specifically (white) American anxieties about the racialization of urban space, conjured by the siege of the last, *white* man in his townhouse and, on the other, the insurgence of a figural Third World" through its depictions of both the survivor children and the revolutionary tactics and rhetoric of the Family (Sully 106). The multi-racial children also allude to the new wave of immigrants entering America during the decade

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<sup>133</sup> Sully writes, "By the 1970s, a discourse of crisis focusing on population dynamics had already undergone a series of transformations. What appears as the threat of a global population bomb in the popular culture at the very end of the 1960s builds upon a discourse of disaster that had been shaped and reshaped, over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in relation to the concentration of urban populations, wage labor, and the development of statistical management and medical rationalities of reproduction" (88).

that, for the first time in the country's history, were mostly Asian and Latin American and not white Europeans. The oil crisis, inflation, and unemployment also shape this anxiety about population explosion in the popular culture produced during the decade.<sup>134</sup>

Neville uses a system of closed-circuit television cameras to surveil his residence, another luxury commodity similar to that used in suburban gated neighborhoods to police which kinds of bodies are allowed to enter the space, demarcating his individual private realm from that of the public Family, defining inside opposed to outside. In this situation, as the Family gathers around his fortress at night to chant his name, Neville has become hyper-visible in his social position; this figuration of this visibility as victimization “contains a recognition that white masculinity can never recapture the invisibility upon which its normative power has rested” (Robinson *Marked Men* 39). His use of an infrared telescopic sight on a rifle serves as another surveillance technology that extends and enhances the power of his gaze and allows him to patrol the borders of his domain as he defends the boundaries of his identity, protecting not only his Playboy lifestyle, but also his laboratory and the rational episteme that gives him mastery over medical science, a skill ultimately used to make his blood into a vaccine to ward off this social disease. In this transaction, his body becomes the vehicle and technology that saves the future by producing the miraculous elixir, and his private body is sacrificed to save the body politic. He passes on his “fitness” to a new generation purified by his serum, but does this mean

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<sup>134</sup> Sully particularly points out the emergence of “what Marx calls the ‘relative surplus population’—in terms of both the rising unemployment (particularly in the United States) and the new specter of untapped planetary reserves of labor in ‘developing’ nations” (91). This surplus is figured in these films as dangerous or sick.

that he passes on his whiteness to them?

When he first meets the surviving children who are in the first stage of the disease, and therefore curable and the hope of a future for a humanity not transformed into the Family, Lisa says to an Asian boy manning a huge machine gun (Brian Tochi), "It's all right, Tommy. This is the Man.... I mean THE Man.... but he's tame." This line can be read in many ways. It operates as an appeal to the young people in the film's audience by using the jargon of the counter-culture and urban black culture. Heston's version of Neville is constructed to be appealing to both the older, conservative viewers his age as well as the younger, "hipper" viewers (Ransom 116). It could be a reference to his being the last, or omega, man, but Neville's status as a white affluent doctor and military colonel indicate that Lisa refers to the way that the phrase, "the Man" was used in Black Power discourse to indicate institutions of white supremacy. The fact that she considers him "tame" alludes to the pretence of his continuing mastery over a city he only ostensibly "owns." Nama notes this, as well as the use by Matthias of Black Power rhetoric in his speeches and the tactics of urban guerrilla warfare espoused by the Black Panthers, observing that, "in their condemnation of Neville, the mutants' rhetoric mirrors the Nation of Islam's extremist articulation of black nationalism," such as the repeated referral to Neville as a "devil" (48). That being said, Lisa's comment that "he's tame" also indicates the film's ambivalent position regarding the role of white men in society, racial integration, and the future of a "pure" human race.<sup>135</sup> As Martinot explains, racism is structured by ambiguity, confusion,

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<sup>135</sup> The script clearly indicates that the majority of the children survivors are white, but we only see a few of them in the film.



and paradox, “lost in unrecognizable multiplicities”; “the resulting unintelligibility of the concept—the reliance of individual actions on institutional meanings, and institutional actions on individual sentiments—is the secret of its tenacity” (10). The very unintelligibility of the concept enhances this tenacity and vice versa.

Using the scene in the movie theater, which does not appear in any of the other versions of the *I Am Legend* narratives, the film poses the question of what is “really important” and offers it to the audience while depicting the neo-Luddite communal Family as the wrong answer to the excesses of commodity culture and demonstrating the importance of the sacrifice that the older generation must make to allow the new one to thrive. The film poses older men, the fathers of the community, as a problem for society as well as the rebellious youth culture. On the one hand are violent men who decide who lives and who dies, Neville and Matthias, and on the other, young people who either follow such a man, as in the Family, or rebel against authority as in the young survivors in the hills. Neville’s authority relies on his social position and the technologies that prop him up, Matthias in his ability to tell stories. In his first speech about Neville, Matthias says that he has “nothing to live *for* but his memories. Nothing to live *with* but his gadgets, his cars, his guns, his gimmicks,” but when one of the Family, a black man named Zachary (Lincoln Kilpatrick), calls it a “honky paradise,” Matthias admonishes him to leave behind such old ideas, eliding the racial element of Neville’s privileged class position and indicating the way in which national politics ignores issues of racialization in its pursuit of a pretense of a “color blind” system of governance, one espoused by Nixon and made a cornerstone of Ronald Reagan’s domestic policies in the coming decade.

The script, however, is more ambivalent about its racial message; on two occasions Lisa calls Neville a “honk” and comments about how her brother, when he “crosses over,” which causes his skin to turn white, will “blow [Neville’s] mind.” She is quite aware of Neville’s status as “The Man” as well as the fact that a black boy turning white will upset the a priori assumptions his position as white man requires about whiteness. Heston’s star image was also recently associated with the issue of systemic racism in *Planet of the Apes*, making Matthias’s remark all the more significant. Nama argues that *Omega Man* evokes the practice of eugenics through the use of Neville’s “160 proof” Anglo-Saxon blood. By using his blood for a cure, the film positions “white” blood as a substance that prevents Richie from becoming one of the night people, who, with their dark sunglasses and black robes are coded as dangerous revolutionaries like the Black Panthers as well as religious fanatics and alluding to the mob violence of the Ku Klux Klan (Nama 49).<sup>136</sup>

After his death at the end of the film, speared in the side like Jesus Christ, Neville’s mantle as “the Man” is symbolically passed to the young man who rescues him from the Family’s clutches in the middle of the film and helps Lisa protect the children, Dutch (Paul Koslo), described thusly in the script:

He wears a leather jacket, a pair of pearl-handled .45 automatics on his hips. Saddlebags are staffed with grenades, a Thompson submachine gun, etc. Dutch also wears goggles, an old World War I style helmet, riding breeches and Jack-boots. His hair is long, and on the back of his jacket is painted the upraised red fist of revolution--with the middle finger extended. He is a tough cookie, but very bright indeed.

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<sup>136</sup> I have a great deal more to say about these costumes in the fourth chapter of this study.

We learn that he is a former medical student who not only knows of Neville's work on biowarfare, he intended to enter the field himself before the epidemic. Since the cataclysm, his priorities have changed. His use of weapons and a motorcycle demonstrate his usefulness as a soldier, or "tough cookie" like Neville, with action sequences showcasing his mastery over this masculine technology, but his jacket also adds a note of ambivalence to his portrayal as heroic man. Does his ascendancy to leader of what is left of humanity at the film's end indicate that he rejects white patriarchal authority and will now care for the children with Lisa as a post-familial kin-group, or does it just position him as a new white patriarch? Will he give up these props that provide him with individual agency to embrace a living-for-others in a community?

This version of Neville is not only of a different class status than previous versions, depicted through the change in location and display of luxury commodities, he is also more violent. In the novel and previous adaptation, the protagonist uses firearms only when raging against the infected, often in a drunken stupor. The other urban last man I examined in the first chapter, Ralph, first uses a gun only to make noise in search of other survivors, and he ultimately chooses to lay down his pistol during the duel that acts as the film's climax, demonstrating both his disgust with violence and the fact that he does not need to prove his manhood in such a fashion. He acts in defiance of stereotypes of black masculinity as animalistic and violent. In contrast, revealing the need to protect the privilege of his position in society, Heston's version of Neville seems just as interested in maintaining his bachelor lifestyle with his stockpile of weapons as any nobler purpose.

Like Dutch, Neville has many chances to assert his fitness against the diseased Family in action sequences where he mows them down with automatic weapons or a powerful rifle. Ransom argues that the film “downplays the systematic slaying sequences” in order to make him more heroic than the other versions of Neville (105). This is in keeping with how action heroes are usually portrayed; such films do not dwell on the consequences of the hero’s violent actions. As an immunologist, his body remains inviolate (until the end when it is penetrated by the spear), and his figure acts as a cultural inoculation for the ideological threat represented by the Family, including not only a loss of commoditized luxury but also individual agency. These are so linked in late capitalism as to be inseparable since a modern subject asserts their individuality through conspicuous consumption of commodities as a form of self-fashioning, a self-making through consumption that certifies class status. Dutch acts as a gesture away from such forms of middle-class masculinity and towards an embrace of white working-class machismo, an incessant theme throughout 1970s film.<sup>137</sup>

The film, by making the Family hyper-white (a thorough albinism affecting skin, hair, and eyes), renders Neville’s whiteness that much more visible as a social marking, linking this to his privileged individuality. Harry Brod argues that “individuality” and the autonomy that it implies is neither a “natural right, nor is it an accurate assessment of [subjects] and their world, but it rather is a *mark* of their privilege and the blindness to broader social contexts that privilege tends to produce” (174, emphasis mine). In the

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<sup>137</sup> See Nystrom, *Hard Hats, Rednecks, and Macho Men* (2009).

rhetoric of the Family, who “will cleanse the world,” Neville is *impure* because he lacks “the marks” that identify the Family and make them all look alike; “he is obsolete,” “discarded” by history because he is now, like Heston’s character in *Planet of the Apes*, a racialized minority and not the invisible standard for the human subject.<sup>138</sup> The marks that make them look alike unify them in the same way that the concept of whiteness acts as a unifying principle for white supremacy. The Family rejects the episteme that structures Neville’s search for a cure (figured as light, enlightenment, which hurts their eyes, a reference to the blindness of ideological fanaticism as well as the fact that such faith is not rational but affective), defining a scientist as “a man who understood nothing until there was nothing left to understand,” and by doing so they also reject the episteme of Eurocentrism and the instrumental reasoning that subtends white supremacy and racial antagonisms in American society. But the film paints this as reactionary and regressive. Watching in a mix of medium and long shots the procession to Neville’s execution after the Family has captured him is reminiscent of attending an *auto de fe* (Ransom 110).

Far from being a hero, Neville is portrayed by Matthias as a predator who hunts and kills *them*, clouding his defiant victimhood. Richie even tells him, “You’re hostile, you just don’t belong. At times you scare me even more than Matthias.” When Neville calls them “barbarians,” Matthias agrees with him and adds that they “mean to *cancel*

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<sup>138</sup> In this previous overtly racially charged film, Heston’s character, mute for a portion of the film from an injury, is treated like all the other humans who are genetically mute as a savage animal and a scientific test subject. The film demonstrates the historical cultural construction of racial hierarchies by positioning a white man as a subjugated minority, and, when he does regain his voice, Heston’s outraged character famously yells, “Get your filthy hands off of me you goddamn hairy ape!” to emphasize how this new social position has not changed the privileged status of his identity in his mind, a social position he considers cleaner than that of the apes, alluding to the fear of contamination and the purity concept subtending racialization. The fact that Heston is himself quite hirsute only adds to the irony of his insult.

civilization.” Neville is told that, “outside of the Family there is nothing at all.” Moya and Lopez argue that “these films have often been read as spiritual allegories that explore contemporary nihilism and the general loss of belief in the possibility of social and collective progress, in the face of which the only hope lies in single individuals and their moral purpose” (n.p.). In this film, nihilism has reached the idea of family as “home” or center of society, and Matthias is depicted as a bad father for his new family because he rejects the modern episteme. Significantly, he was a news anchor before the epidemic and continues to spread “the news,” telling stories that make sense of this strange new world. He and Neville are both following scripts, and both consider themselves the only hope for the future, but they are both wrong. In the previous versions of the story, Neville’s adversary was his neighbor Ben, and the survivors of the disease who have become posthuman kill him at the end to stop him from slaughtering them while they sleep. In these versions, Neville becomes a legend, but one of a very monstrous kind. For this film, however, as a Charlton Heston project at the beginning of the decade of the 1970s, Neville is transformed from monster into savior, and through this redemption, the middle-class white man that he represents is also redeemed even if only because, as Ransom asserts, he “dies for the sins of the white man and the flawed civilization he had built,” allowing Dutch to “start over” like the endings as beginnings of *Five, Day the World Ended*, and *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*.

Called “The Man,” Neville represents that figure as a doomed subject position even while his performance demonstrates it as necessary to produce the future. When he discovers the existence of children living outside of the city, he remarks, “I didn’t know

there were any left.” They don’t understand why he remains in the urban blight. When they suggest that he at least move to a tower for more *visibility*, he explains that he will not be forced to leave his own *home*. Ownership and property rights are more important to him than safety. As representative of what is left of America, he reveals how nations must be (re)produced, and that owning property is a form of citizenship, indicating that “whiteness and property share a common premise . . . of a right to exclude” (Weinbaum quoting Cheryl Harris 21). This film treats whiteness as a property in all senses of that word. Ransom notes that his line about his Anglo-Saxon blood occurs while he is giving Richie a transfusion of it as a way “to ward off any potential contamination that might pass back” to him (118). Although his blood ultimately saves the youth representing the future, he is unable to preserve the sanctity of his home or his body. Significantly, when the transfusion works, Richie’s skin *darkens* once more, perhaps alluding to blackness as standard rather than whiteness and the possibility of a post-white future (Ransom 130). The future no longer needs Neville or the concept of whiteness; they are both obsolete. Sully observes in such sentiment “Antonio Gramsci’s famous dictum that ‘the crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born’ appears strikingly relevant” (109). Conforming to Faludi’s idea of generational betrayal, the film states that the future should be left to the children because the fathers have made a mess of the present, but these children can only exist in the future by way of Neville’s sacrifice; the fathers must step aside and enable to future to be born or, as Gramsci warns, history will produce monsters.

By posing the question of “what really matters,” the film demonstrates that “global catastrophe has brought our known world to ruins, we have come to the end of our nations,

our cultures, and our identities, and so humanity needs to reinvent itself” (Moya and Lopez). This reinvention involves reimagining and reproducing a social system beyond the family and blood-relation. The film conflates racial liberation with a Luddite anti-capitalism that gestures back to medievalism as the wrong answer to the problems of late capitalism.<sup>139</sup> But, in the figure of Dutch, a younger version of Neville, this reinvention could possibly be a mere reproduction of the existing white male hegemony. DiPiero notes that this period saw the erosion of the authority of dead white men, replaced with the figure of the angry white man, reacting in often violent ways to the erosion of white patriarchal dominance (1). The figure of Neville in this film, with its mirror image in Matthias, indicates this shift in cultural discourse. Not only that, but the discourse about reproduction and the survival of a “pure” humanity evinces the social Darwinian discourse of “survival of the fittest,” so that, even though Neville dies, he is indeed *not* the last man on Earth.

Thus, Neville’s “pure Anglo-Saxon” blood ensures that the children will survive as human and not albino mutants like the Family, paradoxically removing whiteness as a standard for humanity, and it leaves open the question of what counts as a “family.”<sup>140</sup> By doing so, it disarticulates biological reproduction from reproduction of the socius. What it makes clear is that the city is no place for the “right” kind of society. Cities, as places once

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<sup>139</sup> Osgerby notes that “In popular accounts of the period’s various forms of working-class collective action, the political valence of these activities was insistently blurred, as racist backlash and rank-and-file racialism were equated as like expressions of working class ‘anger and bewilderment’ at rapid social change” (37). The Family, in this rhetoric, serves as a figuration of this gloss of class revolt, resisting the figuration of working-class people as racist, while simultaneously figuring it as reactionary in response to social change.

<sup>140</sup> Robinson notes that such discourses “tend to become popular in eras of critical social change, substituting nature for culture” (*Marked Men* 237).



thought of as more sanitary than the country because they are centers of industry are revealed as dangerous and dirty when industry and labor cease along with the myth of progress. Katherine Shonfield, in her book *Walls have Feelings* (2000), argues that our relationship to cities is largely fictional, and “the notion of a *fiction* modifies the universality and truth implied in both the idea of pollution taboo, and in the notion that human affairs are ultimately driven by economics” (161). By leaving the city, the children leave behind the fiction of the capitalist ethic of production as well as the logic of contamination that structures racial segregation in urban environments. In the dominant fiction presented by *The Omega Man*, a racialized gendered superiority is depicted as a cure for social unrest, simplifying and eliding the economic inequality that subtends racial segregation and urban blight, the fact that economic reality is driven by economic rhetoric. Like previous post-apocalypse film, the future is agrarian rather than urban, and labor power is used for the common good rather than individual profit. As an action movie, although the film seems to take a stance against war, it does not do so against violence. The survivors abandon the city to the contaminated Family, who will eventually die, and escape into the hills, saved by an angry white man, demonstrating the necessity of white men to secure the future through violence but also by abdicating their place in society.

Since then, however, Heston has been instrumental in stoking the anxiety that this abdication causes in many white men. In *Angry White Men*, Kimmel quotes the aging actor from one of his speeches given during the 1990s, noting that Heston, was “less like Moses and more like an angry Pharaoh, feeling powerless as he watches his slaves disappear: ‘Heaven help the God-fearing, law-abiding Caucasian middle class, Protestant or even

worse evangelical Christian, Midwest or Southern or even worse rural, apparently straight . . . male working stiff” (46). The words could have just have easily been said by Robert Neville in *The Omega Man*.

### **The End of Warfare and Transformation of Masculine Agency: Escape from New York**

*The experience of living in the modern city is so disjunctive that the habitual deciphering of everyday life, which we all do, can be described as the fictional imagination’s attempt to describe a pattern.* (Shonfield 160)

*By using the term “heterosexualizing” I do not mean to suggest that these narratives, in any simple, unmediated way, produce the heterosexual desire within which particular subjects locate their specific erotic investments; rather, I argue that these narratives produce heterosexuality as the dominant mode of ideological self-recognition for heterosexual and nonheterosexual subjects alike. They set forth the logic that enables the subject to imagine its own reality, affording a social trajectory that polices the possibilities of alternative experiences, by establishing a narrative template that articulates reality as the arena for a mandatory movement toward the subject’s “realization,” a movement that both presupposes and procures a fundamental allegiance to futurity.* (Edelman 175-176)

The problem of reproducing the right kind of social subject as a production of the future becomes an explicit family affair in *The Ultimate Warrior*. One of the aberrant behaviors of the counter-culture represented by the Family most disturbing to many “normal” Americans was a reimagining of family outside of blood-relations as an extended, voluntary kin-group, and, according to Hester, “kin making, over and against baby making, makes sense when understood as a means of prioritizing the generation of new kinds of support networks, instead of the unthinking replication of the same” that is the heteronormativity outlined by Lee Edelman above (63). During the 1970s, the plight of the ideal nuclear family became the subject of a discourse of national crisis. Kaja Silverman, in *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (1992), observes that the dominant fiction also known

as hegemonic ideology does not just interpellate *subjects* in the Althusserian manner into appropriate class and social positions, but it also produces a *national* “reality” in which these subjects fit, the background for such a position to have meaning and function within society (41). And, as Edelman outlines, this production of reality relies on a concept of producing the future, which is imbricated with the necessity of reproduction. Hence, as he explains above, heterosexualizing ideology reproduces the same, reproducing hegemonic social reality by defining the logic by which it operates.

This is why “family values” become a major rhetorical straw man for conservative candidates and pundits during the 1970s; not because the “family” was being threatened, but because it was being reimagined, threatening the dominant fiction of what a family was supposed to look like. Silverman argues that “the family provides the dominant fiction with its primary image of unity” (75). The family territorializes a subject’s body by locating it in a schema, and the patriarchal model of familiarity makes this scheme a hierarchy, an asymmetric relation that grants men more power.<sup>141</sup> The argument over the structure of the family is also about the reproduction of a dominant fiction of the imagined community of the nation, one that keeps white men at the center and top of the ideal family (a family imagined as white) through control over reproduction and thereby control over the future, one that guarantees the unity of society and grants it meaning through a hegemonic dominant fiction. This symbolic capital then ensures that men control women as the

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<sup>141</sup> And, as Edelman argues, this centrality of heteronormativity as the only thing that can provide not only the future, but also meaning for the subject, an identity as such, makes it the arbiter of *meaning as the arbiter of the social*. Any threat to this structure becomes a threat to the entire episteme of society and the meaning of sociality itself (Edelman 139).

technology for reproducing the “correct” national subjects. Expressing this anxiety about the family structure, *The Ultimate Warrior* depicts the failure of white urban fathers to serve this unifying function as their role becomes obsolete when faced with an uncertain and dangerous world where there is no symbolic patriarchal authority, law, or structure, only dominance via violence and the threat of violence, making explicit that patriarchal law is always already predicated on such violent dominance, naturalized by the system of gender opposition. Like the previous narratives canvassed in this study, it is invested in a logic of fitness, but unlike the others, it recognizes that violence no longer fits our developing imagination of a future America in the 1970s. It demonstrates the shift in masculine discourse that began to critique this dominance and celebrate a kinder, more caring form of manhood. Importantly, it tracks the transformation of a violent man into a caring one, from a man invested in his autonomy and individual agency to one who lives for others.<sup>142</sup>

The use of “ultimate” in the title refers, like that of “omega” in the previous film, to the “last” warrior, but unlike “omega,” it carries with it the connotation of “best” as well. In the film, masculinity is depicted as a dangerous technology of dominance rather than how it is imagined in the dominant fiction that makes it a technology for reproducing the national order. This ultimate warrior saves the future from such dominant masculinity with its totalitarian privilege by giving up violence as his mode of masculine utility, his warrior

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<sup>142</sup> Okin makes the succinct point that the logic of “owning” yourself as a possession espoused by Locke and Rousseau fails when one considers two things: “First, persons are not only producers but also the *products* of human labor and human capacities. . . . Second, the natural ability to produce people is extremely unequally distributed among human beings” resulting in the exploitation of those bodies in the patriarchal family structure (79). It is an exploitation of their “labor power,” which is to say, their “potential to produce” (Virno 81)

status, and instead becoming a nurturing father figure at film's end, but this transformation is only accomplished through his dismemberment as he endures self-inflicted punishment, and the survivors escape from the lack of futurity figured as urban blight in New York to, as with many of the films I have examined, return to an agrarian rural life. In this way, the film treats the city not as an icon of civilization, but one of brutality and lawlessness, and it reimagines a model of fatherhood divergent from the hegemonic standard, one that is not emasculated by the domesticity of child-rearing or the lack of a valiant violent quest to prove his virility. As a possible reimagining of the family structure as well as manhood, this last warrior is not the biological father of the child, but assumes the role of protector and care-giver out of his duty to her father, making of her, like so many women in masculinist fiction, a token of exchange and an object of value, the precious cargo that produces the future. The film could have been accurately named *The Ultimate Father*. Although it troubles hegemonic figurations of fatherhood, the film still cannot find a way out of a future structured by a patriarchal order.<sup>143</sup>

In *The Ultimate Warrior*'s urban apocalypse, private property is a thing of the past. New York is divided between opposing social orders that do not respect individual property rights. On the one hand, we see violent men who dominate the streets in gangs resembling a primal horde, over which leadership is determined by size, strength, martial prowess, and brutality. They take what they want because violence entitles them to it. This figures the

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<sup>143</sup> Edelman would argue that the film's investment in a child as emblem of the future causes the film to posit a patriarchal heterosexual structure for the future even while this structure evokes a symptomatic queer resistance to this futurity (66). The film complicates such easy reading with its insistence in a biological future that does not need humanity in the figure of the seeds that Carson also saves from the city, thereby disarticulating biological reproduction from social reproduction.

violence that enables capitalist enclosure elided by neoliberal rhetoric. Harvey explains, “The main substantive achievement of neoliberalization . . . has been to redistribute, rather than to generate, wealth and income” (159). It does not produce, it encloses what was once common. What he calls “accumulation by dispossession” is exactly how these gangs of men operate. The film ends with an image of “the forceful expulsion of peasant populations” when the commune of survivors is overrun by the most dominant gang (Harvey 159). Extending this metaphor of neoliberalization, the lawlessness of the city can be read as the ultimate deregulation of the market to the point where there is no market, just competition.

A peaceful commune sheltered behind barricades resembling those of the Paris Commune practices a form of participatory democracy and shares commodities for the common good in contrast to the gangs of violent men. However, this community is shown to be too weak to defend itself from the bands of marauders; they need a man who knows how to fight like the gangs do.<sup>144</sup> In his book *Male Matters* (1996), Calvin Thomas observes that “being an absolute master would mean being what death is—the agency of the death of others” (191). Likewise, a truly mastering agent would also defy death by choosing the time and manner of their own, a sentiment that will occur later in this study in its examination of road warriors. The commune entices a warrior (a master of death) named Carson (Brynnner) to aid them by providing him with privileged status in the community in distinction to their communal egalitarian values. Brynnner essentially reprises his role from

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<sup>144</sup> This can be read as an allegory of the national discourse about the waning of America’s international power during the decade, for which pundits blamed the effete elite intellectual liberals in government. Nixon wrote a book about it that blames the decline on President Carter’s “weakness.”

*The Magnificent Seven* to play this warrior, but this time he cannot save the community from the barbarians at the gate as his sacrifice in the previous film accomplished. Again, as with the Family in *Omega Man*, the film presents a communal system which is really a patriarchal hierarchy because they rely on the wisdom and knowledge of Baron (Max von Sydow) and the capacity for violence of Carson who both then have privileged status, and it fails due to the “weakness” of this father figure, and the people reject the older white man’s authority and privilege.

This film acts as an articulation of the oil crisis of the mid-1970s as well as the labor strikes by truckers that threatened to shut down national commerce. It begins with a long shot of New York through weeds with a rusty abandoned rail car in the foreground, giving the year as 2012 as text overlaying the shot. This dissolves to a medium shot of a street with no traffic filled with piles of refuse and the burnt-out hull of an automobile. More dissolves show other parts of the city and its empty streets in similar still shots while ominous music builds, culminating in a long shot of a half-demolished derelict building. Much of these images are merely photographs of the actual urban decay happening in the city at the time of the film’s production as city officials, facing economic crisis and under the duress of banks, cut back spending on infrastructure and social services (Harvey 45). This is apocalypse now.

Following this opening sequence, the narrative establishes an urban food chain. The film cuts to a close shot of pigeons, cooing and defenseless, and the music changes to a soft organ melody. These birds are emblematic of being at the mercy of predatory men. Such a man intrudes into the shot and chases them, putting the birds in a bag as the music

gains in tempo; his dirty unshaven face and torn clothing mark him as underclass, desperate, and he and his bearded friend with even wilder hair continue to collect their meal until the bearded man is shot with a crossbow bolt. A fight ensues, during which the other man is stabbed. Violence is established as the new norm replacing the symbolic exchange of money, and competing for resources the ordinary relation between men.

The film then cuts to an idyllic rooftop garden with Baron, groomed and dressed in clean clothing, ascending to his watchtower, where he surveys the neighborhood with powerful binoculars, much like the way Neville did with his telescope. He is indicated as of higher class through dress, the casting of Sydow, known for playing Jesus in *The Greatest Story Ever Told* and Father Merrin in *The Exorcist* (1973, William Friedkin), and his ability to look down on the city and survey the environs with his mastering gaze from a position of authority, a privileged view of the city. The film cuts to his point of view, watching the gang we just witnessed taking food from the murdered men leaving the building with their loot in overhead long shot. This shot juxtaposes these brutal men with Baron's "free" peaceful commune supposedly ruled by democracy.<sup>145</sup> We later learn that the utopian community structures itself around the ethic that they "do not covet the lives or goods of any people"; they do not dominate or destroy, they reproduce and grow. This is an other-directed community opposed to the self-directed ethos of the violent gangs of

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<sup>145</sup> Baron later mentions to Carson that his moniker does not make him aristocracy, but he does wield power in the community through his mastery of words (rhetoric) and epistemic privilege and is given status over the others.



men and the self-centered ethos of neoliberalism.<sup>146</sup> The film treats urban crisis as cultural crisis, but, as Harvey reminds us by citing Gramsci, “political problems become ‘insoluble’ when ‘disguised as cultural ones’” (39).<sup>147</sup> This is an articulation of a national crisis since “nationhood . . . involves a distinctive imagining of a particular sort of community rooted in a particular sort of place” (Billig 74).

The normality of violence established and positioned as an insoluble cultural problem (similar to current discourse on “toxic masculinity” involving a few “bad apples” that need to have their behavior policed rather than a system of entitlement inherent within masculinity that makes it harmful for others), the film introduces this “ultimate” warrior from this perspective of Baron’s surveillance. His enhanced gaze that the audience shares in a point-of-view shot falls on an exotic, shirtless man standing atop the carcass of an automobile, motionless. A man with Baron tells him that the shirtless man has been standing there for two days, on display. One cannot after all be a self-made man and autonomous when also anonymous (Kimmel *MiA* 82). Manhood is proven to others, it is a masquerade for the benefit of society. Cohan explains that “gender is performative . . . because it ‘enacts or produces that which it names’ . . . and in the process ‘regulates and constrains’ the object of its production” (xv, citing Butler). Significantly, we later learn

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<sup>146</sup> This structuring of a society around reproductive futurism, as Edelman points out, is not liberating, but one in which the children and the future they represent are produced in the interests of heteronormative society, not the individual subjects of the socius (53).

<sup>147</sup> This depoliticizes the problem or rather hides the political rhetoric. “Ethnic groups do not so much fight about culture as they fight with culture. Of course, not all ethnicity is violent, but it is all competitive. Ethnicity only applies when two or more groups exist and compete in a shared social context. In such situations, though, groups do not struggle or conflict over culture but in the name of or under the banner of culture (Eller 234).

that this man is from Detroit, one of the cities previously central to US industry suffering the most from deindustrialization and flexible accumulation during the 1970s and continuing to today.<sup>148</sup> The combination of these signs, his immobility on top of a derelict car and his origin in the “rust belt” point to this figure as an icon of an obsolescent, surplus labor population as well as a member of a diminishing working-class who in this decade had to find employment in the service industry or go hungry. He represents the “silent majority” who has been left to fend for themselves in popular rhetoric from the New Right. His status as warrior then accommodates his status as wage laborer since such a position is often considered emasculating because a man must become dependent on his employer, losing autonomy (Kimmel 84). In a gesture that complicates and problematizes the position of these men as autonomous self-reliant agents, the film instead shows how even the best warrior needs others to provide food and shelter, that humans are interdependent and not atomized self-contained agents. In economic terms that means that he must sell his ability to violently dominate others, submitting to the mandates of social groups, limiting the scope of his freedom, but he still chooses who to serve as a kind of mercenary free agent, the neoliberal subject *par excellence*.<sup>149</sup>

As a product of and producer of violence, this figure, when considered in the context of a national dominant fiction, enacts an ambivalent discourse of danger and necessity, and the status that this brings him in the community proves to be precarious and

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<sup>148</sup> I direct the reader’s attention to Sugrue’s *The Origins of the Urban Crisis* for details on this matter.

<sup>149</sup> Harvey notes that “values of individual freedom and social justice are not . . . necessarily compatible” (41). He adds that “neoliberal theory conveniently holds that unemployment is voluntary” (53).

under constant threat, unprotected by the liberal elite represented by Baron. Whereas *The Omega Man* depicts intellectuals as a contagious social disease through the figure of Matthias or as an emasculated ineffective form of manhood in the case of the *Woodstock* scene or the men of the future in *World Without End*, *The Ultimate Warrior* depicts Baron as an elite, educated, benevolent, gentle father figure who is past his ability to lead in this new world where his privileged status no longer affords authority. He is yet another aged patriarch who must give up the reigns of society to a newer generation, but this future is not represented by Carson, who is hardly younger than him, but the unborn child carried by his daughter, Melinda (Joanna Miles); Baron must sacrifice himself to ensure a reproductive future.

As a maneuver in the “culture wars” then, the film seems to argue for the rhetoric of peace through strength espoused by the New Right as well as the effectiveness of the free agent of neoliberalism, but the film’s ending remains ambiguous in its stance on violent masculinity as necessary for reproducing social order (Robinson *Marked Men* 202).<sup>150</sup> That being said, it also depicts women and racialized others as always already subordinated subjects either in need of protection as victims or being exploited by the gangs of angry white men, and the necessity of this martial class cements a division of labor that requires domestic chores to be the territory of such subordinate people, rendering them into a domestic quotidian technology used by violent men to enable their continued dominance. This situation demonstrates the way that, as Silvia Federici observes in *Caliban and the*

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<sup>150</sup> This same ambivalence can be seen in the results of the presidential election the next year when Jimmy Carter, a pacifistic patriarch like Baron, won the race.

*Witch* (2004), our capitalist society “does not recognize the production and reproduction of the worker as a social-economic activity and a source of capital accumulation, but mystifies it instead as a natural resource or a personal service, while profiting from the wageless condition of the labor involved” (8). As in the previous films I have examined, women, when positioned by apocalyptic thinking, become valuable for their ability to make babies and the cementing of the bond between men through their exchange value as producer of labor power. These films are mired in the notion of separate gendered and racialized domains.

Carson offers himself as an agent for hire in the agora, just like the many men who were beginning to see their situation in the American workforce in similar terms due to neoliberal logic. Brynner often portrayed such erotically-charged, scantily dressed characters whose resolute emotionless masculinity proved superior to those around him in its ruthless efficiency, including his recent appearance before this role as a murderous android in *Westworld* (1974, Michael Crichton), another violent agent of death.<sup>151</sup> “Has he had any offers?” asks Baron after seeing him on display. “We need that man,” says Baron, indicating that the community lacks such men, consisting instead of passive men unable or unwilling to put their own bodies at risk and to harm others.

The next scene shows Baron discussing the garden with its caretaker, Kal (Richard Kelton). The plants are “coming back” because they are of “good stock.” While leaving

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<sup>151</sup> Looking at his career, one could argue that Brynner himself was a violent commodity, and the portrayal of the gunslinger android, as a reference to his character, Chris, in *Magnificent Seven*, represents the return of the repressed. The robot rejects its status as entertainment commodity and instead attacks the people who objectify it.

the rooftop and descending stairs, Baron suffers from some sort of attack, the camera watching in medium-shot as he clutches his chest and leans against the wall while grimacing in pain, indicating that he is not such “good stock.” His weakness is contrasted with the resolute virility of Carson. Indeed, his association with the garden reinforces this. Yeates uses the work of Abraham Akkerman to investigate the gendered spaces of the city, noting that “the Western city, or citadel, is deeply rooted in the masculine myth, so much so that the two have long informed each other. Femininity, on the other hand, is commonly associated with the opposite space, the garden, with its connotations of fertility and motherhood” (419). Thus, Baron is feminized in his garden compared to this warrior. The film then begins a study of the need to cultivate “good stock,” with Melinda as a vehicle for bearing such stock to a place where it can thrive, a place outside of the dangerous city. But this opens the possibility that the child will be raised in a verdant space not structured by masculinity in the way that the city is. Unlike in the previous films I have canvassed, where the intellectual character from the professional/managerial class learns physical working-class masculine values and behavior, the intellectuals in this film, Baron and Kal (father of Melinda’s child) die inglorious deaths at the hands of violent men. Baron is not fit enough for the future, and hires the warrior to ensure that his progeny will continue after he passes, much like the activities of Neville in saving the children. This film, in keeping with apocalyptic thinking, uses a discourse of “fitness” or “health” to demarcate the proper subject to populate the future.

The presentation of Baron’s meeting with this mysterious warrior reinforces the masculinist rhetoric of fitness. The camera reveals Brynner from behind in a close shot that

tilts down his body, slowly showing his scarred bald head and bare torso, his sheathed knife at the small of his back, and his black jeans and motorcycle boots, accoutrement that I will examine in chapter four when I discuss the tropes of costuming. The film then cuts to a low angle close shot of his head and shoulders as he stoically stands with eyes closed as if in meditation, oblivious to the danger of the city streets, a figure of man as separate from and master over his surroundings, but this notion is problematized by his need for employment. The shot/reverse shot conversation that follows emphasizes his superiority over the other men through camera angle by looking down at Baron and his men from Carson's point of view and looking up at him from Baron's. He does not respond to Baron, and the party of men leaves, only to be ambushed by "street people" and saved by Carson when their lives are in danger. Thus, Carson is shown to be of good stock, while other men in the city are either weak due to pacifism like Baron's people or murderous and undisciplined like those attacking them; his body is a crucial technology needed to combat these bands of barbaric people. As a sign of the working-class man, he becomes necessary to maintaining society, but only at risk to his own life. Without industry, labor becomes violence, and this is one of the poignant messages of the film. It offers an analogy of an economic explanation for urban violence rooted in scarcity rather than the neoliberal rhetoric of voluntary unemployment.

Brynner serves as both agential force in his film as well as spectacle and object for the audience's gaze. Fred Pfeil, in *White Guys* (1995), wonders how a man remains "manly" when subjected to the camera's gaze in such a manner (29). How do men avoid the "feminization" that occurs when the body becomes a passive object and spectacle for

an audience's gaze? This is a problem that Cohan observes in *Masked Men* as being inherent in the performance of men in films since they began being exhibited that he argues was exacerbated in the postwar 1950s. Pfeil argues that the action films that began being produced in the 1970s, a mode of storytelling that became the main box-office draw in the 1980s, reassert male virility and individual agency through violent action sequences that mitigate this supposed feminization, seeing these films as "fantasies of class- and gender-based resistance to the advent of a post-feminist/post-Fordist world" that accommodates white men to their position as subjects of this new regime of masculine expectations (Pfeil 28).

According to Cohan, during the 1950s, working-class men adopted the values of the middle-class as they also embraced the class mobility that allowed many of them to move to the suburbs and assume the consumptive habits of the middle-class (xiv). When this promise of social mobility and ascension became a lie in the 1970s, as Nystrom documents, class antagonism increased, and working-class masculine values began to be celebrated as more authentic than those of the middle-class. In this regard, the ruined spaces of the post-industrial urban landscape where the action is set mirror the often wounded bodies of the heroes in these films (Pfeil 29).<sup>152</sup> Spectacular displays of a muscular male body in popular films usually serve the dual purpose of showcasing the performance of a superior masculinity while also demonstrating the vulnerability of this body, which

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<sup>152</sup> Kimmel, in *Manhood in America*, argues that this hard-bodied anti-hero is an "escapist fantasy" of a lone man surviving "the urban jungle," and I want to stress as I made clear earlier the racial connotations of using the word "jungle" (212). This figure also existed in exploitation films made for an urban African American audience as an escapist fantasy of black men winning, a fantasy of Black Power as an effective corrective to the woes of urban poverty and exploitation by embracing crime and violent retribution.

provides the action hero with the further opportunity to prove their virility by withstanding pain and “taking it like a man.” Savran argues that this enduring of pain acts as a primary signifier of manliness in postwar America, arguing that “masochism functions precisely as a kind of decoy and that the cultural texts constructing masochistic masculinities characteristically conclude with an almost magical restitution of phallic power” (37).<sup>153</sup>

Carson says, later in the film, that the commune will “want him to perform,” understanding how much his status relies on the performance of his military masculinity, and ultimately, his ability to withstand pain when he must cut off his own hand in the film’s climax. His visibility and the display of his naked flesh when introduced into the narrative also acts as a performance that marks him as more “natural” and perhaps animalistic than Baron’s intellectual masculinity, evincing the 1970s interest in working-class masculinity treated by Nystrom. His being an object of the gaze then does not place him in a passive position or “feminize” him because it acts as a performance of his capacity for violence.<sup>154</sup> We watch him, but we watch him *act*, and we see the results of his actions as he dispatches the “bad guys,” showing no emotion like the killing machine Brynner portrays in *Westworld*.

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<sup>153</sup> Savran argues that “the real scandal of the white male’s feminization [is that] *he desires to be penetrated* by drugs, femininity, blackness, or a penis, and thus to have his precious ‘body-fluids’ contaminated” (66, italics his).

<sup>154</sup> White manhood is an imaginary subject position with no referent due to its status as unmarked and universal, and thus is always “in crisis” and need of proof. As Gardiner observes, “the conflation of emasculation, castration, feminization, and femininity is a *political* maneuver, not a psychological law, and masculinity and femininity have different meanings” in different social and cultural contexts and differently marked bodies (15, emphasis mine). The psychologization of masculine crisis espoused by some theorists of gender and most men’s liberationists disavows this political aspect of the role of men in society.



When Carson agrees to help Baron, Baron relates that the people in the compound have little hope for the future. He explains, “They look to me for salvation; there will be none.” We are shown people living communally, but in a situation of extreme scarcity, even though they are coded as morally superior to those outside of the walls of their compound by their willingness to share the fate of others rather than take what they can for themselves. Significantly, the film contains a sub-plot about another father, Robert (Stephen McHattie), unable to provide for his family. His wife needs more powdered milk for their child, but they have scarce amounts left in the compound larder and its attendant explains to him that his family has already received its quota. The common good is more important in this community than his individual needs. The mother (Susan Keener), depicted as a caricature of a hysterical woman (she is not even granted a name, listed in the credits as “Angry Woman”), relying on the rumor that milk powder can be acquired at a nearby abandoned bakery, calls her husband a coward for not wanting to go out and provide for his family. In distinction to Carson, he will not “perform.” She finally takes her child to look for milk herself, and the sequence that follows in the dusty bakery, finding no sustenance, reinforces the fact that he is not a “breadwinner” and therefore, by the standards of hegemonic masculinity, less of a man. The mother collapses into tears after this final failure, and gang members arrive, beat the father, rape the mother, and find the baby, which they use as bait to lure Carson into a fight. He then dutifully performs in another action sequence where Brynner and his stunt double easily dispatch the other men, but the baby dies anyway, foreshadowing the importance of reproductive futurism to the narrative. Carson will save the other baby in the film.

The members of the gang are all large white men. The few black people in the film seem to be reduced to slavery, along with women, in the jailhouse that the gang uses as home base, a place contrasted with the voluntary community of Baron's democratic commune.<sup>155</sup> White American society often erases the process of racialization from social struggle, a disavowal informing the invisible threats previously mentioned in other films and also at the heart of Ronald Reagan's rhetoric of "colorblind justice" in the 1980s (Fiske xxxvi). Dyer notes that the "assumption that white people are just people, which is not far off saying that whites are people whereas other colors are something else, is endemic to white culture" ("Matter" 540). For this reason, he argues that "we need to recognize white as a color too," which is why he prefers the term "non-white" to "people of color," and I prefer to describe racialized people, borrowing from Janelle Monae, as "melanated," as simply having more melanin in their skin (543). White people also have varying levels of melanin, only differing in how melanated they are. Hence, "colorblindness" is a way to deny the fact that whiteness is a color while at the same time disavowing knowledge of the racial privilege of whiteness and the system of values attributed to melanin. This logic informed Richard Nixon's domestic policies from 1968 until he was embroiled in the Watergate scandal, a stance that Kenneth O'Reilly, in *Nixon's Piano* (1995), calls "benign

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<sup>155</sup> This setting is an apt representation of American society as such. Martinot, speaking of the criminalization of black people in American society, argues that, "Unfortunately, the notion that whites would have to dismantle the concept of 'criminalization' is not really a metaphor. From the inception of race and whiteness based on an original outlaw (noncontractual) status [slavery] through the paranoia and violence of all subsequent racializations, the criminalization of people of color is what white identity has always depended on. For this reason, the prison system is at the core of social cohesion in the United States, and imprisonment has become the central motif of dealing with social problems. The prison system is not only the defense of whiteness but its icon and metaphor at the same time" (208).

neglect” (322). John Fiske, in *Media Matters* (1994), calls such reasoning a retreat to an enclave of the mind. Fiske explains, “The enclave is built for the safety of those who inhabit it,” which makes it automatically marginalize any “other” that does not “belong,” but only in the name of *safety* (244). The threat of invasion and contagion, from which such enclave reasoning comes, continues to inform the American social imaginary and, along with a purity condition, subtends the structure of white supremacy, a rhetoric of fitness excluding those who do not fit in the enclave.

Although the film contains many similarities to *Omega Man*, such as Baron’s office filled with traces of the previous civilization like books, the differences are significant. Baron’s home is not a Playboy penthouse like Neville’s. The only luxury Baron has is cigars, which are the rare consumable that entices Carson into the compound. His room is also full of clocks, as if he is preoccupied by time, even though he lives at the end of history. His concern is futurity. Also, unlike the luxury automobiles driven by Neville, since the film establishes the end as caused by oil running out and the rapid spread of epidemics, there are no vehicles in the film. While smoking cigars like the privileged men they are, Baron and Carson discuss the hood ornament from a 1981 Cadillac sitting on his desk, shown in close-up, a vehicle Carson says his father owned as one of the last ones made. Thus this luxury commodity that consumes exorbitant amounts of petroleum is linked to fatherhood and the inheritance of masculinity while these are imbricated in the failure of civilization. Relaxing as he sits in Baron’s office, Carson says, “He really suffered when he couldn’t get more gasoline to run it. I don’t know if he ever said another word. Just sat there while his world was turned off around him.” In this telling, the world did not end so

much as it was discontinued, and the figuration of this end in a Cadillac indicates that the sign of Carson's father's dominant manhood was a product of the industry that caused its own demise with its reliance on fossil fuels. Contradicting the idea of "upward mobility" and the masculine dominance of space via ability to move promised by the postwar years, the film reveals the fear that men have nowhere left to go but down, and it couches this in terms of disenfranchisement.<sup>156</sup> Following this apocalyptic thinking, they feel entitled to take back what was supposed to be a birthright.

At first (until they turn against him in an act of mob violence and smash his head with a typewriter, disavowing rhetorical power), Baron wants Carson to lead his people to a new land like a post-apocalyptic Moses.<sup>157</sup> Immobility is defined as a central problem within this *mise-en-scène*, and Baron convinces Carson that he should leave the city with seeds from the garden (good stock) and his pregnant daughter (also good stock) since the

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<sup>156</sup> With this understanding of a concern for reproducing a national subject informing the urban apocalypse film and white men feeling disenfranchised, pushed out of the driver's seat, we can better understand Rep. King's racial logic, which links a "restoration" of "civilization" with the need for more white European babies. Weinbaum looks at the rise of eugenics in the nineteenth century as a response to the anxiety caused by new theories of reproduction. Darwin, by showing that the "natural" world included species with sexually active females selecting mates and taking agency within reproduction, scientifically liberated women from assumptions of "natural" passivity (Weinbaum 150). Eugenics can then be seen as scientists taking control once more over the destiny of "civilization" by controlling reproduction. Additionally, the obsession with genetic purity replaces racial discourse with genetic science without actually replacing racism as a practice. Weinbaum argues that even our current genomics research cannot escape the "race/reproduction bind that characterizes the modern episteme" (231). Racial designators are, after all, only the outward physical manifestation of genetic difference. Nineteenth-century science saw miscegenation as an incompatibility between opposed parts which threatened the purity of discrete genetic subjects, like the cross-species sterile hybrid we call a mule (Weinbaum 239). This logic gave rise to infamous miscegenation laws prohibiting cross-racial mating, some of which persisted far into the current century. See Jeremy Richter's article "Alabama's Anti-Miscegenation Statutes." *Alabama Review* Vol. 68, No. 4, October 2015.

<sup>157</sup> A subtle irony since Brynner played Ramses hunting Moses in *Ten Commandments*.

commune is failing due to dissension among the people and scarcity of food.<sup>158</sup> Baron's illness prevents him from leading an exodus and instead he needs to use Carson's violent body to protect his unborn grandchild, but he makes it clear to Carson that if it comes down to saving one or the other, he is to save the *seeds*. Carson must take these valuable signs of future life and agrarian society "somewhere they can flourish" because it is "a matter of values." He values the idea of a future more than just the future of his own progeny. Like previous apocalyptic films, Carson is encouraged to become a farmer and start over away from the city and industry it represents.

The other major difference with this film involves the means used to commit violence; there are no firearms. We are to assume that bullets ran out when the gas did, and no one cares to make them anymore. So, unlike Neville, with his spraying of bullets in impersonal violence against a group of indistinguishable persons, Carson uses only a knife and his superior skill to dispatch gang members intent on doing him harm. He gets his hands dirty. After chasing him through the New York subway system, in the ultimate duel between the ultimate warrior and the leader of the gang hunting them, Carson must turn his knife on himself and cut off his left hand because it is bound to Carrot (William Smith), the gang leader who has used a chain to entangle Carson's appendage, but after struggling with him now dangles over a pit, threatening to take Carson with him in his fall. As Savran argues, the initiation for white men into a validated manhood of individual agency is often a form of masochism, where a man proves his manhood by taking pleasure in being

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<sup>158</sup> Significantly, Baron says "she carries my grandson," but is corrected by Carson, who says, "or granddaughter." Baron assumes that the reproduction of society requires passing the mantle from man to man, but Carson seems to be open to another social formation.

punished, or, in a reflexive mode, punishing himself. Taking charge of your own punishment becomes a way to assert agency through a paradoxical submission to violation. This act saves his life, but also proves his resolute manhood through the endurance of pain from dismemberment while also symbolically severing his connection to the dominant violent masculinity represented by the savage gang. Although this acts as a kind of castration, he leaves the scene with his most important “member,” the symbolic phallus of his manhood, intact.

By the end of the film, when we watch Baron’s daughter give birth to his grandson with Carson as midwife, he uses his knife, this sign of violence and death, to cut the umbilical cord, rendering it into a medical tool for reproduction (making live, rather than making die); by doing so, he becomes a reproductive agent instead of the agent of death. He saves both mother and child, becoming the new patriarch of this postmodern, post-industrial, post-apocalyptic family as it flees the urban blight, the final scene showing them walk along the beach in a long shot lit by the dawn, the end of the line and the birthplace of life, having escaped the urban barbarity for an unknown future. They continue on their way to North Carolina, where the remainder of Carson’s family lives. Unlike the previous protagonists that I have examined who must learn working-class values in order to survive, like Dutch he must also learn how to give up violence as a game that he wins to prove his manhood. Transformed from a warrior into a nurturer, Carson reluctantly takes on this performance of a kinder, gentler masculinity as father of the future, but this figuration of rebirth conflates biological reproduction with the reproduction of society.

### **Escaping New York: The End of the Urban Apocalypse**

*Each of these alternative personae is not an 'image' or stereotype of masculinity; each interacts with the others within the larger, hierarchically ordered field of power relations; and each has its own discursive history, which became imbricated in its cinematic representation.*  
(Cohan xviii)

*Politics (as the social elaboration of reality) and the self (as mere prosthesis maintaining the future for the figural Child), are what queerness, again as a figure, necessarily destroys—necessarily insofar as this “self” is the agent of reproductive futurism and this “politics” the means of its promulgation as the order of social reality. . . . the act of resisting enslavement to the future in the name of having a life.* (Edelman 30)

The decade ended with the release of *Ravagers* (1979, Richard Compton), another urban apocalypse where New York is overrun by gangs of “ravagers” who take what they want, treating the city as a place for them to exploit, as a bleak space of unfettered consumption and struggle over dwindling commodities, including women, who are dehumanized and used as abject sexual objects rather than vehicles of reproduction, and cast aside with the rest of the refuse. It stars Richard Harris as a pacifistic husband named Falk trying to protect and provide for his wife, Miriam (Alana Hamilton) as they hide in an abandoned factory, a *mise-en-scène* that evokes the end of industry and production as such, an end to the producer ethic of American labor and the myth of progress it subtends.<sup>159</sup> This apocalypse is not the result of warfare but of industry; it is ecological and economic rather than military. Falk is followed back to his factory domicile, where Miriam waits, by

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<sup>159</sup> Taking the ecocriticism of *Ultimate Warrior* a step further, the first shot of the film shows a ruined New York City skyline followed by shots of the empty streets interspersed with shots of wilderness while a voice-over explains how everything died, even the oceans, “then it rained again but the land and the people were still barren.” We then see a long shot of one of the gangs of “ravagers” stalking the street before cutting to a long shot of our protagonist running alone through yet more empty streets. We watch as he scavenges in an almost empty store, finding two cans of food without label, which brings him to tears. This survivor subsisting at bare life conditions evokes pathos and stands in opposition to the violent rapacious ravagers; he and his Miriam are clean, indicating their domestic purity, while the savage men are dirty.

one of the ravagers, an evocation of the practice of separate spheres where a woman's role requires her to remain at home while the man goes forth into public to provide for her. The division of labor is one of the primary ways that men remain dominant via the symbolic capital this grants them (Bourdieu *Logic of Practice* 72).<sup>160</sup> Falk attempts to maintain his sense of manhood in a world that cannot validate it via the symbolic capital of performing the role of breadwinner husband. In order to do that, he must risk his life to forage.

As I will illustrate in much more detail in the next chapter, firearms become not only a technology of domination, but also one of symbolic capital in post-apocalyptic culture and hence essential to post-apocalyptic manhood.<sup>161</sup> At the beginning of the film, Falk has none, but as he journeys he will acquire progressively larger and more deadly guns. The use of Harris in this role makes this a complex message about technologies of violent masculinity, since he was known largely for playing military roles and nobility, not to mention criminals.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> She has found an egg, but there is nothing in it, another indication of sterility and the end of reproduction, calling into question the very domestic arrangement of separate spheres and the reason for their heterosexual relationship. He is upset that she went to forage and tells her that she does not "have to crawl around out there, that's my job."

<sup>161</sup> Bourdieu argues that all social hierarchy is based on violence or the threat of violence, but that much of this has become sublimated into cultural rituals and practices, turning violence into a symbolic exchange, a structural violation often masked by language and custom (*Logic* 126). These films, by removing the trappings of culture, reveal the violence of interactions in modern American life, especially when resources are scarce. Bourdieu observes that the "'choice' between overt violence and gentle [Genteel] violence [symbolic] depends on the state of the power relations between the two parties and the integration and ethical integrity of the group that arbitrates" (*Logic* 127). Without such arbitration, and when the power relations are reduced to the factor of who has a gun, overt violence becomes the best and only option.

<sup>162</sup> In such films as *Jungle Fighters* (1961), *Major Dundee* (1965), *Hawaii* (1966), *Juggernaut* (1974), and *The Wild Geese* (1978); *Camelot* (1967), and *Robin and Marion* (1976). Cohan elaborates the star's role in naturalizing gender roles: "Stardom does not just oppose an actor's charisma to the theatricality of



Having begun in an urban setting, the film quickly leaves it behind after Miriam is raped and killed when the couple fails to escape the ravagers in the maze of industrial rubble. Falk then exacts vengeance by killing the gang's leaders' (Anthony James) male lover in reprisal. Rather than figured as effeminate, homosexuality in this film is marked by hypermasculine violence (a figure of the death drive as posited by Edelman), and Falk becomes more like them when he loses the trappings of a heteronormative life.<sup>163</sup> The narrative then becomes one of survival in a hostile wilderness and quest narrative as Falk is tracked by the ravagers intent on revenge in a cycle of endless violence.<sup>164</sup> Falk ultimately learns how to be an action hero and the shepherd of a new flock of multi-racial people as he accepts the role of patriarch for a group of survivors at film's end.

Finishing this cycle in self-reflexive irony, John Carpenter's *Escape from New York* (1981) parodies the previous films' portrayals of violent hypermasculinity, taking these conventions to comic extremes. Here the urban apocalypse setting reaches its apotheosis, and it goes out of style until the beginning of the next century, largely as a reaction to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The next chapter will look at films from this decade that placed their action in non-urban spaces, ultimately taking violent masculinity on the

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cinema, it makes the opposition central to a star's persona, casting it in gendered terms, so that what a star authenticates is the apparent naturalness of his or her sexual difference (xvii).

<sup>163</sup> Following the trend of many late-1970s films, this one pathologizes homosexuality and depicts the gang leader as a raving murderer, a characterization that would make national news the next year with the release of William Friedkin's *Cruising*. Unlike his previous roles, Harris's character uses violence in this narrative, but not for heroic purposes. Instead, he joins the trend of rampage films that had become quite popular during the decade, and, having achieved his revenge, he flees the city.

<sup>164</sup> These ravagers are figures of the Angry White Man, and are, as Kimmel asserts, a kind of imagined community, a "virtual social movement" bound by their anger and frustration (*AWM* 37).

road and establishing a subgenre of the post-apocalypse that endures to this day as a popular setting.

This chapter examined how private spaces are shown to be vulnerable to penetration and contamination from sometimes racialized, but always toxic and dangerous unemployed men. The only hope for the future requires escaping from the city to an agrarian existence in “nature,” suggesting as before that a new beginning is a return to a previous mode of life, but also divesting the problem of masculinity the films treat of political valence.<sup>165</sup> Although bleak, these films end on a note of hope, and I want to now turn to a series of films that make such endings problematic and unbelievable. The next chapter will analyze in more detail the props that hold up the mask of masculinity, enabling men to play the game of manhood to prove who is the ultimate warrior. Studying the masculine technologies of firearms and motor vehicles as part of the apparatus of masculinity, the chapter culminates in an examination of road rage and the struggle to be king of the road.

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<sup>165</sup> Hester succinctly argues that, when the concept of nature becomes “a pseudo-theological limit, a cartography of the untouchable, or a space of incontaminable purity,” this rhetoric aids in the marginalization of difference (19).

## Chapter Three

### The End of the Road

#### Vehicles and Guns: the Props and Properties of Manhood as a Zero-Sum Game

*Technologies are . . . fully lived and experienced in our daily actions and practices, and that is why it is important to understand technology not as a mechanical imposition on our lives but as a fully cultural process, soaked through with social meaning that only makes sense in the context of familiar kinds of behavior. Technologies cannot simply determine our behavior, although they are part of a persistent, and often coercive, dialogue about our manners. (Ross Strange Weather 3)*

*Masculinity can be thought of as itself foundational to Western notions of technology as force and tool, as well as tool for force. (Burrill 14)*

*Nothing is more dangerous than a monster whose story is ignored. (Newitz 2)*

In the last chapter, I examined apocalyptic scenarios that depicted urban space as a lawless place of unfettered consumption where nothing is produced, a situation only tenable when there is just one last man on Earth, but when others enter the picture the conflict shifts to one of property and ownership over resources, such as the well water that supplies and centers the invaded community in *The Ultimate Warrior* that demonstrate Fiske's assertion that "property rights appear to be so deeply ingrained in capitalism's legal, economic, and discursive systems that the only words referring to the transfer of property to the weak from the strong without payment are ones that put this transaction into the discourse of crime" (*Media Matters* 169). The problem of maintaining a private

place of refuge becomes impossible as the city becomes over-populated by the “wrong” kind of people who threaten the very idea of private property with their “savage” brutality contrasted with the “civilized” ethics of a white father figure. However, as I have indicated, the films problematize such clear distinction, revealing the violence that structures and maintains “civilization” and the privilege of this patriarch.

The narratives of urban apocalypse in the 1970s are likewise ambivalent about apocalyptic masculinity. Depictions of men doing monstrous things in these films imagine and demonstrate the danger of a masculinity modeled on dominance unbound by citizenship, social contract, or ideological conscience to reign in this violence, arguing for the necessity of the “right” kind of dominant patriarchy,<sup>166</sup> a more rationalized and symbolic violence; structural violence is preferable to overt violence when one has no hope for any other social system not predicated on hierarchy. Desperate to maintain a masculinist sense of autonomy, a mastery over destiny, apocalyptic masculinity eschews relationships and therefore cannot “fit” into any future community that requires interpersonal contact.

The answer to urban conflict in these films often lies in escaping the deterritorialized space of the catastrophe and starting anew as farmers abroad, representing a frontier that men can territorialize anew and an escapist rhetoric that subtends the logic of white flight that began in the 1950s and continued throughout the rest of the century with the addition of a “return” to a physical masculinity that grows and nurtures rather than proving itself through economic mastery and winning a competition against all other

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<sup>166</sup> This is essentially the argument of the enormously popular masculinist text *Iron John* (1991), Robert Bly’s jeremiad of masculine crisis.

men.<sup>167</sup> Grant notes that “genre films work by engaging viewers through an implicit contract” (21). These films, following *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*, established a contract with viewers, instigating a genre whose mode of apocalyptic thinking imagines a world where the meaning of manhood is altered, or is in danger of disappearing from a landscape devoid of recognizable cultural markers that would grant it meaning. Thus, by speculating on models of apocalyptic manhood, the films address this loss of meaning while also expressing panic over the imagining of a loss of agency this meaning used to promise, which was never a property of individual men and instead a product of a privileged position in society enabled by the subordination of others.

This chapter will examine apocalyptic narratives that leave the city behind and take the crisis of masculinity on the road. They also address an identity crisis in white masculinity, specifically around utility and type of labor, as well as the erosion of “civilization” and its clear cultural markers. These films, like their predecessors, hold out the hope of a place where someone still grows things, and humanity can begin anew as an agrarian society, but this future is often unavailable for their central hero, who will take his punishment like a man and, in order to remain an autonomous individual in the driver’s

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<sup>167</sup> This sentiment of a “return” to a simpler agrarian masculinity is in keeping with the fact that in the dominant narrative of America, as Segal notes, “The working class is understood as a reservoir of masculinity” (201). Sometimes this historical 70s apocalyptic crisis impacts the working man outside of urban life. The Canadian film *Deadly Harvest* (1978, Timothy Bond) features farmers who already live out in the rural space even though they can no longer grow anything as they attempt to hold onto what food they have after a blight and bad weather lead to mass starvation in the cities. They have to fight off agents of organized crime from the city who operate a black market (a threat from the urban upper-class coded as parasites on society), ultimately using their massive farm machinery itself to defeat their foes; in this rather populist film, the silent majority wins over the urban elite. This despite studies cited by Robinson which show that “alienated” working men who were becoming radicalized in the 1970s were “united by racial, rather than class, concerns” (*Marked Men* 30).

seat of his life, must remain separate from society and social attachments, alone and unaccountable to others. This places these omega men in a position much like the queer subject that does not reproduce biologically and is not future-oriented, described by Edelman as “machine-like men (and often, in science fiction, they are replaced by machines as such) who stand outside the ‘natural’ order of sexual reproduction” (165). Their bodies are equated with machines as they become functions of the technology of masculinity. Fiske reminds us that “the body remains a desperately insecure site for social control, which is why society has had to develop such powerful and all-encompassing apparatuses to deal with it . . . [obfuscating] the fact that the body provides the essential labor of capitalism” (*Media Matters* 76-77). This obfuscation extends to the figuration of a man’s body as part of a larger apparatus, his vehicle which is supposed to grant him liberty and agency but is really just another means of harnessing a man’s agency.

Patriarchal authority maintains its dominance largely by remaining unexamined, and this chapter will reveal how this mastering gaze is supplemented and altered by the position of the driver’s seat and a mobile perspective when it is freed from a territory that it masters and instead becomes a possible line of flight that leads nowhere and masters nothing.<sup>168</sup> The car or motorcycle is associated in modern discourses of transportation with “escape, freedom, and power” and this discourse has become naturalized by the 1970s (Davies 222). Vehicles are iconic tropes that act as signs of economic status as well as

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<sup>168</sup> Braudy usefully insists that “visibility always risks the threat of judgement” (191). He specifically references the penis, suggesting that “the first steps forward in ‘civilization,’ and the movement away from the physical and toward the metaphoric, came with the covering of the penis in public” (Braudy 191).

institutional power (police car), and in films, “the driver is presented in the position of the viewer and the viewed” (Davies 225). As in the previous films canvassed, public space, especially the road, becomes deterritorialized and contested in these films, a blank space like that of the urban landscape deprived of bodies, which allows for recoding of meanings as well as the examination of the space in the abstract. These later films, more than those confined to urban space, elaborate a logic of “accumulation by dispossession” in more detail, showing how, as Ivan Ascher asserts, the accumulation that Marx called “primitive” is not a thing of the past, but is instead an on-going process of violent enclosure and dispossession (86). But apocalyptic manhood feels dispossessed of physical and imaginary properties.

This chapter will more thoroughly examine the vehicles and weapons that act as signs and props of/for manhood in road rage films and enable the dominance of the road, where the vehicles themselves become deadly weapons as dangerous to their drivers as others. Before I turn to these wild boys of the lost highways, however, I need to take a detour to suburban America and an examination of the inevitable futility of white flight to a promised safe place away from the city’s violence since it structures the suburban socius just as much as the urban, only in more symbolic ways. Hence, the cinematic revelation of the fragility of this façade masquerading as safety in that most hyperreal of places, the shopping mall, will elaborate the way in which masculine technologies like guns and vehicles are used to enable masculinity as useful, but are also in constant danger of becoming merely toys used in the game that men play to score “points” and prove their manhood by “winning”; these tools then become props used in a theater of manhood that

determine roles in the masculine masquerade, a comedy that becomes melodrama when this game becomes deadly.

**Illusory Refuge of Consumer Capitalism: *Dawn of the Dead* (1978, George Romero) and the Danger of Masculinity as the World's Most Deadly Game**

*Whether we flinch or cheer at marksmen halting the rote itinerary of one zombie after another with bullets and hammers, it is the immanence of political power in raw flesh that we see revealed, precisely on the set of its own structural crisis.* (Sutherland 72)

*The setting is gradually torn apart because the behaviors the mall fosters, taken to their logical extreme, must end in ruin.* (Bailey 104-105)

*These films literalize obscenity. In their insistence on cannibalism and on the dismemberment of the human body, their lurid display of extruded viscera, they deliberately and directly present to the eye something that should not be seen, that cannot be seen in actuality.* (Shaviro *Cinematic Body* 100)

George Romero's sequel to his classic and seminal walking dead film, *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) (a low-budget production which largely transpires within a rural farmhouse), takes the metaphorical and allegorical significance of this first film to new places, both figuratively and spatially, ultimately arriving in a suburb and exposing the monstrosity of consumer capitalism and imagining apocalyptic masculinity as less a game of conquest and mastery than one of endurance and pragmatics. This later film subverts many of the myths of suburban living as safer, the opulence of consumer capitalism, the ease and entertainment it offers, and sense of community, which the shopping mall attempts to simulate, by ripping away the façade that hides the precarity of suburban life and graphically demonstrating the structural violence done to marginalized people by the



invisible hand of commerce through the depiction of the production of dead consuming bodies and the destruction of living (re)producing ones.<sup>169</sup>

The film follows a group of survivors trying to live when a zombie plague brings civilization to an end. One woman and four men escape the city in a helicopter stolen from a television station and search for a safe haven from the undead cannibals. The refuge used in this film proves, like the fortified domicile of Neville in *Omega Man*, to be vulnerable to invasion, not only by the shambling consumers who flock there, but also by dangerous men with firearms whom represent the logic of the neoliberal marketplace taken to its limit, a group of men roaming the land, accumulating what possessions they have through the dispossession of others. The problems of the city, which I have established as the antagonisms of class and race which the suburbanite attempts to escape, cannot be eluded so easily and, as in *Omega Man*, the film seems just as concerned with overpopulation by the “wrong” kind of national subjects as the end of humanity as such. It is likewise invested in the model of reproductive futurism structured by family relations. Still operating under a fear of contamination or being polluted by others (a use of the purity condition), as in the previous films I have investigated, *Dawn of the Dead* renders these excess bodies not only as surplus and expendable, but also as another dangerous mob like

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<sup>169</sup> This is biopolitical in the sense outlined by Virno: “The living body becomes an object to be governed not for its intrinsic value, but because it is the substratum of what really matters: labor-power as the aggregate of the most diverse human faculties . . . Life lies at the center of politics when the prize to be won is immaterial (and in itself non-present) labor-power” (83). The body becomes the site of political power because of its abstract capacities and the potential it represents to create profit. “The practical importance taken on by potential as potential (the fact that it is bought and sold as such), as well as its inseparability from the immediate corporeal existence of the worker, is the real foundation of bio-politics. . . . Bio-politics is merely an effect, a reverberation, or in fact, one articulation of that primary fact—both historical and philosophical—which consists of the commerce of potential as potential” (Virno 83-84).

in the urban apocalypse films whom, although they act autonomously and never in concert, nevertheless, through their cumulative acts and shared goal of eating living things, endanger the lives of the “good” people who eat the “right kind” of food, a source of sustenance dwindling daily.

This film reveals the usually unseen danger of a model of masculinity that defines itself by its ability to “win” at any cost, that must constantly prove its mastery by any means.<sup>170</sup> J.P. Tellotte, quoting Rosemary Jackson, argues that “all fantastic texts find their true appeal not so much in the sort of ‘escapism or . . . simple pleasure principle’ that many critics emphasize and also use to dismiss the form from serious consideration, but rather in the way they ‘trace the unsaid and the unseen of culture’” (206). In this way, the fantastic trope of the “zombie apocalypse” is used to reveal some of the “unsaid” and “unseen” aspects of hegemonic masculinity in the 1970s as well as the excesses of late capitalist commodity culture. The need to prove manhood by treating problems as a games to be won and danger as “fun,” proving manhood by “scoring points,” endangers everyone in this film and ultimately causes the demise of two of the group of survivors who act as protagonists as well as many of the hostile motorcycle gang members who attempt to “win” by taking the mall for themselves.

Again, as in *Omega Man* and the other films I have canvassed, property serves as a contested place and concept ultimately rendered public, owned by the mob,

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<sup>170</sup> DiPiero notes that “white masculinity sustains itself in the position of the stable and stabilizing master, eschewing any problematic indeterminacies by construing all males as engendered through precisely the same means and culturally valorized forms and institutions” (138). Like DiPiero’s work, this film disarticulates the pretense of stable mastery and the means of establishing this mastery as well as the positioning of whiteness at the center of definitions of manhood.

detrterritorialized and reterritorialized by both the pale undesirables (walking dead) who act as icons of the late capitalist subject position of consumer and the wild gang on motorcycles, imagining both the isolation and the inability of white male mastery and the “civilization” it stands for to maintain “order” and the status quo. The motorcycle gang represents a commentary on rhetoric of “Middle America” that dominated the 1970s, which, as Robinson notes, was “a heavily coded discourse on whiteness” that depicts it as endangered and disguises whiteness as “‘law-abiding conformity’ . . . and blackness [as] coded by ‘welfare,’ ‘law and order,’ ‘urban decay,’ and ‘crime.’ . . . Importantly, though, the racial binary is skewed by the fact that ‘white’ is a normative category and ‘black’ a racial one” (*Marked Men* 29, quoting Updike).<sup>171</sup> The rhetoric of Middle America was an expression of resentment over the gains of marginalized populations that takes on the mantle of marginalization to claim victimhood driven by a sense of lost entitlement. Thus, the men who invade the mall do so because they feel entitled to take what *should* belong to them. The film also allegorizes, through its depiction of the motorcycle gang, the neoliberal logic that had taken over American society which criminalizes poverty and makes, as Ascher puts it, “vagabonds” of the masses dispossessed by the flexible accumulation which produces shopping malls (88).

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<sup>171</sup> Martinot elaborates on this difference: “In order for colors to be racialized (that is, given a social meaning beyond the descriptive), a concept of race had to exist. In order for a concept of race to exist, divisions had to be discoverable between people for which definable boundaries could be authorized. In the face of continuous spectra of human characteristics, those divisions had to be invented. To invent those divisions, a first division was necessary. The first division invented was that between whites and all other shades. And the purity condition for whiteness was the essential concept that produced that first division” (23). Thus, to be white is to be a pure human and to have “color” to be a raced subject divergent from pure humanity.

By placing most of the action of the film in the commercial, hypernormal spaces of a suburban shopping mall, especially those “behind the scenes” where much of the invisible labor occurs, the film demonstrates that the end of the world is normal, as Thomas Dumm phrases it, “the end of the world does not mean its destruction in a catastrophic sense. We are always at the end of the world, and we must find some comfort in our ability to reflect upon that banal fact” (319).<sup>172</sup> This end of the world is experienced differently by different subject positions spatially demarcated by the divide between laborer and consumer. But the mall is curiously a space where consumption *becomes* labor, and we must remember that labor-power, as Virno reminds us, is a concept based on potential and not actual production. This non-place or hyperreal space of mass consumption deliberately blurs the boundaries between private and public, production and consumption, as well as outside and inside, offering the phantasmagoric utopia of a freedom to purchase unlimited goods with no discernable origin that will not really liberate the consumer and instead only enthrall them to their role as dutiful capitalist subject.

As the above epigraphs from previous analyses of this film indicate, the inclusion of firearms in this space links this market to the military-industrial complex that makes it possible and the on-going accumulation by dispossession that this military ensures. Meghan Sutherland, in her article “Rigor/Mortis: the Industrial Life of Style in American Zombie Cinema,” observes that Romero introduces the mall in this film with a montage of

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<sup>172</sup> Morgenstern usefully asks what we mean by “world” when we use it. She writes, “It is surely not identical with the earth, although it is not entirely separable either. Is ‘world’ (merely) akin to a symbolic structure? Are there many worlds? Who shares a world or worlds? The very signifier “world” echoes back to us in its strangeness. . . . For the subject of humanism . . . the world might have functioned like a (good-enough) mother, but a certain ‘failure’ may provide us with new ways to think and practice care” (99). Thus, the “end of the world” becomes a space to imagine such practice.

shots that present the space abstractly, impelling the viewer to “recognize the sense of isolation that is literally part of the mall’s design as an institutional complex; an attribute that the respective shots containing the cyclone-fenced HI VOLTAGE sign and the roaring chopper both link to militarism, private property, and the violent order they found” (70).

She details this montage:

The four survivors look on with expressions of disbelief before the image cuts to a series of highly stylized still shots set against the beige winter sky: a canted view of a towering metal lamp-post from the mall parking lot; another more geometric shot of the lamp-post from underneath; a medium-shot of a cyclone fence . . . and another canted shot of a series of lamp-posts leading to the mall entrance at precise intervals. (Sutherland 70)

Thus, Romero draws the viewer’s attention to the danger the mall represents and the violence that ensures private property and exclusion and sets the space as a trap.

The walking dead who populate the mall before the survivors come, and who do so again at film’s end, are depicted as so banal as to be comic in some sequences, such as when walking on an ice rink or riding an escalator, and the film identifies the audience with *these* figures rather than the interracial couple who fly away at the end to find a safer space in which to survive. The horror of this situation comes from the inability of consumer capitalism to protect a pregnant woman and her companions from the consumption it offers and encourages, from becoming just another consumable item on the menu. Annalee Newitz, in *Pretend We’re Dead* (2006), uses a term that applies to both the animate dead and the motorcycle gang, “monsters of capitalism,” whose monstrosity comes from their inability to differentiate between people and commodities and thereby de-monstrate a

subject position that consumer capitalism encourages as banal normality (2).<sup>173</sup> In this film, reproductive futurism is not predicated on a purity condition and is therefore not threatened by miscegenation. Instead, capitalist society and its logic threatens the future, but the film offers no line of flight from this situation since the surviving couple who flies away in a helicopter search for a refuge that may not exist.

Several scenes in the film depict a monstrous man becoming engrossed by the “game” of combat and depersonalizing his victims, and the first instance of this establishes the homicidal danger of this model of masculinity as well as how it is enabled by the masculine technologies of the military industry, thereby elucidating the logic of what we today call a “mass shooter” and the way that this figure is produced by the capitalist-military system structuring American society. After opening in a television studio, a scene that I will return to shortly, the film cuts to a team of police officers belonging to the Special Weapons and Tactics division (SWAT) preparing to raid an inner-city tenement where residents refuse to evacuate either because they are simply too poor to give up what little they have or they are involved in criminal activities. These people, even the armed gang members, are depicted as victims in the violent sequence of ebullient gunfire that follows

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<sup>173</sup> Robin Wood, in *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (1986), argues that horror films in the 1970s became more complex and were “characterized by the recognition not only that the monster is the product of normality, but that it is no longer possible to view normality itself as other than monstrous” (85). He analyzes *Night of the Living Dead* as a deconstruction of the typical American nuclear family and the role of fatherhood, noting that Ben, the central protagonist, a middle-class black man, is set apart from the other working-class white characters and has no history in the film (Wood 103). Whiteness in the film is rendered monstrous and alienating for this man. In the sequel, the black protagonist not only survives this time, but he is also included in the group and is provided with a history that links him to the Caribbean and its myth of the zombie. In both films, these men are depicted as resourceful and can understand the phenomena in a way the white characters cannot. In this way, blackness is afforded value and normality while whiteness is made strange and unreliable.

as the armed gang attacks the police and are felled by spraying bullets, and the sequence acts as a truncated version of Romero's previous film, *The Crazies* (1973), which was his oblique critique of the Vietnam War and in particular events like the Mai Lai massacre, transposing the carnage to a rural town in Ohio infected by a bioweapon that turns ordinary people into homicidal maniacs. As with that film, the breakdown of authority when the forces of law and order are unable to contain the contagion leads to soldiers dehumanizing both the victims of the "rage virus" and innocent healthy people in their violent game and necessity to win at any cost.

During the graphic, bloody sequence of gunfire and attacks by walking dead that makes up this urban portion of *Dawn of the Dead*, a hectic intercutting of various encounters the SWAT team has with residents both living and dead shot in the cramped spaces of the apartment building as the officers attempt to clear it, the two protagonist police officers, white (Roger, played by Scott H. Reiniger) and black (Peter, played by Ken Foree), are shown stoically performing their duty in close shots of their faces not reacting to the carnage (Peter at first wears a helmet, adding to the lack of affect), until Roger displays both remorse and horror after the two of them find a large group of animated dead feeding in the basement and the camera cuts away as the men massacre the cannibals as if it is too horrible to watch. In contrast, an enthusiastic officer with no self-control (Wooley, played by Jim Baffico) shouts taunts and appears to have the best time of his life killing people, both armed, dangerous and innocent tenants, as the camera tracks his progress through the building and witnesses his murderous rampage, usually over his shoulder to

indict the audience's pleasure at watching it, until he is stopped by a bullet from Peter's gun.<sup>174</sup>

Manhood has been a violent game for men to play for a long time, but recent changes in American culture have encouraged this practice. In *Die Tryin'* (2008), a study of masculinity and video game culture, Derek Burrill notes how, in America, work and play are conflated more and more as consumer culture becomes entertainment culture and leisure consumption becomes synonymous with labor, encouraging men to remain boys who play games as their primary occupation, neglecting and denying the adult responsibilities and expectations of manhood, like fatherhood and the ability to be of use to others or proving manhood through economic mastery (5). He asserts that, not only can "technology and masculinity . . . never be imagined as separate," but also, in keeping with the thesis of my study, that "masculinity is a form of technology, a set of tools that allows the user extension of his physical powers" both materially and ideologically, enabling the power of men over others and operating much like a video game avatar in the sense of existing as an imaginary projection of a man's identity as a man (Burrill 5).<sup>175</sup> Paradoxically, masculinity enables such mastery through force while it forces men to prove

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<sup>174</sup> Robinson argues that the rhetoric of unbound masculinity positions it as dangerous, and argues that men must contain emotions within themselves at all times, resulting in a lack of affect in general unless demonstrated as anger seeping out, becomes a metaphor of "wounded" masculinity, men harmed by the strictures of manhood, making dominant white masculinity into both a position of superiority (the manly restraint and control that lets him take it like a man with no emotional response proving to mastery over self) *and* victimhood (the problem of all of these repressed emotions surfacing and the pain of keeping them down) ("Emotional Constipation" 134).

<sup>175</sup> This is further elaborated by Judy Wajcman in her chapter "Technology as Masculine Culture" in *Feminism Confronts Technology* (1991).



their manhood or “die trying.” In this film, as in the video games investigated by Burrill and the movies examined previously, the only way to stop the game is through yet more violence enabled by masculinity and its masculine props, the vehicles and guns these men use against the walking dead and the living alike.<sup>176</sup>

Not only does this reliance on such props enable violent, dominant masculinity as the only answer to the danger it poses, the positioning of such men as “toxic” or broken, if not psychologically ill, enacts a rhetorical shift from the “political to personal,” which, instead of understanding how such behavior is enabled by *hegemonic* masculinist ideology and ways it structures the military-industrial complex, locates the problem in the *deviance* of “bad” men who have some kind of disease, a positioning of this dominant subject as a victim that elides the social and cultural practices and values determining such “toxic” behavior (Robinson “Emotional Constipation” 135). These diseased, wounded men are then no longer a problem that requires structural, systemic change, but a product of the side-effects of their gender prescriptions, rather than acting out the logic determined by a masculine position in a patriarchal society. Wooly, then, is less an aberration than a norm in this film. Through the use of its setting and the position of the ubiquitous post-apocalyptic trope of a last blonde woman, *Dawn of the Dead* re-politicizes this figuration of masculinity out of control and demonstrates, as Burrill phrases it, that “the violence of technoscience and technoplay is intimately wrapped up in heteronormative, masculinist

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<sup>176</sup> It should come as no surprise that videogame manufacturers produce a proliferation of scenarios in a post-apocalyptic setting. See a small sample of this list after the bibliography.

imperatives to keep the gender divide stable and unassailable” (22).<sup>177</sup> The failure of masculinity in this film is often figured as penetration equated with feminization, whose body gets penetrated contrasted with a wholly masculine, sovereign owner of a male body inviolate.<sup>178</sup> In the film, this penetration is the result of gunfire or the attacks of the voracious undead.

*Dawn of the Dead* foregrounds the use of firearms and the technologies of the military industry not only through its SWAT team members’ gunplay, but also by including a gun store in the mall as a resource for these men, the one location that the film’s producers had to invent and add to the actual mall that they used as a location since no malls contain such due to licensing issues (most malls at the time did contain a knife store, however). As Burrill notes, violence often requires a tool, “something that simultaneously extends and prostheticizes the male’s penetrative qualities, while shielding him from the external world” (26). The scene in which the three men invade this militarized space and “go shopping” for arms depicts a montage consisting of medium and close shots of the jubilation these men feel as they grin, laugh, pose, and play with their new toys as a bouncy, comedic score drives home how much fun they have playing the masculine game. Burrill notes that “masculinity (particularly a violent masculinity), as performance, is a complicit part of technological presence and utility” (21). In case the viewer misses the masculine

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<sup>177</sup> Although Burrill’s book deals with video game violence, I find it useful for my argument both in its treatment of technology and because it is no coincidence that this film takes place in a mall, the original location of video game arcades during this period of history, the nest out of which video game culture was hatched.

<sup>178</sup> Joe Wlodarz goes so far as to call such penetration of a man “masculine suicide” because it shatters the illusion of bounded subjectivity ideologically and physically produced through the technology of masculinity (73)

coding that demonstrates ranking in this performance, Roger and Peter arm themselves with large rifles while giving Stephen (David Emge), the “fly boy” who pilots the helicopter, a small pistol. By doing so, they posit his masculine utility as less than theirs.

After gearing up, the men then enact a plan to secure the mall for themselves, territorializing it by excluding the undesired bodies, blocking the mall’s large entrances with huge trucks by using Roger’s mastery of tools to start them and the men’s ability to drive such large vehicles under dangerous circumstances. Thus, they solve their problems through prosthetic devices coded as masculine and working-class. The endeavor is tense and dangerous since at any moment they could be overwhelmed by animated corpses and devoured and indeed have many close-calls filmed in rapid close shots to make the action intimate and heighten the sense of peril. As the sequence progresses, and the men are gradually successful, but Roger grows more reckless, laughing and treating the activity as a fun game he is playing, scoring points with some friends while they beat their opponents, and ignoring how dangerous the shambling corpses are, resulting in his not noticing one stalking him and his being bit, his leg penetrated and his body infected, symbolically emasculating him as he loses his sense of bodily mastery and the ability of mobility when the purity and boundary of his body compromised. However, this also gives him the opportunity to prove that he can take it like a man, shrugging off the pain and refusing to be “feminized” and treated like a passive victim,<sup>179</sup> still participating in the game as they clear the mall of remaining undead, and he fires his rifle from the cart in which he is

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<sup>179</sup> Burrill observes that “violence is central to the male experience. In fact, [he suggests] . . . violence and pain form the central discourse of masculinity” (33).

wheeled about like he is playing the type of video game called a “first-person shooter” using another prosthetic device and the help of another man to enable his continued mobility. Ultimately, he succumbs to the infection and “crosses over” in a touching scene where we see his reanimated corpse sit up in his sick-bed with the white eyes of the undead, but his friend Peter shoots him in the head in order to spare him from the horror of an existence as a mindless consumer. The camera lingers on Peter’s face as it registers the grief of losing his friend as well as trauma of having to shoot him.

Gender roles are maintained in the film not only through the game of masculinity played by the men, but also the separation of space and delineation of labor. As soon as her pregnancy is known to the men, they enact a regime of separate spheres, with Francine (Gaylen Ross) remaining in, and maintaining, their domestic space, hidden away in an attic, like a mad woman in a Gothic romance, and tasked with preparing and serving food. We are shown a sequence where she decorates this private place with wares from a nearby department store such as a lamp and sofa, making it cozy with all of the accoutrements of middle-class life like a television and stereo system, a place in which the collection of firearms stands out, foregrounded as abnormal but also indicating this as a kind of new normality. However, Fran resists being reified as merely a technology of reproduction, her only role that of giving birth, insisting instead to be trained in the use of masculine technologies like the helicopter and receiving instruction in the use of firearms from Peter in a scene that builds intimacy between them while they stand on the roof of the mall and use the walking dead as targets for her practice. She becomes a player in the masculine game and thereby alters its rules.

Although her ineffectual boyfriend, Stephen, and the police officers attempt to enforce traditional gender roles, she remains assertive when they plan, insisting to be a part of it, as when we meet her at the film's beginning. The first shot of the film consists of an extreme close-up of red carpeting which tilts down to discover her awakening from one nightmare into another. In the chaotic sequence that follows, she appears to be in a position of authority as she gives orders, but the scene demonstrates the erosion of authority of every kind as people run around frantically asking questions, alluding to the inability of the media to maintain order without authorizing certitude. Fran is positioned as representative of two forms of "feminization" of American society, feared as the enemy of masculinity noted by Robinson: "institutions that produced sheeplike conformity (including marriage) [also figured as the walking dead here], and a consumer culture that threatened to level the class-based distinctions between elite and masses" (*Marked Men* 219). The mass media were seen, throughout the twentieth century, as a "feminizing" force that made spectators into passive receptors, and consumption/shopping was relegated to femininity. Fran escapes the confusion of the television studio with her "flyboy" fiancé, but he ultimately becomes another figure of failed fatherhood at the film's end, like the several that I have already analyzed, his impotence alluded to by the small revolver dangling ineffectually from his dead hand as he emerges from an elevator, his body having been penetrated and violated, now infected with a need to consume rather than produce.

Stephen spends the first part of the film attempting to prove his manhood to the two SWAT team officers, and he performs reckless acts in order to not be left out of the game. This need to constantly prove his mastery becomes his undoing when, after a roving

motorcycle gang breaks into the mall, he attacks them rather than escape, enraged that they would take from him what he took from the dead. Like Neville, he refuses to abandon his property. In his analysis of this film, Matthew Bailey argues that this space of consumer commodities encourages such behavior, which is epitomized by the actions of the gang. He observes that, “driven mad by the abundance at their ‘fingertips,’ they smash, loot, and consume all they can get their hands on. . . . They too turn consumerist, if destructive, in the ‘behavior setting’ of the mall” (104). This destructiveness links consumer culture to the military industry and reveals the violence enabling American capitalism while showing how it is structured as a game to be won by dominant, ruthless men.

The motorcycle gang, like Peter, consists of abnormal figures to see in a shopping mall in 1978, and the film makes this exclusion of class- and race-marked bodies from the space explicit while also linking the gang, through its working-class status, to the bands of police, National Guard, and armed, rural men depicted in the montage at the end of *Night of the Living Dead* and whom the survivors of this film fly over on their way to the mall. As Dyer notes in *White* (1997), the aerial shots of these men shooting the walking dead as a game at first makes the men look identical to the zombies, and with their casual disregard for life, they are equated as agents of death just like the walking dead, which Dyer sees as a mark of whiteness (211). This film pulls away the mask of respectability that the mall represents by inserting these excluded bodies who follow the logic of the space to its extreme limits while also using images of “hyperbolic masculinity” to reveal the harmful representation of the action heroes who were beginning to populate popular films in the 1970s and would become, as Grant notes, “an expression of American ideology regarding

politics and gender, reasserting male power and privilege during and after the Reagan administration” (84). Action in this film is rarely heroic. We must remember that Fran acts as the focal point of the film; this is all *her* nightmare, and the men are all as much a threat to her as the walking dead.

Fran begins the film in a useless and obsolete role; no one needs the media anymore (it helps to recall that the media in this film are a feckless continuation of the media in *Night*), and her new role is less one of mother of the future than one of survivor and partner to Peter as they fly into the unknown, unlike the clear path to agrarian sociality indicated by the apocalypse films produced before. Unlike *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*, this couple does not require a chaperone to legitimize their relationship, and even though the child she carries is Stephen’s, nothing prevents she and Peter from having further children together, resulting in a post-white future. As Dyer observes, racial discourse is invested in reproduction and controlling heterosexuality, and “inter-racial heterosexuality threatens the power of whiteness because it breaks the legitimation of whiteness with reference to the white body,” demonstrating that this “unmarked” body is neither universal nor “natural” (25). By naturalizing the union of Peter and Fran without comment, Romero’s film engages this demonstration of whiteness as particular and not universal, as historical, with the future being a space wherein bodies will cease to be racially marked but instead just seen as shades of skin tone.

Thus the “happy” ending for our protagonists alludes to a possible better future, but what of the escaping gang? Where do they fit in the future? The point of this figuration is that they do *not* fit *anywhere*, hence their nomadic status. They represent a surplus

population of violent, aggressive men (and some women, although they never *drive* the vehicles, but this will change when George Miller reimagines this trope) who live parasitically off of what is left of consumer culture, like the gangs of “street people” in *The Ultimate Warrior* and *Ravagers*, producing nothing but death, with the undead as their less-organized analogue. The film positions them as barbarians storming the gates, but their ability to work together and their technological privilege does not keep many of the gang members from being *dismembered* at the film’s end in graphic detail. Their deaths are shown in close shots depicting their agonized cries as the undead rip open their bellies to pull out viscera (they used cow entrails for these scenes) and pull off their limbs. This lingering over the disarticulation of these figures of hypermasculinity, in addition to causing shock and body horror in the viewers witnessing the cannibalistic orgy, also serves to dismantle the supposed superiority of this kind of dominant masculinity and demonstrate the emptiness of its mastery. These men are instead mastered and penetrated by mindless consumers and become yet another item to be consumed in the mall. The excruciating scenes demonstrate the violability of the male body and the fantasy of totality and individuality that hegemonic masculinity values. As Bailey notes, when Americans visit a mall, “they imbibe it,” and Romero shows the mall imbibing its visitors (100). History is often a case of who gets to eat and who gets eaten.

The narrative of civilization versus barbarism structuring all of these films becomes linked explicitly to class and property in the films to follow. Leaving behind the “civilized” spaces of the city and its environs, the next section will look extensively at the liminal space of the road and the violent hypermasculine men who compete to dominate it.



**The Road to Nowhere and the Production of Death in *Mad Max* films: Threatened Masculinity, Warriors, and the Need for Speed**

*The road movie promotes a male escapist fantasy linking masculinity to technology and defining the road as a space that is at once resistant to while ultimately contained by the responsibilities of domesticity. (Cohan and Hark 3)*

*While avant-garde and original works congratulate the audience by implying it has the capacity to understand them, genre films can exploit the automatic conventions of response for the purposes of pulling the rug out from under their viewers. (Braudy and Cohen 539)*

Bennet Schaber succinctly describes the evolution of the American road film as a pseudo-Biblical text where “Exodus . . . gives way to Apocalypse” (39). Alvin Toffler, writing at the end of the 1960s, noted at the time that “young girls in the United States, when asked what they regard as important about a boy, immediately list a car” (84). When the motor vehicle no longer takes a man to and from his place of employment and home, acting as the means for a him to prove his worthwhile masculinity as a breadwinner for his family, the road no longer connects places of production, where wage labor is performed, and reproduction, where labor-power is produced, becoming a meaningless path that is reinscribed with meaning by becoming the only place left where a man can prove himself the master of his destiny. What happens to definitions of manhood when survival displaces production and hegemonic narratives no longer authorize and validate this identity? This contested space of the road is linear, but it leads nowhere when there is no place like home

to return to, to oblivion, a non-place that is a kind of utopia for the “wild” men who dominate it and a dystopian nightmare for all others.<sup>180</sup> The road becomes “neither path to escape nor mediation zone between locations . . . [but] site of transformation” (Varga 262), and the future becomes a bleak, competitive landscape structured by scarcity, becoming a present that cannot be escaped, one haunted by past history that will not allow the future, doomed to a cycle of violence.

In *Mad Max* (1979, George Miller), the first film of the series, one of the opening shots that establishes the mise-en-scène of road conflict displays a sign that reads, “Anarchie Road 1.6km,” indicating that the film begins in a place very close to the end of civilization imagined as law and order. As the law of the state and its ordering structure erodes in this imagining of a near future operating as a lens to view the present, the road becomes a deterritorialized and contested property of manhood that allows for a recoding of meanings as well as the examination of these codes in the abstract. Braudy, investigating military masculinity in 17<sup>th</sup> century England, notes that the figures of “both the highwayman and the pirate represent a freedom from conventional identity, possible for every man in wartime, but impossible in peace” (160). Miller tapped into this sentiment of freedom by positing the highwaymen of the future, pirates of the roadways. This figure of a post-apocalyptic road warrior operates as an icon of neoliberal subjectivity in the way

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<sup>180</sup> In “Cinematizing Dystopia: *Mad Max 1*,” Metin Bosnak observes, “The road in MMI, as opposed to Turner’s ‘open road,’ does not represent any progression, freedom, and hope of future any longer; it leads, not to the American Dream, but to the American Nightmare. It only brings about death, destruction, and unhappiness. Though the characters seem to be constantly moving on wheels, there is no progression, geographical or spiritual, for the better. A vicious circle, corporeal and incorporeal, surrounds the characters” (105).

that this subject becomes an isolated and alienated agent whose only goal can be that of surviving a precarious position whose precarity only ever increases while also freeing this male subject from the conventions of normative masculinity.<sup>181</sup> These men who no longer fit into society struggle to prove their fitness on the road.

When progress seems a thing of the past, and there are no more frontiers to cross, do these men, as Claire Corbett suggests, merely drive in circles without end? She argues that “the focus on cars, speed, metamorphoses and escape” structures the series of films into a theme of “circularity . . . an enduring sense of stasis despite the exhilaration of the long chase sequences” (348). The only progress Max makes from film to film is towards oblivion. This aspect of his story is in keeping with the tradition of Australian filmmaking, one that Meaghan Morris calls “persistently conquistadorial in its attitude to the land . . . insistently masculinist . . . [and in which] to fail gloriously against an insuperable opponent is the ultimate proof of heroism” (131). Miller, in an interview with Danny Peary, remarks that he does not consider “anything in the *Mad Max* films . . . specifically Australian,” and this was his intention, wanting to market the film internationally and especially to an

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<sup>181</sup> Corbett analyzes the protagonist, Max, this way: “Though he reluctantly ends up helping others, he remains atomized, he does not represent authority though he was once a cop. Far from being an insurgent or revolutionary leader like John Connor in the *Terminator* films, Max does his best to reject being enlisted as a savior, for example, by the children in *Beyond Thunderdome*. His separation from the state he used to represent is one reason why Max is ‘Mad.’ He is ‘Mad’ because he is atomized, rendered feral and alone not just by the breakdown and disappearance of the state whose legitimate authority he once embodied but through his exclusion from personal relations by the murder of his wife and child. Thus at the beginning of each of the last three *Mad Max* films, Max is shown operating in a world with no meaning beyond bare existence” (346). Max loses any sense of agency along with the proof of his masculinity offered by his family, and only operates out of a need to survive and keep moving. This necessity of motion becomes the final proof of his manhood.

American market (281).<sup>182</sup> Although this intent is certainly one of the reasons why the films became so popular in the US, they do however portray the themes that Morris elaborates. She remarks that, for Max, “the line of his slow ‘becoming’ as a survivor, and as a different kind of inhabitant, is overtaken and *infected* by those of the more rapidly moving societies he crosses on his way. . . . He is a nomad, wandering into *other* people’s centers and spaces of movement” (Morris 131, italics hers). The first film is *his* story, in the others, he becomes part of other people’s stories while remaining a privileged observer of the action.<sup>183</sup>

In the case of the second film, known as *Mad Max II* internationally and *The Road Warrior* (1981) in the US market, this idea of circularity becomes a visual metaphor as the group of survivors who guard an oil pump and refinery are circled by a menacing mob of road warriors who cannot leave without the precious resource the survivors own, a trope lifted from early twentieth-century Western films when pioneers would circle their wagons, surrounded by the “savage” racialized figures of indigenous peoples evoked as well in Miller’s film by the warriors’ Mohawk haircuts and use of leather and fur. As Martinot observes, race only matters because it is noticed,

thus, the mutual conditioning of appearance and social concept is not a simple thing; the forms of their interaction fill the space between the individual and the institutional aspects of racism . . . [between appearance and concept of race] for it is across that separation that the social institutionalization of racializing concepts becomes concretely determinative of appearance in order to be discovered there, as if empirical. (31)

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<sup>182</sup> Brian McFarlane observes that this attitude was a necessity for successful Australian directors, especially in the 1970s (26). In fact, he goes on to remark, “*Mad Max* created a new respect for Australian technical achievement, especially for its photography” (28).

<sup>183</sup> Davies notes that “the typology of car-based perception establishes white masculinity as the dominant subjectivity of the hyperreal, while simultaneously disavowing any sense of whiteness as a racial category” (220).

Miller uses these tropes to link his film to the genre conventions of the Western while also drawing attention thereby to the lack of any indigenous people in this space, ostensibly the Australian outback. It is as if they have been erased from or were never part of its history. Corbett argues that Miller's films do not "ignore" such persons, "but that their mystique is simultaneously summoned, used and effaced all in the same moment" (339).<sup>184</sup> Of course, such bodies were also missing from the earlier Westerns to which the film alludes, those roles usually played by white actors in make-up portraying racist stereotypes, drawing from the primitivist colonial mythology of American pioneering that disavows the genocidal expansion of US manifest destiny by coding it as victimization by brutal natives rejecting civilization. Furthermore, the plot structures of both the traditional Western and this film imagine a conflict over resources and territory (one that disavows the ownership of those already there), and Miller, by foregrounding the aspect of resource extraction as the primary signifying act that drives the film's action, links this conflict to industry, capitalism, and colonialism; the very things blamed for the social collapse in the prologue that he added to the American release of the second film, which explains the circumstances that led to the end for an audience not likely to have seen the first *Mad Max* film because it was not marketed or distributed well in the US. Corbett argues that the figure of Max articulates a "trauma of dispossession" (333), and in his aspect as an angry white man this is certainly true, but the films also register a broader social trauma of dispossession that

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<sup>184</sup> Corbett argues that such "images of and references to Indigenous people in the *Mad Max* world are so evanescent as to be dreamlike, and yet they're unmistakably and critically present. What is disturbing is how their traces simultaneously evoke, within such a clearly Australian setting, Indigenous presence and absence at the same time" (338).

overcodes such masculinist rhetoric about his personal strife and gestures obliquely that Max's plight is but a microcosm of a larger, longer history of accumulation by dispossession that we call capitalism.<sup>185</sup>

The new economy of vehicular dominance relies on combustible fuel, and, since these men do not make anything new, but scavenge as they roam, the issue of reproduction that loomed so large in the films that I have already canvassed is completely ignored after Max loses his family to road violence; reproductive futurism is replaced by a technological vehicular futurism when all that matters is the "juice." Additionally, Schaber observes that the American highway system acts as a symbolic space in road films, providing "the spectacle of law and transgression without community so that both remain essentially abstract and empty of real content" (34). He argues that road films posit a "simple being in the world as a kind of capitulation to a blind necessity. Freedom, which all of the protagonists of these films demand, is reduced to a right of which one feels deprived" and the "marginality" of these men, "like the freedom toward which it grasps, is abstract and without content . . . [little more than] the freedom to drive" (34). It is a capitulation to the slogans of automobile advertisements and the road rage depicted in the *Mad Max* films indicates anger caused "by a new postindustrial landscape" that alters the context of this freedom (Lockhurst 145).<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Corbett argues that these films represent a compulsive reliving of such trauma as a way of disavowing such history, a repetition used to both master and dismiss the trauma (332).

<sup>186</sup> McFarlane argues that "the dramatic effect" of these films "lies in the contrast of the landscape with the violence and terror of the human behavior, barely masked by the apparent ordinariness" (79).

With this resignation of the future offering anything new and reproduction of the species as a thing of the past, women are treated instead as another resource waiting to be extracted for instant sexual gratification, and if not taken into the homosocial gang, discarded on the roadside as just another piece of used detritus.<sup>187</sup>

This violent road work redefines class structure. Nystrom observes that social classes are defined in opposition to other each other (12). The road agents that populate the post-apocalyptic world of Miller's films patrol and roam just like the agents of authority, the MFP (Main Force Police) or "the Bronze" of the first film, and the parallel between these groups is made explicit in the second film by many of the gang wearing the paraphernalia and costume of the police from the first. Ultimately they are both playing the same road game; in the first chase sequence one of the Bronze states that his car is "still in the game" after a crash, framing the action as such. They create a new social order, a new law beyond paternity and the family structure, but dominated by men nonetheless, men with no home and no ties to the rest of humanity, fugitives from the past social order who express an excess of pleasure unrestrained by morality or cultural code.<sup>188</sup> What drives these men is power for its own sake represented by dangerous, fast vehicles, and the

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<sup>187</sup> Segal argues that one of the most profound lasting effects of Gay Pride may be the way that it frees male sexuality and allows men to openly express "the pleasures of the body" (156). But when this liberation is not also freed from the constraints of patriarchal heterosexuality and its objectifying of women, it only reduces these women to a sexual commodity; this was a key problem with the sexual revolution of the 1960s only exacerbated in the 1970s. Like the "free love" practiced in the 1960s, the women usually pay for this freedom.

<sup>188</sup> In *Manhood in America*, Kimmel notes that social responsibility has been long equated with emasculation and not a demonstration of masculinity, one of the driving factors of a doctrine of separate spheres for men and women (318). Hence, hegemonic models of Western masculinity, with their emphasis on individuality, place men in a double-bind: they are supposed to support a family to be real men, but this responsibility to others acts as a limit on their autonomous agency, emasculating them.

opportunity to face danger and take it like a man. They do not place themselves in harm's way to protect a community, which is the model of hegemonic masculinity in many cultures (this includes Max; his journey in the first film is from such a hegemonic position to one that only helps others only for his own benefit), instead, they face danger to be witnessed doing so and for no other reason; they do it to score points with the other men in the group in the game of road masculinity. The esteem of other men in your homosocial group is all that matters in this future. McFarlane argues that "part of the film's mesmeric effect derives from its use of gently rolling countryside as visual counterpoint to violent movement and a pounding score . . . [and] the drama of a powerful machine splitting a peaceful landscape" (79). Lacking any agency in a meaningless world with no future, where patriarchy no longer offers a suture for masculine anxiety, the road warriors exploit any and all in their path for the sake of self-aggrandizement, as a game they are going to win or die trying.

This masculinist discourse becomes more problematized and critiqued as the films progress. Colin MacCabe argues that, contrary to much early cinematic theory, "film does not reveal the real in a moment of transparency but rather . . . is constituted by a set of discourses which . . . *produce* a certain reality" (182, emphasis mine). These films produce a fast, dangerous reality for their audience through spectacular stunt work, creative camera rigs on vehicles, and montage editing, one that conveys a sense of motion to the viewer as if along for the ride, much like early cinema's performance of the "phantom ride," where viewers would watch a film made by attaching a camera to the front of a moving vehicle, usually a train or tram.<sup>189</sup> But to understand any of the conventions used to produce this

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<sup>189</sup> Also note how we speak of being affected by a film as being "moved."



reality-effect, I need to elaborate Miller's predecessors in 1970s cinema, returning to 1971 and two exploitation road films that began a cycle of road rage films, both of which are texts interwoven into the *Mad Max* narratives.

**Driving School: Class Conflict and Masculine Crisis in *Duel* (1971, Steven Spielberg) and *Vanishing Point* (1971, Richard Sarafian)**

*Our recognition [of genre] takes place not in relation to individual films but to a total field which includes a range of contemporary films.* (Tasker 68)

Since its invention at the beginning of the twentieth century, American men have had a love affair with the automobile as a symbol of freedom as well as class status, a liberty linked to the autonomy promised by hegemonic white masculinity and its role in commerce. During the 1950s and 1960s, this use of the car and motorcycle as signs of masculine power that prove the virility of their operators became popularized by films such as *Rebel without a Cause* (1955, Nicholas Ray) and *The Wild One* (1953, Laslo Benedek). These decades also saw a rise in the popularity of watching competitive racing (both sanctioned and illegal), even as films, a practice that occurred on racing tracks and the streets of urban spaces, leading to a thriving market for the sale of sports cars offered to young men, and we can see the continuation of this discourse in the incredibly popular *Fast and Furious* (2001-2020) series of films (the first is a remake of a film from 1954 that spawned the genre of race films), to name only one example out of many.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> The populist appeal of such films can be seen as articulating popular resentments and anxieties: "Populisms are always contradictory because populism is more an emotion than it is an ideology. And that emotion is anger. . . . Maybe actually having to play evenly matched, on a level playing field, is too frightening for a gender that stakes its entire identity on making sure it wins every time" (Kimmel *AWM* 8-10). During the 1970s, such discourse expressed the anxieties of the "silent majority" which "worked to recenter white men as subjects-in-crisis, in a culture that was proving itself to be ever more interested in such subjects" (Robinson *Marked Men* 27). This discourse was not meant to solve the crisis, only articulate

These vehicles were signs of class status used by Playboys to indicate sophistication and virility as well as signs of power and dominance represented by speed and used by working-class men to display both driving ability and technical mastery over the vehicle's engine. They extended the reach of male force and the obsession with control.<sup>191</sup> Filmmakers exploited this fascination with "horsepower," and these earlier films from the 1950s and 1960s are quoted in the masculinist narratives of *Vanishing Point* and *Duel*.<sup>192</sup> As Nystrom argues, the 1970s cinematic depictions of working-class crisis operated "as dramas of masculinity and whiteness; they are films in which class, to invert Stuart Hall's maxim, is the modality in which race and gender are lived" (14). They reduced the plight of the working-man to that of a white man in conflict with criminals and corrupt authority. As I have argued previously in this study, this crisis becomes so heightened in such narratives that it is more descriptive to call these films melodramas of masculinity and whiteness, and in this hysterical identity crisis, vehicles play a crucial role. The vehicles, like the working class men, are depicted as both a threat to the manhood of the

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it as such "since it is through dwelling on crisis that the threats to the normativity of white masculinity get managed" (27).

<sup>191</sup> Segal argues, using the work of the social psychologist Joseph Pleck, that men are trapped in a double-bind due to "the constraining, inconsistent and unrealistic or dysfunctional nature of the sex-role expectations themselves. Men who violate these unrealistic or inconsistent demands experience social condemnation – in particular from other men- and in consequence experience a self-devaluation which leads them to overconform to their roles" (68-69). Motor vehicles are one of the modes of overconforming.

<sup>192</sup> Indeed, aside from skilled editing and pacing, the visceral danger represented by the game played by a homicidal trucker in Spielberg's first feature film, *Duel*, made as a "movie of the week" for CBS, owes much to the use of camera rigs that he was able to acquire from a cinematographer who invented them to film races. He then cleverly filmed against a backdrop of a rock face on a mountain highway, causing shots filmed at slow speed to appear much faster as the background streams past.

professional/managerial class and also an object of forceful “natural” manhood to be desired.

In such films, the viewer, by use of the camera’s point of view, is compelled to identify as much with the vehicle as the man driving it, they become an assemblage with the camera as part of the operation. Indeed, we never even see exactly *who* is driving the homicidal truck in *Duel*, provided only with oblique reflections of a man in sunglasses and extreme close shots of cowboy boots, positioning the smoking vehicle itself as an infernal monstrous character in the film, an atavistic icon of working-class frustration.<sup>193</sup> The theme of a road duel as an act of vengeance links the film to other rampage films of the 1970s where, as Braudy puts it, “the movie avenger of private wrong acts beyond the law” which was an echo of such narratives from earlier centuries where a man proved his righteousness and enacted revenge in single combat, but this newer version positioned the man not as a wronged aristocrat or gentleman, but a simple working-man (156). They are “men without family names, who have only themselves” and fight for personal honor (156).

Paul Willemen argues that narrative film acts like a mirror that does not reflect a viewer’s body, but instead puts the spectator “in the role of an ‘invisible subject’ identifying itself to the camera” (210). When this camera is part of a moving vehicle, this invisible subject identifies with the speeding momentum of the car or motorcycle as part of the cinematic apparatus. In most Hollywood cinema that includes cars, they are a safe space where a white man can watch the world pass by as a spectator separate from his

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<sup>193</sup> This class animosity was aggravated by the shift in anti-war protests to a critique of the role played by the Professional Managerial Class, especially at universities and government agencies (Nystrom 26).

environment, like in countless detective and police films where it is used as a place of surveillance. In this way, it acts as a simulacra of safety and interior space like the aforementioned shopping mall in Romero's film.<sup>194</sup> *Duel* disrupts this myth of safety and escape, evident through use of music and the paranoid affect of Dennis Weaver as a salesman intent on driving fast on California highways to meet a client because, like so many men in road films, he has a deadline.

Adapted by Richard Matheson from his last published short story, and following the pattern of his other narratives of middle-class men unmanned by their domestic and professional responsibilities, figures of the man in the gray flannel suit who are given, through a usually fantastic aspect of the plot (like the virus in *I am Legend*), the opportunity to stand up and prove their resilient manhood and individuality, *Duel* foregrounds the masculinist discourse that it will demonstrate as dangerous through a talk radio show played over the opening credit sequence. This opening montage displays in long shots, like in *Omega Man*, a red luxury vehicle, but this time driving *out* of the "civilized" space of Los Angeles and into the rural mountains that surround it. A man calls in to the show to complain about his wife and her constant nagging about his responsibilities. This emasculating discourse is paralleled with a call that the salesman makes home to his wife (Jacqueline Scott) in which she reminds him to be home in time for dinner (another deadline). Driven by a tight schedule, he passes a smoking, dirty tanker truck on a two-lane

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<sup>194</sup> Historian Dan Carter observes that in the mid-twentieth century, "middle- and upper- income families were able to escape the increasingly unruly public spaces of decaying central cities by creating a 'secure and controlled environment' in malls and private automobiles" which he contrasts with the bustle and turmoil of public transportation (105).

highway, and it spends the rest of the film attempting to force him off of the road, an act, considered by many who have written about the film, of working-class rage against the privileges of the professional/managerial class.<sup>195</sup> Like the other films I have canvassed, this one depicts a white man besieged, but instead of his home, he is protecting his car. This figure of masculine crisis manages to trick the truck into crashing in a slow-motion spectacle of destruction, and the salesman proves his manhood against adversity and animosity on the road by sacrificing his car, this symbol of masculinity and class status, to orchestrate the crash. Braudy is worth quoting at length here:

The paradoxical place of dueling in the early modern state . . . resembles the politically ambiguous figure of the cowboy in American westerns. The western movie duel on a dusty main street in full view of the townspeople draws deeply upon the chivalric underlay of modern masculinity. Professing motives of personal revenge and honor, it appears to be beyond politics, yet it has political implications. (156)

The moment of this head-on collision or end to the duel, the game of “chicken,” and subsequent meticulously documented crash will be a recurring motif in the films I will examine here, and it operates as the ultimate test of the masculine resolve of the driver while at the same time showing how precarious his mastery over the road will always be. After the slow-motion replay of the crashing tanker truck from several angles, replete with sound design that includes not only the crashing sound of the vehicle but also the growl of

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<sup>195</sup> Nystrom notes that this class is amorphous and difficult to define, but two factors remain steady: a profession requires specialized training and as such its class status must be “relearned by each new generation,” and managers by definition control labor (12). Although both positions offer a sense of autonomy and authority, they are still both employed by another and therefore laborers themselves. Much of the class antagonism traced by Nystrom can be explained by the disavowal of this class as part of the working-class due to the nature of the work and supposed autonomy it offers while also desiring the physicality of the working-class position as somehow more manly and virile because it produces things and has a direct effect on the world.

an animal, the film ends with long shots of the salesman sitting on the side of the canyon into which the vehicles have plummeted, smiling contentedly. The viewer does not know what lesson this ordinary man has learned through this ordeal except maybe that he is “man” enough to face fear and able to sacrifice the *sign* of his manhood, that beautiful red car, to put a stop to the toxic masculinity that stalks him. One can imagine that this man never returns to his domestic life and instead walks a new path, living his life on his own terms, “like a man.” He gains such agency by giving up a vehicle that ties him to a class status the film has positioned as “weak” and ineffectual.

*Vanishing Point*, on the other hand, displays the crisis of working-class white masculinity behind the wheel, the kind that races on streets illegally and modifies vehicles for maximum power, by presenting another man (Kowalski, played by Barry Newman) on the road with another deadline. He must be in San Francisco the next afternoon and attempts to drive from Colorado in one of the aforementioned modified, powerful vehicles while hunted by a variety of police forces for transgressing traffic laws and flouting their authority. A blind underground radio announcer, Super Soul (Cleavon Little) learns of his story and begins broadcasting updates, framing his chase and making Kowalski into a folk hero, a rebellious outlaw pitting his independence against the system like so many who precede him in American mythology, most especially figures like Bonnie and Clyde and John Dillinger. Revealingly, he describes this renegade race-car driver the “last American to whom speed means freedom of the soul.” Like a blind prophet from myth, Super Soul becomes a guide to Kowalski, giving him updates on the movement of the police as a gesture of solidarity from a blind black man to this renegade racer. Through flashback

montage, we learn that, before racing cars and motorcycles, Kowalski was a veteran of the war in Vietnam and then a police officer in San Diego who left the force, disgusted by the abuse of power. Unlike the depoliticized action/revenge hero discussed by Braudy above, Kowalski is provided with an overdetermined motivation for his actions, positioning him as a man who has been systematically wronged by his society. In this way, he becomes one of the “forgotten” men that Faludi writes about, a man who has served his community but it has not served him. This film isn’t so much about competing masculinities as the enactment of a repetition compulsion. Like Max Rockatansky, who will follow in his footsteps (or tire tracks), Kowalski is figured as dispossessed and no longer has anyone to live with nor anything for which to live.<sup>196</sup> Ultimately unable to escape the police, he drives at full speed into a roadblock made of industrial construction equipment and dies in a blaze of glory, a martyr to independence and the defying of authority meant to appeal both to the young working-class men who identify with his subject position but also those men who would identify with the salesman of *Duel* and feel emasculated by their social situation in the professional/managerial class, living vicariously in his struggle for rugged individualism, a quest that ultimately fails. These films provide the central antagonisms and the template for the *Mad Max* films that Miller then uses to tell a story about wounded masculinity on a road to nowhere.

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<sup>196</sup> This figure again comes from the genre of the Western. Shari Roberts argues that the primary link between the genres of Western and road film “is this ideal of masculinity inherent in certain underlying conceptualizations of American national identity” (45).

## **Going Slightly Mad: The Road as the Rack upon which Max is Broken and the Obsolescence of Authority**

*This world of half meat and half machinery is one of the lethal places that make up our wound culture, in which death is theater for the living. (Seltzer 22)*

Much ink has been spilt analyzing how the figure of Max Rockatansky fits the archetypal monomyth of Joseph Campbell's books on the heroic journey. I push against the universalizing of this figure as akin to the superordination of the white male subject in Enlightenment discourse that positions white men as the standard unmarked subjects of history. Instead, I will discuss what makes Max peculiar and particular to the historical moment of the 1970s and its discourses of masculinity. McFarlane remarks on the fact that the two films from the Australian revival that were the most successful internationally advertised the gender of the protagonist, *Mad Max* and *The Man from Snowy River* (1982, George Miller, not the same as the George Miller who made *Mad Max*), explaining that "the images by which Australia is instantly recognizable in the world at large are of men, of *white* men," and this is related to a "suppression of the role of women, relegated to the sidelines in most recent Australian films" (48).<sup>197</sup> Treating Max as a "monomyth" also ignores the importance of father figures to the meaning of the films, as either failures or absent, a discourse noted by Faludi that arose after WWII when the authoritarian father that boys had to stand up to was replaced by his being away either at work or with other men (375). Max is not universal, but instead a specific historical figure articulating a cultural crisis of manhood. He was also a divergence from the typical protagonist of

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<sup>197</sup> McFarlane notes that Max's wife "has to die to become significant, in providing Max with a motive for action" (52).



Australian films, owing more to the influence of American rampage films (McFarlane 48-49).<sup>198</sup> Although action movies, action in the *Mad Max* films changes nothing and is figured as hopeless and pointless. In this endless cycle of violence and crashing vehicles, the films become an examination of a stalled masculinity on the go, a depiction of a masculinity unable to master anything except the vehicle of manhood, a vehicle shown to be dangerous to both driver and others, and ultimately deadly to the primary site of hegemonic masculinity, the male body.

Max goes “mad” in the first film and joins the nomadic warriors of the road. This discourse of road rage as madness positions these men as “toxic” or broken and psychologically ill, enacting a slide from the political to the personal, which, instead of explaining how such behavior is enabled by masculinist ideology and the structures of the capitalist-military-industrial complex, locates the problem instead in deviant “bad” men who have a psychosocial disease, placing a dominant subject in the position of a victim that elides social and cultural practices and values, not to mention the circumstances of history.<sup>199</sup> Where do these men fit in the future? Are they fit for the future? It appears that

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<sup>198</sup> Such young men in Australian films are usually “presented in visual compositions that stress youthful vigor and innocence against romantically conceived backgrounds” (McFarlane 49).

<sup>199</sup> Faludi argues that “a categorical shift” occurred in the decade of the 1960s, which “threatened bedrock concepts of American manhood. A social pact between the nation’s men and its institutions was collapsing, most prominently but not exclusively within the institutions of work” (43). Additionally, the recession of the late 1970s “cost 11.5 million workers their jobs in plant shutdowns and relocations” (51). “A quarter million manufacturing jobs and a total of more than a half million jobs were lost in the country” (52). Australia also felt the recession and was facing a crisis for working men, informing Miller’s films, and I am arguing that the circumstances in America account for the popularity of his films during the 1980s. The American Dream of hard work and dedication proved to be a fantasy, and “there was nothing to be said, only to be feared” (70).

they do not fit anywhere, hence their nomadic status. They represent a labor without production, a surplus population of violent aggressive men unbound from subordination to bourgeois domestic values contrasted with nomadic vacationers who have a home to which they can return. This is made explicit in the first chase sequence of the film when a police car crashes through and obliterates a mobile home towed by a vacationing family. Although this prop was prepared structurally to explode in the proper way, Miller insisted on verisimilitude for this brief shot: he wanted everyday household objects to rain from the wreckage as a sign of disrupted domesticity.

In this apocalyptic narrative, the road becomes a locus for an accident waiting to happen, an always imminent crash and burn overdetermined by the road itself, and I think it owes a great deal to another earlier film for this sentiment, Peter Weir's second feature, *The Cars that Ate Paris* (1974).<sup>200</sup> As Kieran Tranter observes, cars in these films "manage individuals through allowing specific knowledge, including self-knowledge, and facilitate specific orderings of the self, others and space" (68). In Weir's odd narrative, a tiny, rural, ironically-named Australian town bases their identity and economy on scavenging parts from cars that crash on a dangerous curve near the town, using this as a synecdoche for Australian society.<sup>201</sup> The enterprising citizens of Paris sell these parts to fix other vehicles

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<sup>200</sup> Roslyn Weaver, in *Apocalypse in Australian Fiction and Film* (2011), connects apocalyptic fiction with speculative fiction since "apocalyptic writing essentially is speculation," taking a recognizable world that viewers already know and using it "to disclose something new" (7). This is another way of describing what I am calling apocalyptic thinking.

<sup>201</sup> Tranter observes that "the car maintains a sense of Australian community through an elaborate myth of future prosperity and possession. . . . The emergence of a national sense of Australia in the 1920s corresponded with the arrival of the car" (74).

and repurpose them for other uses, even ornamental; interior sets in the film contain many works of art made from such automotive technology. This scheme includes setting up car lights at this treacherous curve which they use to blind on-coming traffic, thereby causing the accidents that fuel their economy. The film ends apocalyptically as the youth of the town destroy it with their custom-made scrap vehicles covered in armor and spikes, looking quite similar to the custom vehicles used in the later Max films.<sup>202</sup> Like this town, the MFP in *Mad Max* are also in the business of creating accidents by running down the mad and reckless men who flout the rules of the road through their performance of hypermasculine brutality. Vehicles are in this narrative both signs of freedom and policing of freedom and serve as simultaneous tools of anarchy and governance; anarchy is less than two kilometers away, and becomes the destination of these men.

The first sequence of *Mad Max* is a truncated quotation of another film from 1974, *Dirty Mary Crazy Larry* (John Hough), the road equivalent of single combat in which a race car driver, Larry (Peter Fonda), who was expelled from legitimate racing due to his drinking habit, commits a robbery with his friend and mechanic, Deke (Adam Roarke), but their homosocial bond and smooth getaway is threatened by the inclusion of Mary (Susan George), Larry's new girlfriend. The film relies for its drama on the masculine hysteria of this situation as Larry keeps failing to prove his free agency by way of driving, and the car,

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<sup>202</sup> McFarlane notes that the film was marketed with this automotive figure; when the film was premiered at the Cannes film festival, "they dressed up a Volkswagen with spikes and drove it round the streets" (28). The film was still too quirky for audiences and did not fare well in the market.

like him, needs constant repair.<sup>203</sup> Like in *Vanishing Point*, the majority of screen time involves car stunts, and the audience is encouraged to identify with the criminal as he defies authority and proves his manhood by eluding his pursuers. Proof of masculinity becomes fugitivity in these films. Also like that film, they all die in a blaze of glory at the end when their powerful car collides with an oncoming train, and they become martyrs for the illusion of free agency. In the chase sequence that begins *Mad Max*, the fugitive Nightrider (Vincent Gil) seems to be literally insane, rather than just reckless like “Crazy Larry,” and his mad chase in a stolen police interceptor, replete with Biblical epithets shouted over the radio, after causing mayhem and threatening the lives of civilians, ends with a crash and fireball made even more spectacular by Miller attaching a rocket to the vehicle, causing it to reach a speed of over 150 miles per hour before colliding with other crashed vehicles.<sup>204</sup> “Nightrider” is an ironic choice for a name when one is a fugitive since the historical meaning of the term defined road agents who roamed at night in search of fugitives. As such, his crash renders him forever fugitive from the social order; unable to be free of social constraint, he enacts the ultimate escape. He refers to his vehicle as a “fuel-injected suicide machine.”

Roslyn Weaver notes that “fuel is the ultimate prize [in Miller’s films] and those who have access to it have freedom and power; those who do not either perish or struggle

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<sup>203</sup> Žižek notes, “What is hysteria if not precisely the effect and testimony of a failed interpellation,” a failure to meet the “symbolic mandate” of hegemonic identity, the feeling of powerlessness in the face of a totalizing subject position (113).

<sup>204</sup> All of the facts about the filming come from the recent documentary *The Madness of Max* (2015) and the interviews with film crew therein.

for it” (92).<sup>205</sup> This same fuel that enables the freedom the car represents also enables the fireball it becomes when it crashes. It is a dangerous means of agency. This hyperbolic car crash that ends the first chase sequence in *Mad Max* showcases the spectacle of acceptable road violence in this world not very far removed from our own, and the appeal of these films relies as much on the explosive acts of destruction as the spectacular vehicles and stunts. The audience *wants* to see these sleek machines smashed to pieces and bodies fly through the air, even though it breathes a sigh of relief when the child threatened by the chase is saved by its mother at the last minute. The film “targets” the family, and the sense of inevitable doom that leads to a mother and child dying later is a fatalism often seen in Australian films, what Morris calls a “routine assimilation of male violence and vision” (116). The audience wants to see the spectacular *limit* to this highway game, relishing the consequences of failure as much for the purposes of *schadenfreude* as masochism; it wants to see the protagonist punished as well and feel his failures with him, for, as Morris asserts, “if its apocalyptic elimination of the wife-and-child was, by our standards, ‘natural,’ *Mad Max* was unusual in presenting its hero as having been happy as a husband and father” (117).<sup>206</sup>

In this film, the cars are treated as characters much like the infernal truck from *Duel*. Tranter observes that “it is through . . . car identity that the characters are known and ordered” in this film (70). The identities of all of the characters are figured through the

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<sup>205</sup> “The architects of the American Century had drummed it in that manhood was all about the score . . . [and] you could not score without an opponent” (Faludi 331).

<sup>206</sup> Indeed, his mistake is in treating his family as something he was responsible *for* rather than *to*, thereby doing them a disservice by assuming the agential role in the relationship (Morgenstern 102).

vehicles that they drive, and this becomes more explicit as the series develops.<sup>207</sup> Miller's and producer Byron Kennedy's intention making the film involved breaking into the international action movie market, but more importantly to appeal to the target American market of young men that they knew would be attracted to the display of vehicles and stunts (not to mention spectacular crashes).<sup>208</sup>

Since they lacked the funds to film on the location first written into the script, the city streets of Melbourne, Miller and Kennedy were forced to place the film's action on the rural roads outside of the city. This move aligns the film with an apocalyptic tradition in Australian fiction that depicts the "wilderness" of the interior as "a place of testing and judgment" (Weaver 11).<sup>209</sup> Foucault, in his final lectures, published as *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (2001, English trans. 2005), traces the ways in which Western subjectivity became, by way of Stoic philosophy and the Catholic Church, a life-long test, to the point where it becomes "a general attitude toward reality" (431). This idea of life as test, as I have elaborated earlier, is a masculinist rhetoric of subjectivity in need of proof, and it leads to the practice of manhood as a game that men are supposed to win. The test in this

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<sup>207</sup> Christopher Sharret notes that "the black leather uniforms and souped-up cars reflect the cult of style, male beauty, and what is 'cool' about the function of the male group discovered in *The Wild One*" (85). More on this in the next chapter.

<sup>208</sup> The film succeeded in the international market; having been made for a mere 400,000 US dollars, it netted over 100 million worldwide, but its release in the US was marred by the distributor's choice to over-dub all of the dialogue and poor marketing.

<sup>209</sup> She elaborates about these films specifically: "The flat and empty landscape confronts viewers and offers characters no respite or escape from the violence of the villains, whose power reaches from town to outback via roads. The land becomes another enemy, enclosing those who seek it as refuge or attempt to leave it, offering only punishment for its inhabitants" (88). I am attempting to draw attention to this use of the road as a place of punishment for men who attempt to be "independent" of society.

film relies on the mastery of motor vehicles, and although he at first fails, Max ultimately proves his manhood and passes the test by passing judgment on and executing the gang members who have wronged him, becoming, by film's end, a mass murderer who kills far more people than any of the antagonists, a fact not lost on Mel Gibson when interviewed about the film; during the film, Max transforms from antihero into psychopath, from privileged officer of the law to fugitive angry white man, much like *Nightrider*.<sup>210</sup> The following films of the series attempt to assuage this monstrous status somewhat, although problematically. The change in setting to a barren landscape also begins the trend in the rest of the films which "ultimately reject the promise of a new world by suggesting that the only reality is the desert wilderness while the coastal perfection is a false illusion" (Weaver 101).<sup>211</sup> Before going fully mad, Max spends much of the film "trying to put sense to it," but this cannot be done.

This narrative structure of a man pushed past his limit becoming a murderer is in keeping with the 1970s genre of rampage films inaugurated by *Dirty Harry* (1971, Don Siegel) in which, as Jeffords articulates, "a larger-than-life superhuman hero battles alone against an increasingly deteriorating society in which the only recourse from crime, violence, and corruption is the determined individual who acts" (16). Although he is not a superhuman hero (which is articulated by such things as infinite ammunition) like Harry in his series of films, Max "solves" crime through murder, leaving the social structures and

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<sup>210</sup> The film foreshadows these events with its introductory montage of "A few years from now..." as it displays the entrance to the Halls of Justice behind a stop sign, indicating exclusion of the public from justice.

<sup>211</sup> McFarlane calls this setting "a terrifying sterility which reinforces the progress of the dehumanization process at work in its protagonist" (79).

corruption that led to the crime intact (Jeffords 18), treating the symptom with the *pharmakon* of violence, a cure that poisons the body politic. Moreover, this personalizing and wounding of these individual men, which substitutes for “a more properly social wound [acts as] a way to evade, forget, deny the very marking that has produced those wounds in the first place. In other words, narratives about wounded white men spring from, but obscure, the marking of white masculinity as a *category*” (Robinson *Marked Men* 8-9, italics hers). As Robinson reminds us, “the power to represent the normative must be constantly rewon” (4).

Vehicles in this near-future apocalypse are the ultimate symbol of power, and, as Deleuze reminds us in his book on Michel Foucault, power “is less a property than a strategy, and its effects cannot be attributed to an appropriation” (25). A subject does not “have” power so much as they *employ* it, and in the *Mad Max* films this power is measured in both the “horsepower” of vehicles and a man’s propensity to violate others’ bodies and property.<sup>212</sup> Several times in the film, Max forces others off of the road by driving directly at them in a “game of chicken,” never wavering in his resolve, proving his superior mastery of the road through suicidal self-control, ultimately chasing Toecutter, the powerful gang’s leader, into a deadly collision with a huge semi-truck in a direct quotation from *Duel* (although, instead of the hyperreal slow-motion crash in Spielberg’s film, Miller uses a frantic montage of quick shots that includes an extreme close-up of a bulging eyeball that

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<sup>212</sup> Mark Seltzer argues that “the spectacular public representation of violated bodies has come to function as a way of imagining and situating, albeit in violently pathologized form, the very idea of ‘the public’ and, more exactly, the relations of bodies and persons to public spaces” as always violent and dangerous (35).



culminates in the huge truck demolishing and running-over the assemblage of motorcycle and rider), causing his spectacular demise, in which not only is Toecutter's body mangled, but his precious motorcycle is smashed to bits of scrap metal by the awesome power of on-coming traffic.

The opening sequence not only sets Max apart from the other officers of the highway because he is more effective and maintains a stoic calm, it also displays the incompetence of these lesser men as well as their lack of concern for the public they are ostensibly supposed to protect. The first officer that we see voyeuristically watches a nude couple copulate through the telescopic sight of his rifle instead of watching the road. We are shown this point of view to implicate the audience in the act. After being called into the chase, the partners are shown to bicker and not cooperate; they clearly do not like each other. This contrasts with the close and loving bonds performed by Toecutter's gang later in the film and Max's relationship with his partner. Indeed, Nightrider's insane driving, called "terminal psychotic" in the film's diegesis, is performed solely as a tribute to Toecutter (Hugh Keays-Byrne) as he repeatedly shouts, "Can you see me man?" A man must be seen proving his manhood for that performance to be proof. This being said, Nightrider's audience appears to consist only of "the Bronze," the police officers chasing him, so his gesture can be read as an act against authority as proof to both Toecutter and the figures of that authority that he decides his fate, no matter how disastrous that may be. It is a matter of honor, which Braudy describes as "the willingness to behave openly, immediately, and decisively on the basis of a moral belief that is felt internally as part of a general code. Thus there can be no honor that is ever untested. And no test is definitive, for

honor must be proved again and again” (52). It is a matter of policing boundaries that leads to a logic in which “all violence can . . . justify itself as being connected to some issue of male honor, just as every issue of honor is rooted in some question of individual and social identity” (Braudy 53). As Morris asserts, “The men in this film are not just ‘driven,’ they are volatile” (129).

Max is depicted as separate from the others, like a knight in shining armor. His superior officer tells him, “You’re a winner, Max.”<sup>213</sup> The montage that introduces him, intercut with the beginning chase sequence, links him visually with his vehicle. The first long shot shows a figure in black pants and white shirt bent over a car engine, cutting to an extreme close shot of a hand tightening something in the engine. Max cares for his car and is not distracted by his surroundings like the other officers. This links the car intimately with Max’s identity since, as Foucault puts it, the Western individual subject is “fashioned by himself as the object of his own care” (*Hermeneutics* 119). Max and car are an assemblage that he cares for. We then see him as a pair of black leather motorcycle boots in a low, close tracking shot that follows them walking past the black tire of the car, visually equating boot with wheel.<sup>214</sup> Then we see him in close shots calmly don his black leather jacket, still without revealing a face, then, seated behind the wheel, putting on black leather

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<sup>213</sup> Braudy remarks that “action films are at root about questions of personal honor—the violence of righteous revenge that is beyond the law, like the justification of dueling that began in the sixteenth century, when the state was assuming the monopoly of violence” (551).

<sup>214</sup> Seltzer calls this modernity’s “double-logic of making men prosthesis” because Taylorism/Fordism as a way of not only managing labor but producing laboring men “projects a violent dismemberment of the natural body and an emptying out of human agency . . . [but also] a transcendence of the natural body and the extension of human agency through the forms of technology that represent it” (146). In this sense, Max is as much a prosthesis of his car as the car is his prosthetic extension.

gloves. Only when he places black sunglasses on his face, completing the ensemble with eye protection, do we see Mel Gibson's boyish face, and this only in the reflection of a side mirror, again linking him to the vehicle while alluding to the narcissism of his bond with his machine, his technology of masculinity.

This sequence makes the car into a suit of armor that he dons like his uniform, even a direct extension of his body, a second skin, but it also places him in service to the machine, beholden to its need for fuel.<sup>215</sup> He will lose this protective shell and the privileges that it provides in the second film, impelling him to help a group of people he previously only considers a resource for his continued survival via fuel for his car. Braudy examines the spectacular quality of the knight's second skin: "Encased in the polished and hardened exterior of his armor, the warrior in battle epitomized what I would call a 'bounded masculinity,' focused on short-term and immediate advantage" (60). Such logic applies to all of the road warriors in Miller's films. During the 12<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, "the armored figure on horseback appeared as a grand individual hero" even though he was in actuality enabled by the vast economic infrastructure of feudal culture (Braudy 58). This figure remains in the genre of Westerns with the armor reduced to a sheriff's badge, and Miller deliberately links his films to this genre, drawing on a long history of epic antiheroes from Lancelot to Clint Eastwood's gunslinger in Sergio Leone's cycle of "spaghetti Westerns." In the case of Max, his car acts as both armor and mount.

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<sup>215</sup> Seltzer notes that the subject gains an individual ego only through the fantasy of an armored body that promises, but does not supply, a total person and individual agency, and is only a social effect. Men often respond to threat to this identity by defending the boundaries of this fantasy body through violence (50). He also argues that the Taylorization of the Fordist assembly-line defeats human agency by transcending the individual body via a technological supplement that renders it into part of a larger apparatus (Seltzer 69).

Central to this figuration of masculine prowess and honor, the knight needs an audience to view his grand performance of masculinity (Braudy 56). We, the viewers of the film, bear witness to Max's individual prowess, but the film continually troubles the aspect of heroism in his actions while repeatedly demonstrating the permeability of this armor and Max's body, disrupting his "bounded masculinity," and revealing that, as Mark Seltzer puts it, "the notion of the 'self' as a delimited agent, immune to foreign bodies and 'bounded by the skin,' is simply nonsense" (90). Max is not "himself" without his car and his leather uniform. Not only do such machines fail to protect him from being violated on and by the road, they also significantly fail his wife and child, as when their family vacation van stalls during a chase sequence, becoming instead the instruments of pain and death when they are run down by motorcycles, not vehicles of liberation but vehicles of murder.

The highway is figured as a space of danger with the police admonishing the public to "stay off the roads" and posting signs depicting some spaces as a "prohibited area."<sup>216</sup> Like in America, the road is in Australia equated with individualism, but, as Roberts asserts, in road films it "tends to reveal the illusory nature" of such concepts (52). In contrast to this, Max's domestic space on the coast is idyllic and safe (but this safety is an illusion shattered when his family is attacked at another idyllic coastal location, launching him into the role of "the road hero, whose journey is often motivated by death, and who never reaches any goal or satisfaction, and instead remains on a road that never ends" (Roberts 55)). We see him clad only in a bath towel, his body on erotic display, but also

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<sup>216</sup> Roberts observes that all narratives utilize the "theme of the road" as they detail a journey, but "the road does not constitute a genre until a body of films" represent this genre (50).

exposed and vulnerable as he reclines while his wife dries his hair. We will rarely see him thus again. This being said, Miller introduces the threat of violence into the quotidian ease with a medium shot of Max's child Sprog playing with Max's firearm like a toy, showing how violence invades the safe domestic space and also the way that it is a game that men play. Although he wants to stay there with his family, he has obligations to his partner, Jim Goose (Steve Bisley). Max is just as much married to his partner and the job as he is his wife, and losing these signs and properties of his manhood leads to his going mad as much as, if not more than, the loss of his wife and child.<sup>217</sup> Without the job or the family, he lacks a stable identity, becoming what the narrator of the second film calls "a shell of a man." He becomes the armor he wears, losing even his name in the third film. Seemingly closer to his best friend than his wife, he begins his spiral into madness when Goose gets cooked, burned alive in his wrecked car by Toecutter's gang as vengeance for the death of Nightrider in another demonstration of the permeability of this armored surface and bounded masculinity. The sequence is tense as the camera intercuts between close shots of Goose struggling in his up-ended car to escape while we hear gasoline pour from his tank and Toecutter urging Johnny the Boy (Tim Burns) to light his cigarette with a match and throw it at the fuel, which he is reluctant to perform. This scene is about men failing the test, both Goose and Johnny the Boy, who cannot bring himself to light the fire. We pity both of them, trapped in an apparatus causing them pain and suffering, both the car Goose cannot escape, a technology of manhood, and the system of restraints and rules making up

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<sup>217</sup> Roberts argues that "the road does not provide, or even allow for, a female space for escape or revitalization because of the cultural codes that make up the masculinist road film, which reinscribes women into regressive social prescriptions of femininity" (66).

masculinity as a technology of force that requires Johnny to prove that he is a man and not just a boy.

The car that Max ultimately uses to track down the gang is a deliberate analogue of that driven by Nightrider at the beginning of the narrative, only more black somehow, and he drives it into the next film, but it cannot be the means of his escape. Unlike the “suicide machine” driven by Nightrider, Max makes his car into a murder machine. The scene where Max is introduced to it in an underground garage medium three-shot of Max, Goose, and the mechanic showcases its massive engine with cuts to extreme close-ups of machinery in motion with a roaring sound that causes the men to beam with ecstasy, almost drowning out the dialogue. Its features are listed: “last of the V8s,” “600 horsepower,” etc., as if the men are speaking of something mythical, magical, and wondrous.

This is the “candy” with which they attempt to “seduce” Max into staying on the job after Goose is attacked, but he chooses his family over his symbolic knighthood and rejects the admission by his superior officer, a spectacularly hard-bodied dandy named Fifi (Roger Ward),<sup>218</sup> when he quits the job, that he needs to be a hero because no one believes in them anymore, this choice being contrasted with becoming one of the “nomad trash” on the road. In a shot-reverse-shot exchange where he stands at the bottom of a flight of stairs looking up at his former boss, Max responds that this is the very reason he must stop; he is afraid of how much pleasure the job brings and that he will indeed become one of the nomads if he continues. He must stop playing the game because the only way to win is to

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<sup>218</sup> This figure is akin to the hypermasculine gay clone that proliferated in urban spaces during the 1970s, a model of manhood that takes the masculinist macho forceful posture and eroticizes it, turning it from tyranny and pain into pleasure and revolt (Faludi 505),

become one of them. Indeed, as Max then leaves on an extended road trip with his family, he does become nomadic, never to return home because he no longer has any place like home to which he may return; it loses any meaning without his family, just like the police force lost its meaning for him without his fraternal connection to Goose. Max spends the following films fleeing from social entanglement of any kind; the world does not need another hero and he does not intend to be one. Like in the other films I have analyzed, these narratives remain ambivalent about the value of male bodies as reproductive agents and agents of dominance and posit that one cannot be one while being the other.

With the amount of road carnage depicted, a viewer is left wondering why the road becomes such a place of violence and retribution; perhaps because the freedom offered by the open road is really a trap. With no civilized space left, it becomes a place of constant contest rather than means of travel between locations. It becomes the only location that matters. Faludi notes that, “while violence uses all the visible aspects of male utility—strength, decisiveness, courage, even skill—its purpose is only to dismantle and destroy. Violence stands in for action but is also an act of concealment, a threatening mask that hides a lack of purpose” (37). When this becomes a road to nowhere, it offers only oblivion with no line of flight. Taken as an allegory for social mobility, it demonstrates the illusion of movement in a milieu that does not register change. The road and landscape zooming past ultimately look like the same empty landscape wherever Max goes. When there is no destination, the road becomes all that there is, and mastery over it the only dominant position for a man to take. Speed and the possibility of impact become the new proof of manhood, and violence determines the order of subjects while masking the lack of purpose

for any of this competition. All resources are diverted to this death race with no end, a race one can only win by surviving to continue racing.<sup>219</sup> In this schema, women, typically portrayed in Hollywood narrative film as performing the affective labor of “pacifying” men, become only obstacles or momentary objects of sexual gratification to be discarded after the man has “scored”; reproduction and production have been replaced by rape and pillage, the future and history by an ever-present now that cannot be escaped. With no destination, there is no future. With no home, no history. In this economy of violence, speed signifies directly, visually and viscerally, the power and virility of a man, indicating mastery over the road and his destiny.

When Max chains Johnny the Boy to a car wreck at the film’s end and sets up the vehicle to explode, he enacts this logic on Johnny. Live by the technology of manhood, die by it. Max finally joins in the game and “goes mad” after these vehicles have broken his body on the road he used to master, his posture with outstretched hands as he reaches for his shotgun resembling a crucifixion on the tarmac. The road breaks and remakes him into one of its agents. Supplemented by “the last of the V8s,” he corrects the balance of power and restores his priority as ultimate road warrior, becoming another agent of the road’s vengeance, thereby accepting the vanishing point of no destination and the end of endings as his lot. The last shot of the film alludes to this subjectivity as it shows from his point of view an endless progress down a lost highway. Just like the men investigated by Faludi, “the frontier, the enemy, the institutions of brotherhood, the women in need of protection—

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<sup>219</sup> Clearly this film owes a great deal to Roger Corman’s production *Death Race 2000* (Paul Bartel, 1975), not only for the road violence but also the bondage uniform worn by David Carradine.



all of the elements of the old formula for attaining manhood . . . vanished in short order. The boy who had been told he was going to be the master of the universe and all that was in it found himself master of nothing” (30). Max can only drive forward as the whims of fate determine his course.

Rather overtly, this film registers anxiety that men will no longer be necessary in a post-industrial future and instead become a menace. How can man as producer be useful when nothing is made anymore? Faludi notes this in her book, as during the 1970s and into the 1980s, the economy shifted from industrial manufacture to a service industry, and working men were forced to abandon the masculine-coded labor of building things and learn the feminine-coded labor of “aid and assistance” (34). Faludi’s narrative itself acts as a kind of apocalyptic speculation which she imagines as the advent of an “ornamental” culture of surface and appearance which is anathema to traditional “useful” and physical masculine dominance (35).<sup>220</sup> What she calls ornamental culture is largely just the logic of neoliberalism that treats labor as a marketplace in which men rent their ability to the highest bidder, on display like Brynner in *Ultimate Warrior*.

Like the man set adrift in Faludi’s explanation, Max is left without context or social system in which to prove his value. The next film provides him with such, but only by way of narration; Max resists the context that would make of his actions the heroic saving of the future even while this status is thrust on him by the narrator from the position of a remembered childhood. Max’s only activity after he enacts vengeance on Toecutter’s gang

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<sup>220</sup> She elaborates: “Ornamental culture . . . is a ceremonial gateway to nowhere. Its essence is not just the selling act but the act of selling the self, and in this quest every man is essentially on his own. . . . In an age of celebrity, the father has no body of knowledge or authority to transmit to the son” (35).

is survival in a meaningless world he cannot escape as he progresses towards oblivion. Instead of positioning him as a mythic epic hero who sacrifices himself for others, the films' logic of dispossession strip him of the endowments of white manhood as he loses not only his property, but any agency over his fate, impelling him to perform heroic acts because he has no other choice. Before I move on to the sequel, however, I need to spend some time with the characters who actually get the most screen time in the film: Toecutter's Acolytes.

### **Wild Boys and Road Pranksters: Voluntary Exile and Fugitive Masculinity**

*The investment of both straight and gay communities in the iconography of the industrial-laboring male body . . . speaks not only to crises over masculinity but also to those concerning class identity. After all, gender and sexuality were not the only social categories being recast during the 1970s.* (Nystrom 111)

*Gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences.* (Butler 178)

Through the aforementioned vehicular designation used by the film, Max's happy family is identified by/with their vacation van, a domestic vehicle, but one stylized by an air-brushed mural on the side of a sleek spacecraft in a science-fictional setting. This registers that the family's attempted escape from the violence of the world is fantasy as it also makes a cynical comment on science-fictional speculation about the future, the very kind of speculation that *Mad Max* undertakes, but with a more cynical and pessimistic vision. Metin Baştak's analysis of the film notes that "the van . . . is an important symbol [representing] . . . the only period when the family is happily united. Unlike Max' [sic] car which appears to be an ego-building and self-fulfilling vehicle, the van *contains the family members altogether*" (117, italics mine). It is a unifying space, presence, and sign. The safe domestic bonded space of the van is problematized through foreshadowing by the spectacle

of the demolished mobile home trailer in the first chase sequence analyzed above. Its safety and the unity it represents for the family is vulnerable to disintegration on the chaos of the road.

It is by way of this vehicle and the freedom it offers as a vacation from society and its problems that Max is able to open up to Jessie (Joanne Samuel) and tell her about his troubled relationship with his father, an anecdote about trying to walk beside the big man in his big boots, bringing closure to the breach he feels between himself and authority, his inability to “keep up” with the “long strides” of his father in his magisterial boots.<sup>221</sup> This vehicle of family harmony breaks down when needed the most and fails to keep the family together when Jessie attempts to use it to flee the Acolytes and the engine overheats. Before doing this, it becomes an indirect weapon when it rips the hand from an attacking man with a chain. As Ian Leong, Mike Sell, and Kelly Thomas write about the figure of the road in road films, “The road’s seductive speed disguises its reality, particularly in an era in which speed plays a significant role in social control. The road is the Möbius strip of American capitalism: despite the thrill of acceleration, escape is illusory, and the drive into the sunset takes you right back where you started” (72). More than just an allegory of fate, the road becomes a space where the logics of late capitalist culture operate, hidden by the need for speed.

On the other hand, as in *The Omega Man*, the “family” shown to stay together with the most loyalty are the violent, anarchic antagonists of the narrative, the Acolytes. These men show affection for each other openly, embracing and kissing in a playful performative

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<sup>221</sup> I will have more on the icon of the boot in the next chapter.

flaunting of social norms, unlike the way that Max has to explain to his wife his love for her that he is unable to express through an oblique story about his father. The Acolytes model a less repressed masculinity. This aspect of display and performance applies to every part of Toecutter's gang, from their affect, to their outfits, to their customized motorcycles. By using such vehicles, each member of the group is able to fit in the group, to belong, while maintaining a sense of autonomy and more importantly the ability to display dominant manhood, their "fitness," through mastery of the road. The film suggests that the nuclear family with a father, mother, and children is a new kind of marginal subject position, thereby tapping into anxiety about reproductive futurism and the role of fatherhood. These men who feel responsible only for others in their homosocial group are the new normal of the future. This is figured not only by the gang and its activities as well as Max's transformation into one of them, it also involves the shift of setting from city's edge and rural roads in the first film to outright desert landscape in the later additions. Schraber links this with "the place of a people always already in exile, constitutively diasporic" (40).<sup>222</sup> The desert then becomes a space both nihilistic and fugitive. How then, do men prove themselves in such milieus?

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<sup>222</sup> Delia Falconer explains this progression well: "In *Mad Max* (1979), set a 'few years in the future' on the outskirts of a decaying city, the policeman Max (Mel Gibson) battles biker gangs on Anarchie Road. In *Mad Max 2* (1982), which takes place after a devastating oil war, these asphalt roads have been replaced by dirt tracks as Max, now an embittered wanderer, comes unwillingly to the aid of a commune of desert dwellers. In the third film of the trilogy, *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (1985), in which Max helps a group of feral children find their way home, even these dirt roads have disappeared into a trackless landscape of desert dunes, fertile gorges, and post-nuclear dust" (249). Since this article was written, Miller has released a fourth film, *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), and in its post-apocalyptic social structure brought back the dirt roads of the second film, but the bleak desert landscape remains.

To think of masculinity as technology is to understand it as a tool mainly used for force and its figuration in society as utility for hunting and defense. It is also to consider the subject position of men as constantly tested for such usefulness or dominance, an instrumental reasoning that treats life as a game one must win or die trying. When a man does not measure up or score enough points, then he is a broken tool or perhaps one made useless or obsolete. How then to think of the Acolytes and the figure of Toecutter? He is their coordinator and conductor of their performance, acting more as a ring leader of a carnivalesque troupe, in the Bakhtinian sense, of satirists and situationists than he is a leader of criminals.

When the gang first appears on screen, arriving at a small rural town, we watch them from a bird's-eye view as they line up their bikes and roar their engines like a discordant choir until Toecutter motions for them to cut the engines with a grand gesture. He calls them to disorder and *embraces* the performativity of his identity and the masculine masquerade it requires while abandoning or lampooning social mores about such performance as feminizing. This contrasts with the stoic manhood of Max with his professed emotional repression and inability to express himself. After conducting his orchestra of motorcycles, the camera tracks him in a medium shot as he takes off his helmet and strides across town in search of his dead friend Nightrider's body, and Johnny the Boy follows him as a lackey, primping his hair even though it is wild and unkempt, making of the gesture a mockery of customs of grooming. Meanwhile, in long shots and the background of the scene, two of the gang members begin dancing a Tango after playing a shoving game.

Names such as Johnny's carry great significance in this world; his name alludes to another important aspect of the gang: their sense of perpetual boyhood. Toecutter acts as the leader of a band of "lost boys" who seek fun and pleasure with no thought of future consequence (or no thought of the future). In the words of Ina Rae Hark, "The road has come to represent . . . the space where hegemonic masculinity is undone" (227). When they subsequently attack a young couple who attempt to leave the town in the man's flashy, custom-painted, fiery red classic car, the gang, although they also violate the bodies of its occupants, seems to gain more pleasure from disfiguring and demolishing the once beautiful vehicle, and the camera records its destruction with great detail in one of Miller's signature montages of close action shots while Brian May's score shrieks over the mayhem. They destroy for the sake of proving their mastery over this road and in reaction to the conspicuous consumption signified by the car as a sign of its driver's Playboy masculinity, but the audience watches the destruction because we want to see the car pulverized as much as the Acolytes do. A popular working-class pastime during this period was called a "demolition derby," where drivers used their cars to smash other vehicles in an arena until only one remained mobile (Kowalski from *Vanishing Point* drove in such competitions). These rebels without a cause articulate a class aggravation against a consumerist professional/managerial class that motivates their atavism with the police, a populist current of anti-authority and anti-government that, although it can be seen in the countercultures of the 1960s, was exacerbated by the historical conditions of the 1970s with the Watergate scandal only the tip of a very large iceberg of corruption, a distrust of authority tapped by Ronald Reagan for his presidential campaign in 1980.

Wherever they go, the gang is in control, even though they appear to be out of control, and they add to each situation a sense of menace and danger as well as farce.<sup>223</sup> This is evinced in the motorcycles that each rides: large Kawasaki road bikes that were significantly modified to look more interesting on camera and to customize each for every actor so that they emblemize that character. These modifications made them even more dangerous to operate on the road. The gang on camera is the spectacular enactment of the movie crew itself as a road gang. They had no permits to film on the locations that they used, merely arriving, redirecting traffic, filming, and leaving before any authorities could stop them. The crew performed “real” criminal and dangerous acts to get the film about fictional criminal dangerous acts made, and George Miller acted as the ring-leader, like Toecutter, conducting the madness.

Toecutter’s wrath is piqued when, upon randomly encountering Jessie and Sprog as they get ice cream in a seaside town, he harasses her in a close two-shot by erotically licking her confectionary cone, resulting in her kneeing him in the groin and smashing the sticky mess into his face before driving quickly away. This humiliating emasculation is met by the death of her and her progeny; Toecutter cannot be bested in front of his men without retribution. He must win the game. The gang then hunts them down like a pack of wild animals, complete with grunted and whistled noises in imitation of predators as they later stalk Jessie through a wooded area.

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<sup>223</sup> Martin writes, “The lower the camera gets to the bitumen, the more palpable is the feel of the road as a physical object or terrain—as well as the vast, seemingly endless distances it spans, marked by those hypnotic, intermittent white lines. The symbolic or metaphoric sense of the road as territory also becomes more intense—the road as a space of contestation, of danger, of violence” (13).

The need for proof of mastery over the road, the territorializing of this space, pervades the gang's antics, and Johnny the Boy can never quite measure up to the test. Apparently "weak" because of a drug addiction that makes him "useless" (of no masculine utility), he is arrested after the attack on the couple in the car but never serves time because of the failing system at the Halls of Justice. Intent on proving his place in the gang, Johnny later acts out and shoots a shotgun at a mannequin that two other members were molesting, a performance of violence proven to be an empty gesture by the empty status of the figure that he shoots. Like his symbolic victim, Johnny is only akin to a man; he is not fit for the road and does not fit in the gang. This scene happens on a beach, and Toecutter leads him out to wade in the water because he is not sure that Johnny is "what he seems." The camera records this scene uncomfortably close to them. In an act of oral rape, Toecutter thrusts the shotgun barrel into Johnny's mouth, demonstrating the penetrability of his unmanly body while advising, "Keep your sweet, sweet mouth shut." Perhaps his mouth is too sweet, his body too feminine, leading him to talk too much? His first transgression was the inability to "finish off" the girl from the car after the other members left, instead taking narcotics. Although many of the gang members perform nonnormative or queer manliness, not the least being Toecutter himself, Johnny is coded as a queer masculinity that cannot prove itself in the ways required by the law of the road. They then walk out of frame into the sun and into the water as Toecutter finishes his strange baptismal rite. Johnny has difficulty "taking it like a man," and this is exploited by Max at film's end when he gives Johnny the option of hacking off his own foot with a saw to save himself, knowing that he will fail this last test as well.



Max threatens Johnny in the last scene with his shotgun, featured in much of the film's marketing, but he rarely fires it during the film. In fact, although firearms are used throughout all of the *Mad Max* films, they are largely ineffectual as a means of violence, and even fail as a means of intimidation when in the hands of an old woman in the first film. When she points it at Toecutter in this sequence, the film cuts to a close shot of his face while he over-acts being frightened by the gun. In fact, Max's worst wound, a gunshot to his knee that causes him to limp in all subsequent films, comes from a firearm used *against* him, making guns in this film more dangerous for the protagonist than any of the other road warriors. They prove to be likewise in the sequel, *Mad Max 2/The Road Warrior*, with shells for his shotgun often sputtering and misfiring when needed most. Indeed, the climactic sequence involves the Feral Kid (Emil Minty) crawling across the hood of a moving truck in order to retrieve shells that have spilled out of the shattered windshield, placing him in grave danger in the pursuit of firepower. This ineffectiveness of the gun does not prevent Max from using it as a tool of intimidation, threatening the Gyro Captain (Bruce Spence) with an unloaded weapon at the beginning of the film. Belief in power is more important than its demonstration, and this is another moment of the film revealing and reveling in the masculine masquerade.

Unlike the urban apocalypse films analyzed in previous chapters that locate safety and the possibility of civilization outside of the urban blight, in this film the countryside is just as, if not more, dangerous and barbaric. Apocalyptic films make obvious Benjamin's remark that "there is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" ("Concept of History" 392). Instead of any kind of "progress" from "primitive"

to “civilized,” these terms are inverted, and civilization is shown to have been savage and primitive all along, using such terms to other those that civilization subjugates or destroys as justification and disavowal of the brutality. Instead of a restoration or justification of the status quo, these films indicate the harrowing status of this quo. *Mad Max* accomplishes this revelation better than the previous road films canvassed above because of the narrative style and montage structure used by Miller. As Adrian Marin points out in his slim book on Miller’s apocalyptic films, *The Mad Max Movies* (2003), “any film that hails from the B-exploitation genre corral is invariably a challenge—if not affront—to middlebrow aesthetic values,” and I would add to this class challenge political, gendered, and raced values as well (16) Although it would appear at the end of *Mad Max* that civilization as such is a thing of history, in the next film, Max is given the opportunity to save a community of survivors who represent a remnant of “civilization” if only because they raise livestock, engage in resource extraction, and are committed to reproductive futurism, a post-apocalyptic kin-group that needs a good driver to escape the hellish wasteland in search of coastal paradise in which to “breed,” as an old man in the community puts it.

### **The Reluctant Savior: The Impossibility of Max’s Redemption**

*In Mad Max a car is the union of a speeding chassis and a pilot who swings his look forward and backward. The driver’s seat is all that matters. . . . In Mad Max 2, however, vehicles are more classically microcosms of social space that allow evolving relationships, power plays, and decisive gestures of interpersonal allegiance. (Martin 38)*

If I were to consider Max as an archetypal hero on one of Campbell’s heroic journeys, as posited by other critics of these films, I would wonder about the purpose of his quest and whether his travels and travails can even be considered anything more than aimless wandering. Towards what does he journey? Oblivion, non-existence. He becomes

myth and memory as he loses his agency and becomes what Pappagallo in the sequel calls a “maggot,” or “nothing.” In the course of the first film of the series, Max’s body is broken and violated by not just other men, but the road itself. But Max was already a broken man before losing his family since he keeps “trying to put some sense” into the fate of his best friend, Goose, burned alive in revenge for the death of Nightrider.

He admits to Fifi, his boss, in the scene in which he quits the job and decides to go on vacation, that he is “scared” because he is “beginning to enjoy” the game they play and is afraid he will become one of the mad men that he chases. He is afraid of losing his identity and its link to hegemonic modes of masculinity and instead abusing the associated agency of his position and disregarding the lives of others.<sup>224</sup> With this in mind, how are we to interpret his description by the narrator of the sequel?

In this maelstrom of decay, ordinary men were battered and smashed. Men like Max, the warrior Max. In the roar of an engine, he lost everything and became a shell of a man, a burnt-out, desolate man, a man haunted by the demons of his past, a man who wandered out into the wasteland. And it was here, in this blighted place that he learned to live again.

Described as “battered and smashed,” Max is also called a “warrior,” but what kind of battles has he fought? He fights duels more than wars. In what way does running others off of the road in a high-speed, postmodern form of joust make one a warrior? His status as wounded man also attests to his warrior status; his are the scars of a battle lost in the previous film, including the loss of his wife, child, and best friend. The loss of these as

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<sup>224</sup> This is a form of agency panic: “This is another reason for liberal individualism’s tenacity: it has taught us to believe that agency is a ‘property’ only of self-contained, autonomous entities, whether they are individuals or social systems. To view oneself as less strictly bordered—that is, to adopt a self-concept from systems theory or poststructuralism—would be to recognize oneself as too ‘leaky’ or ‘open’ to contain the scarce, magical, and easily dissipated property called ‘agency’” (Melley 186-187).

well as his role as police officer displaces him from any fixed position in society, forces him into exile even while it frees him of responsibility to society or other people. However, he was always already “a shell of a man,” more an agent of his armored V8 black-on-black car than an independent, free agent, indicated by his introduction in the first chase sequence in *Mad Max* analyzed above.<sup>225</sup>

What he lost were properties of manhood, and now “desolate” of such items as a family and social position, he scavenges what he can on the road. He is not a monomyth because his activities during the second film do not redeem him from the status of murderer that he ended the first film with, and the spectacular, long chase sequence that culminates the film only demonstrates that his model of masculinity is more a distraction than an act of heroism and a game he cannot possibly win. In *Mad Max* he loses the endowments of his white professional masculinity except his vehicle and uniform, and the car, the “last of the V-8s,” will be taken from him in the next film. Max registers a maximum masculinity, enacting the extreme logic of civilization as masculinist colonial enterprise where a man proves himself on the frontier, taking pain like a man and mastering himself and his surroundings and the fantasy of this position.

Max begins *The Road Warrior* a “wasted” man, and he is a figure of the end of Western civilization as the “thundering machine sputtered and stopped.” Now he is “ready to wage war for a tank of juice.” He begins the film being chased by yet another bike gang, as if this is a normal part of life for him now, and these motorcycles are even more

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<sup>225</sup> Falconer notes the nostalgia of using such a vehicle in a futuristic film, observing that “it is the archetypal vehicle of choice of the suburban ‘hoon’” (257). As I noted above, this populist appeal to a dwindling working-class is deliberate.

outlandishly customized than those of the first film and are accompanied by custom-built cars, one made of an open frame adorned with skulls; a death machine obviously not built for the safety of its exposed driver but instead to demonstrate the driver's ability to face danger and death. Another vehicle is a dune-buggy-like car made of only frame and chassis adorned with animal hides, making it a modern primitive vessel, a document of civilization and barbarism intertwined. The vehicles appear in this second film more like those at the end of *The Cars that Ate Paris*, made from salvage, scrap, and detritus from road collisions. Like the members of the gang itself, there is a sense of bricolage, an assemblage without predetermined form.

As the sequel commences, he is running out of gas, and Max ends the film in worse shape than he began it. Falconer analyzes the voice-over narration that provides the film's prologue and epilogue that "describe its action from the standpoint of a peaceful future after the conflict" (261). The old man's voice explains the oil wars as warring tribes that occurred long before the events of the film, which places the narrative within "the framework of 'imperial history' which, as Paul Carter has argued, narrates historical events as if they were inevitable, rather than the results of local negotiations" (261). The 20<sup>th</sup> century oil crisis is relegated to myth and reduced to nationalism rather than the logic of capitalism. In the sequel, Max is offered a "future" with the "Great Northern Tribe" or the oblivion of the road. It is never made clear whether the "paradise" to which the others flee is anything more than a fantasy about a picture on a postcard even if it is more peaceful.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> This is further problematized by the way that Pappagallo's people are positioned as "civilized" because of their "*naturalized* exploitation of resources for a better future," a "clean" rationalization of the very practice blamed in the film's prologue for causing the devastation that is the future (Falconer 261).

Indeed, in the third film, the escaped children saved by Max fly all the way to Sidney only to find it a dusty, wasted place. We can only imagine their life there as harsh like that depicted in a film like *Ravagers*, but without the roaming bands of men.

*The Road Warrior* duplicates the plot structure of *Ultimate Warrior*, but Max not only saves more of the community than Carson, unlike the former warrior, he does not give up his warrior ways to become a surrogate father at film's end, thereby becoming a nurturing father of the future and living interrelationally with and for others. The last shot of the film emphasizes this point with a retreating shot of a battered Max stoically standing alone, taking his injuries like a man as the people drive away, never to see him again. He remains dispossessed. The issue has never been one of whether Max can "learn to live" again, he is a proven survivor, but rather one of community and whether he can ever belong to or with others again, not a question of his fitness as a man but whether his manhood fits in the society of the future. He is fit for the horrors of the road but does not fit in a civilized milieu anymore. Doing so would remove Max from his masochistic and masculine position, ending his Sisyphean suffering and what it proves to an audience about his manhood while abdicating his free movement and the illusion of agency it allows.

This sense of being beyond saving is alluded to in the film's opening shots of Max driving his car in the midst of being chased down for his all-important "juice." As Tranter remarks, it is

a highly modified police pursuit vehicle. It is a 'piece of history,' yet it has been modified for its current role as a high-speed marauder with booby-trapped, long-range fuel tanks and a huge 'bug catcher' supercharger. Max, the ex-policeman, is similarly a piece of history. Just like the car, he is modified. . . . [and] only after the destruction of the Interceptor, when his identity as a road warrior is challenged [does Max choose to help the survivor community]. (70)

Pushing against the narrative of Max's rehabilitation and heroism, he does this not because he wants to be part of a new community and kin-group, but because, after the loss of his vehicle and dog, he has nothing left to lose except his ability to keep moving, and driving the tanker truck provides him with such. Helping the community is his only choice. His volunteering to drive the big rig in their mad dash away from the compound is driven not by altruism, but his need to reaffirm his manhood after having been emasculated by the loss of his vehicle as the primary sign of his agency, autonomy, and power. It gives him not so much a purpose as the opportunity to act.

The new vehicle that he operates is significantly larger and more powerful than his V8, not to mention phallic in both appearance and symbolic weight. In a reiteration of Toecutter's demise and as proof of my point, the chase climaxes when Wez, introduced in the first chase sequence as Max's rival, having just revealed himself to somehow still be alive and clinging to the grill of the truck by suddenly attacking the Feral Kid in one of cinema's most effective jump-scares, is smashed to bits along with Lord Humungus, leader of the marauders, when the latter collides head-on with the big rig in another game of chicken lost by the smaller vehicle. The fact that this tanker turns out to be only transporting sand and not the all-important "juice" demonstrates that this was all just performance, the entire chase sequence a scene in a hyperviolent masculine masquerade. The sand and the petroleum it replaced are what Alfred Hitchcock would call a MacGuffin, like the Maltese Falcon in the film and novel by that name, "a pure nothing which is nonetheless efficient. . . a pure void which functions as the object-cause of desire" but turns out to be worthless (Žižek 163). Max smiles when he discovers that he has been transporting and fighting to

the death over nothing because he recognizes his own position as “nothing” and faces the pointlessness of the whole endeavor like the Sisyphus of Albert Camus’s existential philosophy, taking up his absurd burden and shouldering on. The third film explicates Max’s progress toward oblivion in the name of the desert he traverses as “the nothing,” his nameless status as the “raggedy man,” and his refusal to be the savior figure Savannah Nix (another nothing) wants him to be.

It would seem, with its elision of non-white bodies from the future depicted in the Max films, that my previous arguments about racialized others as enemies and possible contaminators of hegemonic white patriarchy have also disappeared, but not quite. As I noted above, Miller’s films draw on the iconography of such bodies in such guises as the Feral Kid and the cargo culture of the surviving children in the third film, thereby drawing attention to this disappearance as a structuring principle.<sup>227</sup> In *Beyond Thunderdome*, Max’s whiteness is foregrounded by his relationship with Auntie Entity, played by Tina Turner, cast as much for her personal history as an African-American woman survivor of spousal abuse as her fame as a singer. Ann Kaplan reminds us that “whiteness is not just one category among many; it is the category through which all other differences *are produced as Other*” (192, italics hers).<sup>228</sup> Instead of standard, it is determined in relation to

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<sup>227</sup> As Martinot argues, colorblindness or the doctrine that “race” does not exist “is disrespectful to those people who, having been racialized, have constructed a sense of identity and resistance as a group out of the terms and conditions of that racialization” (24). By drawing attention to the absence of indigenous bodies in the films, the films reveal the erasure of their presence and history in the Australian landscape.

<sup>228</sup> Martinot elaborates this point: “When white people express personal prejudicial feelings, they are acting as conduits of a social mechanism, rather than as autonomous beings, though they have wholly internalized and hidden their being a conduit within their white racial identity. They have become cogs in a social machine, in a social institution without which what they feel would make no sense” (24).



blackness and the non-white, much as masculinity is not a standard but determined in relation to femininity and the non-manly.<sup>229</sup> Although racialized bodies do not appear in the first two of the *Mad Max* films, they both use and require *blackness* for their attraction and meaning, represented in the uniforms and the car Max drives.

DiPiero argues that “whiteness has this in common with masculinity, that it constructs for itself its own internal inconsistency” because it relies on the bounded subjectivity required for agency, a fantasy of totality no subject can achieve (226). Recall that Max’s Interceptor, last of the V8s, was nicknamed “black on black” by the film crew because they thought that such a black vehicle commanded attention. When wearing his black leather uniform, Max is then a figure of white in black in black on black. He puts on blackness to produce his identity. I will address this in the next chapter, which will look at the costumes used in the films as gendered, racialized, and sexualized signs revealing the performativity of the masculine masquerade and showing that the vehicles are just props used in the melodrama.

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<sup>229</sup> DiPiero argues that “white masculinity’s ideological strength and weakness, which might in fact coincide almost completely, inhere in the simultaneous privilege and responsibility that identity grants its others of defining what it is” (227).

## Chapter Four

### The Clothes That Make the Man

#### Costumes and the Sartorial Performance of Manhood

*Fashion is a forceful purveyor of cultural norms and symbols that can shape and express gender differences.* (Aspers and Godart 184)

*The relation between a garment and a meaning is completely arbitrary.* (Svendsen 42)

*There is much confusion about what fashion actually is.* (Aspers and Godart 172)

As these epigraphs indicate, the meanings attached to sartorial performance are often contradictory and confusing. In the discipline of fashion studies, clothing is seen as an indication of identity, and sartorial trends are often forms of self-fashioning in defiance of social codes. As Elspeth Probyn remarks, “Beyond the egoism of the supposedly self-sufficient individual, this is to remember that selves always work with others selves within discursive events” (112). The discourses of fashion are only recently becoming an accepted area of academic study, and this is more so for the study of cinematic costuming.<sup>230</sup>

The evolution of men’s fashion as a mark of manhood that vacillates between modes of aesthetics and function has fluctuated throughout history, just as American discourses of manhood change over time.<sup>231</sup> As a semiotic system of masculine performance, sartorial style shifts with the variation of social milieu and values. Fashion

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<sup>230</sup> Sarah Street attributes this to gender bias and the attribution of anything relating to fashion as “feminine” (1).

<sup>231</sup> Although, as Robinson makes clear, the language used by Kimmel in his history of manhood in America tends to “unmark white masculinity” through its attempt to “generalize by gender and specify by race” which works to locate white masculinity as the standard even if only by implication (*Marked Men* 193). For this reason, I often use the term “white masculinity” in this study to particularize and decenter it from gender discourse. This chapter hopefully serves to mark up this unmarked masculinity further.

styles became more ambiguous, reflexive, and referential throughout the twentieth century as American culture became more postmodern and mediated with the rise of consumer culture, and new subcultures began to identify their difference from the norm through a dress code that appropriates normative styles in sometimes counterhegemonic or even situationist ways.<sup>232</sup> Also, many fashion trends of the postwar period owe their popularity to the use of such garments as costumes in Hollywood films, giving mass media a privileged role in setting clothing trends, such as the now ubiquitous leather jacket.<sup>233</sup>

Style of dress indicates individuality and membership in a group simultaneously, status through conformity and rebellion via personal artifice and “style.” Dress can also be seen to take away individuality. The figure of white masculine crisis in the 1950s was called the “man in a gray flannel suit,” the costume a metonymic object emblemizing the imagined emasculation of office work with its suppression of individuality, emphasis on mental work over physical labor, and its orientation of labor to one of service rather than producing things.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> This practice can be recognized as stemming from modern anomie documented by Emile Durkheim and a postmodern response to the collapse of master narratives that determined the congruence of social codes and expectations of the populace during the preceding century.

<sup>233</sup> Documented by Sklar, Steele, McDowell, Park, Gage, and DeLong among others. Street notes that “as far as Hollywood was concerned, audiences frequently adapted what they saw on screen for their own wardrobe. Sometimes this was a deliberate commercial strategy” in which the fashion is product placement (8).

<sup>234</sup> The use of this figure in discourse on postwar masculinity is pervasive. I am indebted to the chapter by this name in Cohan’s *Masked Men*.

Dress in film is, of course, not a self-fashioning, but instead represents choices made by the film's producers, director, and costume designer for specific symbolic reasons to produce effects in a viewer. Sarah Street argues that

film costumes . . . occupy a shifting place within film narratives. They can advance the plot, suggest character and provide an authenticating discourse for films which are set in the past . . . [and] they can 'exceed' the demands of the narrative by suggesting intertextual connections and allude to star identities which have been forged outside the narrative system of that particular film. (32)

The costumes worn by the men in post-apocalyptic films indicate the character's relationship to conventional masculinities of the time, sometimes in contradiction to such conventions as emasculating, like the gray flannel suit. Costumes are one of the ways that films set the protagonist apart from both antagonists and society (Tasker 62). They not only separate genders, they demarcate differences within gender performance and inscribe value on these differences. They also importantly register embodiment with this performance, countering the disembodiment of Western humanist subjectivity.<sup>235</sup> They are also intensely intertextual, referring to trends outside of the film's diegesis, especially in genre films, which we have to consider as what Tasker calls a "total field" that includes other markets and media forms such as MTV and video games (68). Tasker emphasizes the necessity for genre films to produce certain kinds of "atmosphere and tone," and costumes work with the setting to provide this along with other aspects of the *mise-en-scène*, like camera work and lighting (60).

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<sup>235</sup> Robinson cites Elizabeth Selman to observe that "the division of the body from the soul is *the* project of Western philosophy, and it is a project informed by the desire to create hierarchies of human beings" (*Marked Men* 72).

In Hollywood films, costumes are often designed to increase the desirability of the actor as a sexualized object for the audience's gaze, and this applies across gender. Colin McDowell, in *Dressed to Kill* (1992), argues that our idea of sexuality and what counts as sex appeal "is a twentieth-century invention" shaped by the commercial exploitation of sexual desire in a variety of media, firmly affixing sexuality to sartorial codes: "Whereas love and lust can be quite separate from dress – although they rarely are – sex and clothing are inextricably linked. Clothes are not just the armor of the class war; they are the uniform for the battle of the sexes [but] our dress must always speak in a standard tongue, respecting that which is allowed to be shown and that which must be hidden" (11). Sexuality represented by clothing plays with the norms of bodily exposure, and these norms are gendered. With national standards like the Hays Code and the rating system of the MPAA, Hollywood producers are keenly aware of this sartorial language and its rules of decorum.<sup>236</sup> McDowell's book explicates the way that power and sexuality are expressed through and by clothing. He wrote this study during a period when lingerie and fetish fashions were becoming mainstream in American and European style, worn outside of the boudoir and sex club, an openness that owes its shift in social mores, in no small part, to films released during the 1980s that featured such attire, not the least of which was *The Road Warrior*. Fashion has always been a site of struggle over gender discourses.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Fiske, in *Understanding Popular Culture*, posits culture as "dynamic, 'always in process, never achieved' . . . created anew through each social transaction" (xxv). Thus, these rules of decorum have changed over time, with the Hays Code being abandoned and replaced by the ambiguous and amorphous MPAA rating system.

<sup>237</sup> Fiske observes, "Discourse is the continuous process of making sense and of circulating it socially. Unlike a simulacrum, discourse both a noun and a verb, it is ever on the move" (*Understanding* 6).

My reading of the costuming in these films addresses the ways in which these images reimagine the white masculine subject as an independent, autonomous agent in a world that is figured as threatening this agency at every turn as well as what Jameson calls “a symbolic meditation on the destiny of community” (70). The violent reactions to this threat to masculine autonomy are founded on the assumption, noted by Robinson, that “male sexuality [is] *naturally* resistant to repression or control [which is] the foundation of the idea that men are ‘damaged’ by the *cultural* or *social* suppression of emotions and expressivity” (“Emotional Constipation” 139, italics hers). This places men in a situation where they are damned both ways; either they are repressed “wimps” who have their agency usurped, or they are abject, violent predators exhibiting their agency by dominating others. Savran argues that the figure of the masochistic male victim helps to answer several pressing historical questions:

How can masculinity be reinvented to go beyond the polarizing logic of Cold War politics? How can it authenticate itself in a world grown increasingly suspicious of direct military intervention and the violent subjugation of native populations? . . . How can it adjust to irrevocable economic decline? (194)

He notes that the professional/managerial class increased its size so rapidly during the postwar period “that by the early 1970s the United States had become ‘the only country to employ more people in services than in the production of tangible goods’ [making it] all the more urgent that the masculine fantasmatic be reconstructed to bear the unmistakable traces of a robust, independent, and entrepreneurial masculinity” (Savran 194).<sup>238</sup> As

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<sup>238</sup> He elaborates on the period: “For many social theorists of the late 1970s, the political disasters of the 1970s coupled with the triumph of mass-mediated culture became symptomatic of a precipitous moral decline in the United States and an ominous disintegration of American civil society. Birthrates plummeted during the decade (reaching an all-time low), divorce rates climbed dizzyingly” (Savran 166).

Robinson points out, this logic, similar to that subtending Faludi's argument about productive manhood usurped by a new "ornamental" manhood, assumes a "stable and secure" manhood in the past that never really existed, and many men have actively taken on the mantle of the "oppressed," now using such liberationist discourse not "to reclaim lost entitlements" but instead join in this new system of victimhood, a status often imagined as caused by other oppressed groups, such as women and the melanated peoples who used to be invisible marginal subjects before they were promoted to a subject of social discourse as victims in the 1950s and 1960s (*Marked Men* 195).<sup>239</sup>

I part with Faludi's model of masculine "decline" and crisis as a recent historical development because it assumes that masculinity was not always already threatened, ornamental, performative, and unstable, thereby requiring constant proof. Historical studies such as Braudy's *From Chivalry to Terrorism* demonstrate that historically dominant warrior masculinity was always involved with display and pageantry as proof of superiority, agency, and manhood imagined as righteous and honorable. One cannot perform heroic acts without an audience. There has always been a tension in hegemonic masculinities between the functionality of violent dominance and the display of dominance as intimidation and a mark of respect and authority, between acting like a man and looking like a man. Men must be seen doing the things that increase their value in the eyes of a culture but in a way that does not reduce them to objects for a mastering gaze that is not

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<sup>239</sup> Robinson elaborates: "Rather than confronting the gap between the personal and the political, the men's liberationists instead draw on a rhetoric of personal injury and pain and, thus, enter the field of 'liberation' both acknowledging and disavowing the political" ("Emotional Constipation" 138). The victim status operates to assuage this wounding through the very disavowal of the social causes of this trauma.

itself invested with authority, such as the church, a patron, or a liege (and in Chivalric romances, an untouchable Lady). In this way, the wounding of white men in the films examined here becomes a visible register of both their resolute manhood, their ability to withstand pain, showing how they can “take it like a man,” but also their attempt to make up for an imagined marginal status as other groups are included in the imagination of American identity by joining with them in a figuration of victimhood.<sup>240</sup> The wound born by these white men comes from the scrutiny that they now receive, which is not like the adoring of an ideal, such as witnessing when a knight fought in the lists, but instead serves to unmask the “universality” of white male subjectivity by showing that it is only an arbitrary standard while also revealing the violence that subtends its dominance and hegemony.

Before I delve into the punk and bondage fashions of Miller’s films, however, I will, as before, canvass the previous films of the genre to show how costumes function as codes that vacillate between the functional utility of manhood and the spectacle of sexualized ornamentation; a man of action who does things or a man whose primary function is to be looked at, a poser. Max performs the dialectics of this fraught position, and this performance becomes an increasingly necessary part of the narrative as the series progresses, with *Fury Road* ultimately rendering him into both a functional part of a War Boy’s rig as a blood bank for the driver and a living hood ornament much like the captured

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<sup>240</sup> Robinson explains the important differences in “invisibility” between racialized and marginalized subjects, those excluded from history, and that more elusive “invisibility of those who can be said to inhabit the center of cultural and political power . . . invisible behind a mask of universality” (*Marked Men* 194).



men crucified on the grills of vehicles in *Road Warrior*, an image that I will return to in the conclusion of this study.

## **Earlier Films: 1950s Heteronormative Masculine Norms and Consumer/Economic**

### **Masculinity as Weakness—Functional versus Ornamental Masculinity**

*Researchers that attempt to uncover the ‘hidden meaning’ of garments . . . often forget that the clothes by themselves, out of their social context, have no meaning. They acquire meaning because they are embedded in social relations and contexts. In this sense, clothing is, at best, a code characterized by ‘undercoding.’* (Aspers and Godart 182)

*Men nurture their society by shedding their blood, their sweat, and their semen, by bringing home food for both child and mother, by producing children, and by dying if necessary in faraway places to provide a safe haven for their people. . . . I am arguing that men are innately not so very different from women and need motivation to be assertive.* (Gilmore 230)

Costumes in genre film often serve as iconic shorthand for a certain character type common to the genre, such as the mad scientist’s ubiquitous white lab coat in SF films.<sup>241</sup> However, this visual shorthand also operates in films that are outside of established genres. The apprehension and pleasure of film viewing often requires recognition of the iconic status of parts of the *mise-en-scène* such as costuming. Thus, *Five*, presented as a realist drama, uses costume to establish character status, such as that of the black chauffeur in his uniform and the wealthy banker equipped with a three-piece suit and monocle. Indeed, the film investigates a possible future where such distinctions no longer have meaning, referring also to the social marks of melanin, but all of the survivors cannot leave this hierarchical system in the dustbin of history and decolonize their minds, resulting in conflict.

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<sup>241</sup> “Typecasting in the genre film is a bonus, not a debit. It is just one more way of establishing character quickly and efficiently” (Thomas Sobchack 107).

*Five* imagines a future obsolescence of economic masculinity through the figures of both the dying banker and the intellectual, educated, English teacher, necessitating that this man of the professional/managerial class learn how to work with his hands in a nostalgic turn back towards agrarian society and what Kimmel calls the figure of the “heroic artisan,” an ideal of manhood that owned his own person, his property, and his business (whether that was blacksmith or farmer; he controls his own means of production), a version of white masculinity out of place in postmodern consumer culture and wage-work. This teacher literally rolls up his sleeves in the final scene of the film and picks up a shovel to undertake the work ahead, and his working, physical masculinity is shown to be more functional than that of the athletic, elitist, mountain climber (a feat of individual autonomy that must be witnessed to have social value, overcoding his status as an object of the gaze and the performativity of his masculine virility), who only produces dead bodies in his quest for “fitness.” Tasker argues that postmodernity redefines work and men’s relation to it (130). This redefinition informs the discourse during the 1950s that expressed anxiety about the growing presence in American society of a masculinity measured by the size of a wallet and the proper consumptive habits rather than the “bread-winner” producer ethic that had structured American masculinity since the days of colonization (Osgerby 151).<sup>242</sup>

In the work from the 1950s that I have investigated, the use of costumes evolves by the middle of the decade from a narrative of national identity crisis like *Five* into that of a

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<sup>242</sup> Tasker argues that “class is a key and somewhat neglected term through which images of fighting and the male body need to be conceptualized” (106). Likewise, this study attempts to keep class always in view when examine masculinist discourse.

post-apocalyptic future of emasculated men in a society of powerful sexualized women in strange, colorful costumes designed by pinup artist Alberto Vargas. Diverging from the previous narratives that ended with a reimagined Adam and Eve going back to nature, *World Without End* instead imagines a future of Playboy bunnies gleefully serving virile American servicemen who have proven their worth by fighting.

These dominating women are saved from the “weak” men of their time by a group of decisive, steely, resolute military men from the present who wear regimental, drab clothing in distinction to the emasculated men of the future; these men spend conspicuous amounts of screen time with their shirts off, displaying chiseled torsos and hard bodies that represent visually the resolute certitude of the dominant, masculinist national fiction of Cold War rhetoric, which imagined America as a powerful, victorious, but benevolent master of the world. These shirtless sequences ambivalently display power *and* vulnerability. Tasker asserts that, in action films, “the body of the hero is the sole space that is safe, and . . . even this space is constantly under attack” (65). These men’s bodies are sites of melodramatic crisis. Richard De Cordova, arguing about the gender dynamics of melodrama, notes that, “when the performative dimension comes to the fore . . . the body of the actor becomes an issue in the film” (137). Hence the importance in the film version of *Picnic* (1956, Joshua Logan), released the same year as *World Without End*, of including many scenes with William Holden shirtless demonstrates not only the visual excess of his sexuality but also identifies crucial moments in the narrative where his masculine performance is tested, usually by the measuring gaze of women.<sup>243</sup> Such masculine

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<sup>243</sup> Documented by Steven Cohan in his chapter on actor’s chests in *Masked Men*.

melodrama is so prevalent in the 1950s that Cohan calls the decade “The Age of the Chest,” devoting a chapter to the subject. Significantly, these manly torsos are usually (with the exception of Heston) smooth and shaven, which Cohan argues, rather than diminishing the “actor’s physical prowess” actually *foregrounds* “his body as a marked surface, [and] it visibly equates the proof of his virility with a masquerade that makes the male and female body comparable in value for the film industry as constructed erotic objects” (189).<sup>244</sup> Cohan likens screen acting to “transvestism” because it displays the performance of masculinity as an “impersonation” of gender norms (186). The masculinity of a screen actor must be manufactured as an *image* for a camera, thereby revealing its inherent performativity. But the man being looked at must never assume a pose like a pin-up model or be threatened with passivity and be coded feminine; he must display his body in action (Tasker 77). Tasker notes that bodybuilders have an ambivalent masculine position as representing an ideal body type while also being “feminized” due to the narcissism and passivity of such display (78). Curiously, the men in *World Without End*, especially Rod Taylor, show their torsos in domestic scenes, not action sequences, wherein the men mostly discuss women. I will return to this paradox several times in this chapter. When these men take their shirts off, it reveals the melodrama of masculine anxiety that structures the film, alluding to the precarious hold of white masculine dominance by demonstrating its artifice.

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<sup>244</sup> He elaborates: “Dependent upon makeup and other features of the *mise-en-scène*, like lighting and costume, screen acting blows the cover of masculine ruggedness because the technology of performance makes virility just another masquerade. . . . Male spectacle sells movies and fan magazines, too, and in the process dispels the myth of a natural masculinity” (Cohan 187).

The masculine superiority demonstrated by these men is threatened first by the emasculating culture of these future humans when they take the soldiers' weapons, and then by the challenge of the hirsute, monstrous, racialized others on the surface, much like Corman's lesser-budgeted film, *Day the World Ended*, with its ape-like, horny beast, and this discourse of masculine monstrosity will be an over-arching concern of this chapter. A word derived from the same Latin root as "demonstrate," all monsters are emblematic examples of cultural anxieties and fears. The monsters in these narratives evoke the sense that white, heterosexual, middle-class men are in "a virtual siege mentality," and that "the Self-Made Man [the term Kimmel uses for economic 'breadwinner' masculinity], that model of manhood we have inherited as the only marker of our success as men, leads more than ever before to chronic anxiety and insecurity" (Kimmel *MiA* 330). These 1950s post-apocalypse films depict competing masculinities that are marked by style of dress and hair in order to establish a normative national American masculinity over and against others marked as either "weak" because they have become consumers and not producers, indicated by their flashy clothing,<sup>245</sup> or, at the other polarity, as monstrous, hypermasculine, violent, savage, dangerous, and racialized. In *World Without End*, the "superior" men from our present are set apart through their military discipline/chain of command and the drab green uniformity of regimental dress. They represent the new class of men returned from war and domesticated, but without losing their manhood, the ideal paternal breadwinner and protector that dominated the popular imagination of America in the 1950s, one not

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<sup>245</sup> Hence "feminized" by the *Generation of Vipers* (1942) represented by the sexualized women and derided in Phillip Wylie's jeremiad on "momism."

overcome by conformity to the point where the “gray suit” takes away his autonomy (Osgerby 68). *World Without End*’s resolution prepares for a new society consisting of the proper, “fit” kind of national subject using a rhetoric of peace through strength and white male mastery. It presents a “crisis” of masculinity even though the authority of the American men is never really in question (Osgerby 20).

These racialized monsters who must be eliminated in order for society to prosper are equipped with practical makeup and costumes to make them furry, larger, and facially disfigured to look like a Cyclops. They do not speak, but grunt to each other; they are on the screen to be seen, to act and be acted upon. They are doomed to failure by the American men’s superior firepower, by the privilege of technology and “good old American know-how.” The American men function better than these dangerous others, but that function remains one of violence, and the new social order is predicated on conquest, a post-apocalyptic settler colonialism. This powerful military masculinity that maintains order through violent domination informs the films that this study has investigated that were produced in the 1970s, especially the portrayal of Neville by Heston, who often played military characters or police officers and subsequently became a famous spokesperson for, and president of, the National Rifle Association. As I will show, however, Heston, rather than overcoming a “weaker” masculinity like the previous films, incorporates it into his masculine performance, combining a steely, resolute manhood with that of the Playboy bachelor who dominates economically rather than physically, often considered the opposite of a “real” family man, the “breadwinner” who served a central function in the reproduction of heteronormativity (Cohan 267). As he also bears his torso conspicuously like Rod Taylor

in *World Without End*, Neville's body is both practical *and* ornamental, but also trapped in a cycle of violence and besieged by racialized others who dress uniformly in black, eschewing ornamental individuality for the "marks" of the Family. The struggle between Neville and this group demonstrates that, contrary to the common notion that violence represents social order failing, it actually "is a sign of 'a power struggle for the *maintenance* of a certain kind of social order'" (De Lauretis 34, italics in original, citing Breines and Gordon). The last chapter of this study examines how masculine violence is legitimized as necessary for maintaining social order.

### **1970s: The Sharp-Dressed Man and the Fear of a Black Planet**

*What Richard Dyer calls 'the Playboy discourse,' with its presumption that 'sex is for the man,' with women serving simply as the vehicle for male sexuality . . . functioned to prevent unsympathetic readers from asking why the bachelor didn't want to get married.*  
(Cohan 269)

*The action narrative relies on an equation between blackness and marginality, blackness and criminality.* (Tasker 4)

In *Omega Man*, Robert Neville dresses in the fashionable clothing of a man of leisure, treating the city as his place of unfettered consumption.<sup>246</sup> Although a military doctor, we only see him in uniform in a brief flashback. In his penthouse apartment, he wears a green velour smoking jacket. When hunting, he dresses in khaki jacket and trousers, typical of a great white hunter, another type of leisure for the moneyed elite. His entire apartment, from décor, to kitchen tools, to clothing, looks to have been acquired by

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<sup>246</sup> Osgerby notes that "until the early twentieth century, production rather than consumption was considered, for the most part, the legitimate focus of middle-class men's energies. [i.e. the ideal model of the "self-made man"] . . . Yet from the beginning of the twentieth century there arose alternative models of middle-class masculinity that laid greater stress on the pleasures of consumerism" (9). Conspicuous consumption became a class-conscious way of performing dominant manhood.

reference to the lifestyle section of *Playboy* magazine. Osgerby argues that, contrary to how the magazine is typically viewed, the inclusion of pin-up pornography operated as a mask for the interest the readers *actually* had in the accoutrements on display, the furniture and technological gadgets, so that a consumer lifestyle could be masculinized by treating nubile young women as another commodity on offer (5). *Omega Man* contrasts Neville's style of dress with that of the 1960's counterculture in the scene at the movie theater wherein he watches *Woodstock*, and his sneer indicates what he thinks of the men on screen with their nonnormative clothing and hair, along with their remarks about "what really matters." The counter-culture represented by these men was an embrace of a purely consumptive lifestyle and a rejection of a producerist ethic, with the free concert documented in the film within the film as an emblematic example of this practice. Faludi notes that difference in clothing after Vietnam was one of the many indicators of "the divide between the good sons and the prodigal sons" which was "depicted as a gulf between the patriotic, duty-bound, under-appreciated working-class sons of the Silent Majority [in their military garb] and the privileged, hippie flouters of authority whose long hair challenged gender conventions" (298).<sup>247</sup> Heston sides with this imagined "silent majority" with his derisive sneer and mode of dress, an angry white man victimized by the counter-

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<sup>247</sup> Robinson argues that "identity politics is best understood as a strategy for combating perceived losses of power, a strategy for healing the wounds that mark the individual as the carrier of racial and gender 'particularity.' The focus on 'victims' makes it possible for white men to claim injury without claiming to be oppressed systematically by white supremacist patriarchy. To speak of victims, as opposed to oppressions, and of identities, as opposed to institutions, lifts 'difference' out of the realm of the institutional and places it in the realm of the individual" (*Marked Men* 68). This is part of the neoliberal move to depoliticize social problems, to shift from the political to the personal, a problem of the individual instead of society.



culture and besieged in his home by a group that hates him for who he is as much as what he does.

This conflict between patriotic sons and prodigal sons was figured as a symbolic patricide on the part of the sartorial others and informs much of the conflict between Neville and the Family, but the costumes of the infected mob in this film allude to, not just the generational conflict informing protests of the Vietnam War, but also the unrest in cities across the country with yearly summer uprisings in their segregated ghettos. I have already noted how Heston's hairy torso acts as a sign of his virility, much like the way that hair functions in the hypermasculine mutants populating *World Without End*, but I did not address how the film presents his part-time love interest as another commodity for his bachelor pad, another sign of his hegemonic masculinity and class status.

The changes in Lisa's costume suggest how her role as woman in the narrative changes when confronted with a dominant white man, similar to how, in *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*, the introduction of a white woman changes the black man's status and behavior as they follow familiar although outmoded scripts. That previous narrative revealed that white patriarchal authority consolidates power by using women as an object of exchange between men; women act as a "sign of value," propping up masculinity (Butler 49).

This film is ambiguous about the "value" that Lisa represents to both Neville and the narrative itself. In the first scenes in which we see her, she is dressed in close-fitting clothing that mixes signs of feminine and masculine apparel, making her sexually attractive but also ready for action. The second of these outfits, which she wears when she and Dutch

save Neville from being burned at the stake by the Family, is a brown leather bodysuit that positions her as both spectacular sex object and action hero, a “badass” black militant woman with a gun and also a visual stimulant for the film audience, a market largely consisting of adolescent males and young men. I will say more about leather in a moment, but this costume positions her with power in the scene. She keeps Neville at gunpoint and is in charge, issuing orders and speaking to him in a street lingo that places her in the camp of Black Power activism, not to mention that her hair is styled as a large “natural” that makes her look like Angela Davis.<sup>248</sup> Through these costume choices, the film raises the subject of racial revolt and it explicitly marks her difference from Neville.

Racism does not support the dominant order simply because all whites want to maintain their privilege at the expense of blacks, or because blacks sometimes serve as convenient political scapegoats; rather, the very existence of a clearly subordinated Other group is contrasted with the norm in a way that reinforces identification with the dominant group. Racism helps to create an illusion of unity through the oppositional force of a symbolic “other.” (Crenshaw 550)<sup>249</sup>

Thus the film creates ambivalence around what counts in this future as norm or other, but it does this in the mode of an exploitation film that sexualizes and exoticizes Lisa as a spectacle, and her power is both limited and temporal.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> That being said, Neville still calls her “baby”; his sexism resists even a gun to the head.

<sup>249</sup> Martinot writes of the valuations placed on skin color that racism uses to explain difference: “It is racism that makes chromatic difference strange and fearful, rather than esthetic or something to be noticed as attractive—let alone dispensing with the need to notice altogether and allow encounters to occur simply between individuals” (33).

<sup>250</sup> Martinot cites Toni Morrison to posit that, since the connotations of blackness are so important to the definitions of whiteness, “then whites should really refer to themselves as nonblacks rather than whites,” and white supremacy is a vain attempt to center whiteness when it will always have blackness at its center (36).

After she becomes Neville's girlfriend and appears in a nude scene post-coitus, however, she wears rather more "feminine" attire, like skirts, that position her primarily as an object of the gaze, pacifying her compared to the militant defiant look of her previous action sequences. She takes a subordinate position and ultimately becomes a victim that must be saved by Neville after donning the garb of the Family. As Ann Kaplan notes, "part of the stabilizing of race hierarchies [in film] generally involves the repression of the figure of the black female, who is rendered invisible, or a marginalized object" (190).<sup>251</sup> This transformation from active part of the story to marginal victim is indicated by her costume change.

Before examining the medieval-style hooded cloaks worn by Family members, I will take a brief digression to summarize the history of the use of the color black in European fashion as it pertains to the denotations and connotations of this costume choice by Segal and production designer Art Loel. As outlined in Michel Pastoureau's *Black: The History of a Color* (2008), this hue has a history that is sometimes contradictory, but always implicated in issues of morality, spirituality, and social standing. In chivalric romance, for example, the color of white skin acts as index of nobility, in both the class and moral senses, making whiteness the color of purity and divine grace, while evil is imagined as a factor of

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<sup>251</sup> Savran observes that, "in dominant representations of gender from the '40s well into the '60s, femininity was squarely positioned on the side of 'nature,' sexuality, and irrationality, whereas masculinity was equated with 'culture,' intellect, and reason. According to the logic of Cold War culture, it was the task of men to control, domesticate, and rationalize women and their dark sexuality, to ensure that 'feminine' would forever remain a synonym for 'submissive'" (175). The portrayal of Lisa is harking back to this tradition, but it must be noted that dominant ideas of gender were ambiguous about the distinctions Savran makes. Women are also often equated with "culture" and are expected to "tame" the "wildness" out of men. Indeed, this identification of women with culture informs many of the most popular "women's films" from the 1950s, like *All that Heaven Allows* (1955, Douglas Sirk).

divergence from this purity, darkness contrasted with light (Pastoureau 80).<sup>252</sup> Curiously, throughout the medieval period, the color black shifted from an association with malice to one of devotion and upright duty, indicating the “austere and virtuous” when it was used by monks and clergy (Pastoureau 95). It became a color of sacred authority, demonstrating the abdication of personal identity for a higher cause. Importantly, “this was not a matter of a uniform or even a required color, worn in all circumstances; rather, black was the distinctive sign of a particular status and a certain civic moral code” (95). One chose to wear black to indicate an ascetic status and adherence to an ethical code and community of believers.<sup>253</sup> It is still a color of choice for judges, indicating their devotion to justice and the legal code. Black was a fashion choice that performed social and spiritual value. The style caught on. It became an outward sign of “an honest, pious life” (Pastoureau 96).<sup>254</sup> Black gained new significance with the advent of print culture (Pastoureau 115). With the stark contrast set by ink imprinted on white paper, black-dyed clothing became even blacker and more distinct.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> This use of the color informed the institution of racism that followed during colonialism. Martinot asserts that “race exists because one group, the European colonists in the Americas, conceptualized a purity condition for themselves within certain practical problems encountered administratively with respect to the colonial conquest and, by inferiorizing and excluding all those who did not meet the purity condition, defined themselves as white” (32). In other words, “white identity (as a racialized identity) defines the idea of being nonwhite for itself in order to bring itself into existence as white” (Martinot 35).

<sup>253</sup> In a similar fashion, as Savran documents, many white men in the counter-culture put on blackness or “acted black” as a way of putting on the victim-status associated with this identity (33).

<sup>254</sup> Charles V is a good example of the contradictory values represented by this color. “A man of great piety, he saw black as a majestic color worthy of his rank and power, but also a virtuous color, a symbol of humility and temperance” (Pastoureau 103). It is both majestic and humble, powerful, yet mild. Black really does go with anything.

<sup>255</sup> The practice and discourse of science changed everything. White and black were removed from the color spectrum altogether, thought of less as colors themselves and more as the absence of color

The strict morality of Protestants solidified black's association with moral behavior for the modern world. Once black was no longer considered a color, it could easily be associated with asceticism. By rejecting color, one could indicate devotion to spiritual matters rather than "worldly" concerns (Pastoureau 124). This link of immaterial devotion to material sign still carried with it the connotations of black as indicating the sins of the flesh; it marked one as a humble fallen sinner striving for righteousness through atonement. It acted as anti-fashion, giving "Protestant dress in general an image not only dark and austere but also backward-looking, almost reactionary, hostile to fashions, novelty, and change" (Pastoureau 132). It has a similar anti-fashion connotation when used in punk fashion. This practice had an effect on male attire in general, as men stopped wearing bright colors, and bourgeois culture saw the introduction of business attire that indicates devotion to the job and a work ethic, the rise of functional manhood over ornamental manhood. Cultural practice perpetuated black's sinister connotations, its association with death and witchcraft, but also its use in the legal system, associating it with crime (Pastoureau 139).

The 1960s saw a marked increase in colorful men's clothing, not only in the counter-culture, where gender performance, especially that of men, challenged the dominant fictions of manhood, but even in the loud plaid sports jackets worn by businessmen in leisure activities. Such colorful men's clothing is still not considered "professional," with the exception of the flashy "power" tie. The latter half of the decade

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(Pastoureau 119). This applies more to black than to white, as white is really the colorless all color that includes the others, demonstrated with prisms and the rainbow (Pastoureau 148). But this scientific discourse also indicated the arbitrary quality of color classification itself, as color was shown to be a continuum, and tints blur into each other so that there can never truly be any "pure" shade.

also saw the rise of Black Power and the Black Arts movement, with its slogan that “Black is Beautiful” attempting to shift the negative discourse on the color and its association with African Americans as subhuman and prone to crime and violence. The Black Panthers adopted a uniform of black leather jackets, sunglasses, and berets, and, as I noted earlier, these signs of defiance are alluded to by the Family having to wear sunglasses in *Omega Man*.<sup>256</sup> The Family’s cloaks combine all of the associations canvassed above into a mélange of reactionary, religious, selfless defiance. The religious aspect in particular is emphasized by this costume choice, combined with the way that Neville’s execution scene is modeled on an *auto de fé*.<sup>257</sup> Unlike the monsters of the previous versions of *I am Legend*, vampire-like, enraged dead people in Matheson’s novel and the walking dead-like zombies of the first film adaptation, these black-hooded mobs are meant to demonstrate social and political problems prevalent in American culture in the early 1970s. Militant blackness in this film is equated with a disease of both mind and body, a sickness in the body politic producing violent extremists even while it positions Neville as a violent, white extremist.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Martinot cites Bourdieu to articulate the regulative function of institutions (such as fashion) that give subjects identities and “discourage permanently any attempt to cross the line, to transgress, desert, or quit” this ascribed identity and its associated behaviors (40). The Black Panthers transgressed by taking on the stereotypes attributed to them and wearing them hyperbolically.

<sup>257</sup> As Eller remarks, “the experience of humankind has been a volatile one. Soldiers on the march see enemies everywhere, find battles to fight, and accept orders unquestioningly. However, when this war is interpreted as *the war*—the ultimate war, the final war, cosmic war—the stakes are highest, the enemies fiercest, defeat least tolerable. And when the consummate battle is near, or already under way, there are no noncombatants” (188, emphasis his). Hence, apocalyptic thinking makes everyone into a combatant.

<sup>258</sup> Neville’s status as victim is an articulation of the long-standing practice in America of racial melodrama. In this he partakes of a narrative of white victimhood that goes back to the original settlers of the colonies and the later settlers of western expansion who were menaced by indigenous people and figured this violence as “racial victimization.” As Linda Williams writes, “the white settlers are not just victims in this scenario; they are racially beset victims who acquire moral legitimacy through the public spectacle of their

The later urban apocalypse films of the decade did away with any monstrous others, replacing them with gangs of white, hypermasculine, violent,<sup>259</sup> and, as the decade closed, queer men who ravage whatever they encounter and take what they want with no regard for any values above survival and instant gratification.<sup>260</sup> These men wear what looks like contemporary clothing that has seen wear and tear, and they are visually differentiated from the “good” people by a lack of cleanliness and grooming. In these films, angry white men coded as working-class through their clothing are shown to be dangerous to themselves and those around them; Carrot’s gang in *Ultimate Warrior* destroys the peaceful community to get access to water and in so doing destroys its garden and a sustainable source of food; the ravagers in their eponymous film ultimately die a fiery death along with many of community they invade when they blow up the derelict ship these people live in. These men are the epitome of the embrace of no future. This is a nihilism that, as Virno writes, “has entered into production, has become a professional qualification, and has been *put to work*” (85).

Indicating a different dominant fiction about America’s military power and the masculinist nationalist discourse of the Cold War, *Ravagers* ends in a grounded navy ship commanded by a former sailor whose tyranny only ends when confronted by the more brutal “ravagers” at the gate. In this last act of the film, Ernest Borgnine, playing this

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suffering. . . . Racial melodrama is the popular form that gives permission to these racially constituted groups to carry our actions that they could not carry out in the name of bald self-interest” (44).

<sup>259</sup> Such as the invading gang of men in *Ultimate Warrior*.

<sup>260</sup> Such as the “ravagers” in *Ravagers*.

dictator, is significantly dressed by costume designer Ron Talsky in a navy uniform to set him apart from the people of the community, but his status is precarious since the uniform no longer has the fiction of American naval superiority to give it meaning and authority. This precarity engenders the draconian laws that he decrees for his people. He gives them law and order, but, like Baron in *Ultimate Warrior*, his authority is short-lived and ultimately just so many words.

These films also expose the protagonists' chests, but in different ways. In *Ravagers*, Richard Harris only disrobes for a sexual encounter with a prostitute, not to demonstrate his virile dominant sexual masculinity, but instead his tenderness and vulnerability. As my analysis of *Ultimate Warrior* has shown, Yul Brynner's masculine performance relied on demonstrating his sleek athletic masculinity from the very beginning of the narrative as he stands for all the world to see with his muscular shaven chest (and shaven head) exposed, dressed by costume designer Ann McCarthy in tight black jeans.<sup>261</sup> Examining his performance in *The Ten Commandments*, Cohan notes that "Brynner's baldness obviously gave him a look that jarred with American notions about the relation between a full head of hair and virility, and his mythical Eurasian heritage then ensured that his unorthodox physical appearance connoted not the intellectualism of the American egghead, but the exoticism of the foreigner" (154).<sup>262</sup> Moreover, he argues that, "what we now might call

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<sup>261</sup> Both Tasker and Cohan would agree that this groomed appearance marks Brynner's masculinity as more narcissistic and therefore "feminized" than Heston's hirsute "natural" virility, much like the smooth torsos of bodybuilders.

<sup>262</sup> This mysterious past served him well. Cohan argues that, "shrouded not so much in mystery as in heterogeneity, Brynner's origins were ambiguous enough to make him convincing as an Orientalized Asian (in *The King and I* [1956, Walter Lang] and *The Ten Commandments*) or Russian (in *Anastasia* [1956,



the camp style of Brynner's performance . . . served only to accentuate the transgressive edge of his screen presence at the same time" (Cohan 154). Clearly, *Ultimate Warrior* is cashing in on this exotic and ambiguous star persona with its introduction of his character shirtless. The hypermasculine exoticism overcodes the feminized position in which this posing would place him. An object of the gaze he may be, but an individual and a virile sex symbol as well.<sup>263</sup>

### **George Miller and S/M Subculture: From *Mad Max* to *Road Warrior* by Way of**

#### ***Cruising* (1980, William Friedkin, costume design by Robert deMora)**

*Contemporary masculinists believe that men are still wimps; they need to be rescued from the clutches of overprotective mothers, absent fathers, and an enervating workplace and need to rediscover themselves through a manly quest against a pitiless environment.*  
(Kimmel *MiA* 309)

*Most societies use clothing to define class- and occupation-based identities. Social groups such as subcultures have been identified as being a highly relevant site for the exploration of fashion and its relationship to lifestyles and identity.*  
(Aspers and Godart 185)

Many film reviewers comment on the paucity of speech from the character of Max, this extreme vision of manhood on the edge. His role is more to be seen than heard. Paolo Virno argues that "language is 'without end product.' Every utterance is a virtuosic performance. And this is so . . . because, obviously, utterance is connected (directly or indirectly) to the presence of others" (55). As a figure of the ultimate "loner," Max has no one to whom he could or would speak except his dog. Often this silence is chalked up to

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Anatole Litvak] and later *The Brothers Karamazov* [1958, Richard Brooks]. . . and *The Journey* [1959, Anatole Litvak])" (154).

<sup>263</sup> His bald head becomes a phallic symbol in its resemblance to male genitalia in this scene. He is a bit of a dick head.

the economy of survival, only saying what needs to be said when it needs saying. Furthermore, since the second film has a voice-over narrator at beginning and end, Max does not tell his own story. A lack of speech also indicates his role as privileged observer of the narrative action for half of the sequel, identifying him with the film audience, as he says plenty until the last act of the first film.<sup>264</sup> In the last chapter, I noted the voyeurism of the bumbling police officers in the first scene of *Mad Max*, which, instead of watching the road, shows one of them watching a couple copulate through the scope of his rifle. Max has a similar position in *Road Warrior* atop a mountain, looking down on the violence perpetrated by Lord Humungus's (Kjell Nilsson) horde. This position is indicated as masculine by a comic reference to the phallus when the Gyro Captain (Bruce Spence) pulls a collapsible telescope from his copious jacket to better see the carnage when a vehicle fleeing the compound crashes and is caught by the marauders. Max, as the "superior" man of the duo, trades his binoculars for the Gyro Captain's longer instrument that further extends the reach of his scrutiny. The violence of such spectatorship is registered in the scene when the camera films the Gyro Captain in a tight close shot, watching as they pin a man to his crashed vehicle with crossbow bolts and then proceed to rape a woman. Spence begins the sequence with a smile on his face, clearly entertained by what we are also seeing through intercuts to his and Max's point of view. As the men finish raping the woman and proceed to shoot her with a crossbow bolt, the camera lingers on the change in Spence's face as the smile falls and becomes a grimace, indicating the collapse of distance in this

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<sup>264</sup> Like many of the men I have examined in the 1970s urban apocalypse films, he uses technology of surveillance to extend his mastering gaze over his environs.

voyeurism and the Gyro Captain's empathy with the suffering victims. Conversely, Max's face registers no reaction. The distance between he and others remains. To him, everyone is a victim, especially him.<sup>265</sup>

One of the tag-lines on movie posters marketing *Mad Max* calls him "the maximum force of the future," alluding to his role on the Main Force Police by punning on his name. This figuration of embodied force explains his lack of voice, especially when one attends to his largest speech in the first film, in which he tries to explain to Jessie why he finds it so difficult to say how he feels. Tasker observes in action films of the 1980s the "silence of the heroes, the primacy of the body over the voice in the telling of these stories" (5-6), and in the case of the films wherein Max performs his silent acts of anti-heroism, this primacy extends to the bodies of cars and motorcycles moving at a fast rate down the road, these high-speed motorized vehicles of masculine agency and force. In the first film, the MFP wear full-body leather outfits that act as a second skin, armoring them, but also serve the function of a uniform indicating their status as masters of the road.<sup>266</sup> The uniform is

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<sup>265</sup> Robinson suggests that, "not only are visibly victimized groups increasingly considered morally superior, but arguably, a narrative structured around victims and victimizers becomes *the* national narrative in the post-liberation era" (*Marked Men* 131). This she sees as the logic behind the men's liberationist rhetoric of wounded manhood, and although Australian, I am arguing that this film partakes in similar discourse, which was alive and well in Australia at the time as well, combined with the fact that the film was made with an international and primarily American audience in mind. Furthermore, as she argues, discourses of masculine crisis "do not . . . function to alleviate that crisis, and to recuperate and 'unmark' white masculinity once more; on the contrary, in *enacting* and, in fact, *producing* that crisis, these texts work toward a recentering of white masculinity (and the various symbolic extensions of it) precisely as endangered, victimized, wounded" (Robinson *Marked Men* 55).

<sup>266</sup> Cohan, citing Kaja Silverman, notes that masculine ideology defines the male body as "whole and inviolate," and that "this 'dominant fiction' allows the male ego to function as a kind of armor, 'predicated upon the illusion of coherence and control'" (104). The vehicles and leather uniforms reinforce this notion.

both ornamental and functional.<sup>267</sup> The blackness of the outfits benefits from all of the connotations noted in the previous section of this chapter, such as their duty to the job and each other and the ostensible mission of maintaining law and order, but the use of leather also acts as character armor for this masculine performance, especially the use of the cinematic trope of the black leather jacket with its genealogy of connotations.<sup>268</sup> These outfits set the MFP apart from not only the motorcycle gangs they chase, but also the citizens victimized by road violence.

The leather jacket has a long history of use during the 20th century. Originally worn by airmen during both World Wars, its use by bikers (many of whom were ex-airmen), served the same functional purpose of protecting its wearer from the elements; it was worn as a second thicker skin appropriated from a cow and equates to a suit of armor protecting its wearer as I examined in the last chapter. Leather is bovine skin that has been stressed to make it tougher, and this connotation conflates with the body of its wearer as similarly stressed and tough. But it also makes the body look larger, enhancing especially the shoulders, making the wearer look more menacing. This menace is even more pronounced in the MFP jackets designed by Claire Griffin for *Mad Max* through the inclusion of plates of rigid material to further reinforce and armor the jacket's shoulders. In the following

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<sup>267</sup> Much like the German *Freikorps* documented by Klaus Theweleit, these men “fortify” themselves with leather both physically and psychologically (Bukatman 306). Bukatman opposes this armored body to the Body Without Organs theorized by Deleuze and Guattari.

<sup>268</sup> The fact that they could only afford one outfit made of actual leather, worn by Gibson, and instead dressed the other men in vinyl does not detract from my argument as, diegetically, through the magic of movie-making, these vinyl outfits are read as leather, just like Max's. The appearance of a second skin that armors and encloses the body is what is important here. Of course, they could also just as easily be made of latex or rubber for my discussion of the S/M styles of the sequel.

films, Max has lost one of these, and the remaining shoulder armor is even larger and more pronounced, adding to his lop-sided appearance caused by the injured leg. This visual register of his outer appearance as askew indicates the “madness” of his inner turmoil after the losses of the first film. This being said, the fact that Max drives a car and is already protected by a shell of steel makes the protective purpose for his outfit moot, foregrounding even more how it looks on him, its symbolic purpose, what it connotes, emphasizes, and covers over, its ornamentation over its functionality, and its role in the masculine masquerade.

The leather-clad “male rider, with his bike and black leather jacket, became a symbol of rebellion and individualism” in the postwar years (DeLong 1).<sup>269</sup> It serves this purpose in *Mad Max* for the Acolytes, marking them as a cautionary figure of class rebellion, much like the military jackets worn by the bike gang in *Dawn of the Dead* link them to Vietnam veterans, the anti-war movement, and counter-culture, as well as working-class masculinity. The jacket serves this purpose for the character of Dutch in *Omega Man*, reinforced by the defiant image on its back that links him to the confrontational ethos of the new punk subculture. For Max, the leather jacket indicates his belonging to a group of men devoted to the same purpose and not necessarily individualism, but later becomes a mark of his difference from others and exclusion from future society, an individuation taken to its extreme.<sup>270</sup> In the article, “From Renegade to Regular Joe,” a group of

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<sup>269</sup> Savran remarks that “this ostensibly free, male individual is posited as the basic social unit, his sovereignty founded upon the inviolability of private property and the unrestricted market” (25)

<sup>270</sup> In the recent addition to the series, *Fury Road* (2015, George Miller, costume design by Jenny Beavan), Max (Tom Hardy) significantly loses his jacket at the beginning of the film, and then reappropriates it from Nux (Nicholas Hoult) later, signifying his transformation from victim to action hero in the narrative.

sociologists track the use of this jacket by motorcycle enthusiasts from the 1950s to the current day, surveying consumers for the social values of this piece of clothing. Their research found that, since the jacket was used by Germans and Italians in WWII, it often connotes fascism and conjures images of the Gestapo (DeLong 2). Men wear the jacket to align themselves with this martial power, and this is the intended association when worn by the MFP and the gangs of lawless nomads. McDowell argues that fascists “used [it] to instill fear,” which is clearly one of its functions in the MFP uniform as well as the outlaws (30). It was also used by the revolutionary Bolsheviks as a uniform, demonstrating that it indicates less a sense of law and order than a propensity for violence. The jacket’s popularity and cultural significance, however, mostly comes from its use in mass media, especially film.

Thanks mostly to its appearance in Hollywood films such as *The Wild One* (1953, Laslo Benedek, production design by Walter Holscher), which used ex-GIs and depicted Marlon Brando wearing both the jacket and a military cap, and *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955, Nicholas Ray, costumes by Moss Mabry), the motorcycle jacket projects stoic hyper-masculine individuality, a macho coolness typified by the nostalgic “greaser” character of “the Fonz” (Henry Winkler) on the beloved television show *Happy Days* (1974-1984); it makes a man “feel empowered” (DeLong 2). These earlier films not only certified the leather jacket as a cinematic trope, they also provided Miller with the vital

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Furiosa (Charlize Theron) also wears a leather jacket that, along with her job driving a big rig, mark her as a masculine female who performs working-class physical labor while simultaneously indicating her rebel status. She is aligned with the GynePunk movement, a “project [that] espouses a positive ethos of corporeal self-experimentation. It views the body as ‘a technology to be hacked, from the established ideas of gender and sex, to exploring the capacity to start researching ourselves’” (Hester 141).

themes I have already noted of rugged individualism, vehicular agency, and the game of “chicken” as a ritual proof of manhood. As Eunjeong Jeon argues, “the protective function of clothing is not restricted to physical protection in certain climatic and environmental conditions. It extends to protecting the wearer against both physical harm and psychological dangers, whether under attack or suffering feelings of insecurity” (146). Thus, the jacket acts as protection against masculine insecurity as such.

When Max dons this outfit at the beginning of the series of films in which he will wear iterations of it, it leaves no skin exposed; it *should* enclose him in a second skin that protects him from psychic as well as physical damage, but it fails this role as it is penetrated by gunfire, run over by a motorcycle, and does not prevent the loss of his family nor this event’s effect on his emotional welfare. It also fails to empower Max’s individuality, as he, due to the transformation of his character in the first film, “is not fully human, but only a servo-mechanism to supply gas to the car he lives in” (Dilworth 150). In *Road Warrior*, Pappagallo (Mike Preston) calls him “a maggot.” He is figured as a parasite, suggesting his dependent status. His jacket, designed by Norma Moriceau for the sequel, then takes on the *malicious* connotations of blackness, and it becomes the emblem of his vigilantism during the first film’s final act, connoting his transformation into part of the vehicular apparatus he will then lose during the turmoil of the sequel. In the second film, the leather outfit sets him apart from the survivors’ lighter-colored garments (dubbed “Gucci Arabs” by the film crew) and aligns him with the leather-clad *antagonists* while also becoming more functional with the addition of a belt of tools (Tranter 70).

The agonistic attributes of black leather reach back to the historical uses of it during the 20<sup>th</sup> century noted above. During the 1950's and 1960's, the black leather jacket "became part of the look of the emerging cultural hero/antihero teenage archetype and a visual expression of revolt against the standardized social norm of the day" (DeLong 2). This linkage between jacket and rebel has earlier historical precedent. As Andrea Denny-Brown notes in her book on medieval English fashion, the clothing we call a jacket evolved from the "jack" which was used by peasants and artisans (152). It was worn by the "galaunt," "a largely home-grown character of divisiveness and disorder who emerges at the most critical moment of cultural discord in England's history" (Denny-Brown 153). Her description of these "jacks" intersects with the way that Max's jacket is designed: "these clothes are said not only to create unnatural girth, making skinny men broad, but also to reshape and contort the human body altogether, creating lumps where they shouldn't be" like the large shoulder pad attached to only one of Max's shoulders in the sequels (157).

Like the nomad gangs who roam the roads, Max no longer "fits" in society, and as a result is not fit for the future. Like these nomads, his character emblemizes the punk ethic of embracing no future. The use of black leather in punk and fetish fashions sets the sequel apart from previous films that used such costumes with the exceptions of *Death Race 2000*, *Cruising*, and the underground films of Kenneth Anger.<sup>271</sup> Miller and Moriceau borrow this look from Corman's and Friedkin's films as a way to also transport

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<sup>271</sup> Steele argues that, "not only does a leather jacket 'disguise' the body's 'inadequacies' and provide a sense of 'heightened sexual awareness,' but it also functions as an icon of butch, raunchy, even brutal, masculinity—and raw power" (160).



the homoerotic sadomasochism of the S/M subculture into this post-apocalyptic mise-en-scène, a desire and practice that *Cruising* suggests subtends the masculine performance of uniformed police officers as much as the men who frequent leather bars.<sup>272</sup> In many ways, *The Road Warrior* duplicates the narrative topos of *Cruising*, which reveals how the two supposedly distinct “boys’ clubs” of leathermen and policemen are more similar than different, a comparison Miller achieves in *Mad Max* between the MFP and their adversaries, Toecutter’s gang of Acolytes.

Nystrom argues that the leather bars that appeared during the 1970s were more than just a place for deviant sexual practices, but were political, and “articulated gender and sexual identity through ‘an elaborate form of transvestism that involved putting on the bogeyman costumes of a new social threat to the bourgeois world’” (141, citing Daniel Harris). The carnivalesque performance of this subculture foregrounds the masquerade of masculinity by lampooning and taking pleasure in its most egregious forms of domination.<sup>273</sup> Thus, the rebellion personified by Marlon Brando appropriating military garb as a biker in the 1950s was reappropriated by queer men who turned the tropes of

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<sup>272</sup> In this way, the film denaturalizes the heteronormativity of the police department, foregrounding the discourse of “natural” sexuality as always already queer, for, as Braudy relates, “although Kinsey’s reports expanded the sphere of what was considered natural in sexuality, the lure of the natural as a mode of explanation continued to lead to a stigmatizing of the unnatural. And there was enough fear of a debilitated or excessive masculinity emerging from the war to make the stigma as general as possible” (505). Although the war he mentions was WWII, the same sentiments apply to soldiers returning from Vietnam, perhaps even more so.

<sup>273</sup> Thomas remarks on this political necessity: “One cannot historicize and denaturalize the visibility of feminine masquerade, the proliferation in this culture of images of women’s bodies as fetishized and dominated objects, without also attempting to historicize and denaturalize the *invisibility* of masculine masquerade, the disappearance of male bodies in the construction of men as fetishizing and dominating subjects. In fact, the visibility of the former may be a condition of possibility for the invisibility of the latter” (50, italics his).

oppression and fear represented by the fascist costume into pleasure and changed the connotations of black leather into less a protective and aggressive garment and more a sign of the willingness to penetrate and be penetrated, to take it like a man because you are a man and because you are interested in men.<sup>274</sup> This public and visible performance demands recognition from a world that would deny such manhood and would label such acts as shameful.<sup>275</sup> In like manner, members of Lord Humungus's gang satirize the uniforms of authority in a carnivalesque performance. One of the groups is called the "Gay Boys," and a memorable victim to the flamethrower protecting the compound is a man with pink hair, including beard, driving a pink Cadillac who perishes soon after we are given a brief glimpse of his fabulous outfit. Some of them wear the full uniform of the MFP, suggesting that they may indeed be former members of the police force, but also, like the scene in *Cruising* when Al Pacino's undercover agent is ejected from a gay bar because he is *not* wearing a police uniform on a night designated for such drag, they foreground the masculine performativity of the uniform as masquerade. This "transvestism," like the bearing of chests in Hollywood films noted earlier, becomes another revealing of the masquerade of masculine dominance and the insecurity this mask covers.

Although not as overtly deviant as the costumes in the sequel, the Acolytes in *Mad Max* also participate in a performance of masculine drag that covers over the latent anxiety expressed by Toecutter in a speech that "the Bronze wants to take our freedom and our

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<sup>274</sup> Elaborated by David Savran in *Taking it Like a Man*, especially the chapter "Queer Masculinities."

<sup>275</sup> Thomas, noting that Lacan suggests the revelation of the penis is a shaming of the phallus, compares this notion to the work of Sandra Bartky which argues that the Western social order links shame to femininity (50). In both cases the shame results from proof that a subject does not "have" the phallus, the penis never being able to live up to the demands of the phallus as signifier.

pride.” He wears a leather jacket made to look “primitive,” equipped with furry epaulets that lampoon the ornamental quality of the police officer’s shoulder armor and their authority. His second-in command, Bubba Zaneti (Geoff Parry), wears a V-neck black women’s shirt (or no shirt at all) with a black leather jacket (an image of Max in one of the posters made for the film shows him likewise with a leather jacket and no shirt even though he wears a white undershirt in the film). The Acolytes all wear eye make-up, an activity coded as feminine in modern Western culture, but one that highlights the masquerade of their hypermasculine performance.

At many points, the gang members perform ad-libbed skits or dances like performers in a drag vaudeville show on stage, such as when two of them dance an impromptu tango. But this transgressive performativity can also be seen in the police officers, most notably their leader Fifi (Roger Ward). When Max visits him at home in order to quit the force, we find him wearing the tight leather pants of their uniform with a bare torso and only a black kerchief tied around his neck like a dandy. He is watering his house plants while listening to music. The image of a very large, bald, muscular man with a thick handlebar moustache performing domestic chores while displaying his shaved chest evokes the image of Brynner and provides context for the masculinist discourse of the subsequent dialogue in the scene as Fifi tells Max that he needs to “give them [the public] back their heroes” while it also alludes to a common assumption that body-builders are inherently narcissistic noted by Tasker. The performativity of heroism is juxtaposed in this scene with Max’s insistence that, if he spends more time on the road, he will become one of “them,” the nomads who terrorize the public. The context of what we see in this scene

makes this allusion to the “nomad scum” one not only concerning the discourses of sanity and criminality, but also sexual orientation and its link in popular imagination with deviance from hegemonic masculinity. Fifi’s dandyism also visually links him with Toecutter’s gang, demonstrating that there is very little difference between “us” and “them” in all of these discourses of competing masculinities.

### **Road Warriors and the Punk Aesthetic: Sartorial Transgressions or the New**

#### **Normal?**

*The punk sensibility shares another affinity with Haraway’s unique social criticism, her notion of a new oppositional human/cyborg politics that recognizes our unavoidable connection with machines as well as with nature in the necessary struggle against the all-too-perfect, controlled and controlling communicational systems of phallogocentrism. . . . Like her proposed mutant cyborg bodies, punk was not afraid to embrace the face of the ‘monstrous’-celebrating instead what the mainstream fled, trying to interject the face of the unacceptable Other into the normalcy required by the sterile business-as-usual culture of late capitalism. (Goshorn 71)*

The first shot of *The Road Warrior* duplicates the final shot of Max in *Mad Max* with a medium shot from the front of his car that depicts his emotionless resolute face framed by the windshield of the roaring vehicle. He begins the film as he left the last, a warrior on a road with no horizon, a fugitive from his past and the “civilization” it represents.<sup>276</sup> Tasker notes that the often undesignated location of action films allows them

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<sup>276</sup> Paul Williams explains the use of this amorphous concept called “civilization” in post-apocalyptic texts succinctly, observing that it actually denotes two concepts: “first, the achievements of Europe and North America, and second, the history of human development, in whose name the West speaks, since its endeavors are self-promoted as exemplary. . . . The term appears to be first used in the eighteenth century and is built into the root ‘civilize,’ which originates in the early seventeenth century. This idea of an advanced stage in the development of human society should be set in the context of the contemporaneous making of the modern world: ‘civilization’ legitimized why non-Europeans profited from being exposed to the European culture” (15). Civilization is an excuse for conquest, or as Benjamin puts it, barbarism. It is a fantasy that assumes white Europeans to be the standard of humanity and that the exploitations of colonialism are a gift to the less “civilized” parts of the world.

the pretense of myth and universality (a sentiment attributed to Miller's work ad infinitum), allowing such films to articulate ahistorically and apolitically that "power and potency are constitutive discourses of masculinity" (94). Although this is one of the reasons the films appeal to an American audience, allowing it to enjoy the film without an understanding of the Australian context to comprehend the narrative, my previous discussion of the use of vehicles historicizes the films, placing them into a cycle of 1960s and 1970s road films set in the chronotope of "the road." Miller's series of films come out of this tradition, but, as Delia Falconer observes, the road gradually disappears as the films continue, from the asphalt roadways of the first, to the dirt roads of the second, and to a desert landscape without paths in the third, from the road as a contested space to "a landscape of mythic 'sights'" (249). *The Road Warrior* was originally titled *Mad Max 2*, but they changed the name for the American release because the first film had had such a limited release in the US. In a sense, this newer name is redundant. The word "road" is derived from the same root as, and previously meant, "raid." The *OED* includes a definition used until the 17<sup>th</sup> century of "riding with hostile intent." To ride the road, then, is to always already be a road warrior. This narrative appeals to those euphemistically called the "silent majority," who emerge as a rhetorical figure and political tool in the late 1960s, signifying, as Robinson puts it,

nothing so much as whiteness, and its aggressive posture and sense of 'natural' entitlement. . . . [However,] while laments about the silent majority certainly helped fuel the rise of the New Right, the discourse on the emergence of the Middle American also helped to make whiteness and masculinity visible in such a way as to threaten their normativity. . . . [which] can work in the interests of interrupting the stubborn equation of white masculinity with Americanness itself. (*Marked Men* 50)

These films aid in this interruption because the only thing left to fight over in a post-industrial apocalypse is no longer land, creed, nation, or family since, as the prologue of *Road Warrior* indicates, these “tribes” are no longer relevant, and there is no place like home to return to; only the all-important “juice” matters, the fuel that perpetuates and originates the conflict, the necessary energy for these vehicles of masculine agency in a world without hope or future.

Max operates beyond the frontier, fully enmeshed in savagery and without civility or regard for the needs of others, but he discovers a new frontier, one separating Lord Humungus’s horde from the “civilized” people who will become the “Great Northern Tribe,” and even though he aids them in seeking their future over the horizon, he cannot return to civilization and be part of their community and the future.<sup>277</sup> He instead becomes a legendary sacrificial messiah who lives only in the retelling of stories, just like Neville in *Omega Man* (unlike the previous versions of *I am Legend* where Neville realizes at the end that his legend is one of monstrosity, not heroic sacrifice).

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<sup>277</sup> Povinelli, speaking of how liberal society is based on facts and norms, argues that “the horizon is the deployment of a spatial imaginary to bracket all forms of violence as the result of the unintended, accidental, and unfortunate unfolding of liberalism’s own dialectic” (1). The depiction of colonized and conquered peoples as savages is only one of many forms that this imagining of the horizon takes. Hence the demarcations of race act as a “doublespeak double bind of recognition – [a] revised horizon of the Human – mark[ing] all others as *having been let in*” (4). The horizon then changes the frontier from a demarcation of bordering sovereign states to one that marks “the contested space between civilized and uncivilized natures and cultures. . . . the space between civilization’s sovereignty and the terror of barbarity” (4). This imagining informs *The Road Warrior* “because the frontier emerges whenever borders are punctured or perforated, are not secured or recognized” (5). “The land was not “taken” in any objective sense; it is still there. It was instead juridically transformed into an “object” it could not actually be (an imaginary object) in order to be “take-able” (in an imaginary and military sense). That transformation constituted its taking.” (Martinot 207). Significantly, Humungus uses this liberal logic as a bargaining tool for confronting the community when he tells them to “just walk away.”

The problems of a seemingly democratic, liberal community centered around the extraction and refinement of the only important resource are solved by an outsider's individual agency, by one of the "nomad trash," and he is exactly what they need precisely because he has nothing to live for and nothing to lose. This is in keeping with the trend of anti-Westerns made in the late-1960s and 1970s, where the knight/warrior helps a small group of common people against a larger more authoritarian threat (Braudy 498). However, people are not farmers or homesteaders, for, despite what he says to Max, they are, like Max, living off of the old world by refining the substance that caused and fueled the wars that ended the world. Unlike what the narrator says of him in the opening sequence, that "in this blighted place he learned to live again," what this conflict provides for Max is a frontier upon which he can again prove his "honorable" vigilant manhood through mastery of the road, only this time, as in the following sequels, he is not just murdering the "bad guys," but ostensibly hauls precious cargo to free it from the cycle of violence, something he will not actually accomplish until the fourth installment, *Fury Road*.

*The Road Warrior* begins, just like the first film, with a high-speed chase sequence, but this time Max has taken the role of Nightrider and is being pursued by the new dominant gang of men who now "own" the road, those who are willing to "wage war for a tank of the juice."<sup>278</sup> While Nightrider was driving to display his defiant mastery of the road for Toecutter as audience and with the goal of "death by cop," Max in the sequel is only trying to survive and keep moving; his survival requires constant motion to scavenge more juice

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<sup>278</sup> Max operates in a state of perpetual fugitivity, defined by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney as a refusal to settle and an embrace of dispossession (Halberstam 11).

to fuel the search. Both films position mobility as the ultimate sign of freedom and agency that becomes a double-bind trap from which men cannot escape. A close-up of the dashboard shows us that he is running dangerously low on fuel. Not only is the car beat up and running on empty, but, since Max and Interceptor are an assemblage, he is also damaged and running out of fuel.<sup>279</sup> He now has a swatch of white in his longer unkempt hair. His leather outfit has new utility belts looped around to carry tools, becoming more functional, and is missing its right sleeve. The newer functionality of his uniform sets him apart from the horde of nomads, and the missing pieces set him on the path to becoming the “raggedy man” he is dubbed by Auntie Entity (Tina Turner) in the next film, *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*.<sup>280</sup> Significantly, he will look much worse by this film’s end; Pappagallo calls him “a mess.” He has dealt with his leg injury using a metal brace, linking him even further to technology and indicating that he is a damaged piece of masculine machinery. Replacing the dog ruthlessly butchered in the first film, he has a new canine companion, an indication of his need for some form of companionship and an allusion to *A Boy and His Dog* (1975, L.Q. Jones), a film examined at length in the next chapter.

The leader of the bike gang chasing Max during this first chase sequence, Wez, stands out even among the other nomads with a red “Mohawk” haircut and bare muscular

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<sup>279</sup> Robinson remarks on what she calls a “victim-function” of embodiment which implies “that embodiment is only forced upon our attentions through the apprehension of the body as problematic. Women’s bodies, and the bodies of people of color, have always been apprehended as problematic. . . . The marking of white men as specifically embodied, gendered, and racialized subjects, functions as an objectification that . . . produces responses ranging from acceptance of material vulnerability to defiant reassertions of abstraction” (*Marked Men* 126).

<sup>280</sup> In an interview, Miller laments that they should have made Max dirtier, setting him even further apart from the white- and beige- wearing “Gucci Arabs” with their conspicuous cleanliness.



torso fortified by black shoulder-pads and black leather chaps, iconic links to the film genre of the Western (especially the black feathers jutting out of the shoulders), but also 1970s punk fashion and the leather attire of the S/M subculture. The link to this fetish group is further reinforced when, during the scene, Wez is accidentally shot by one of the gang's cross-bow bolts in the arm. The camera lingers in close-up on his face as he slowly pulls it out and places it back with others in his quiver, appearing to take almost orgasmic pleasure in the pain, taking it like a man and liking it.<sup>281</sup> He and Max are paired as enemies in this sequence, but also as doubles and rivals for our attention since Max is also clad in black leather. Max looks more like one of the members of Lord Humungus's horde than one of Pappagallo's people, and this identifies him as "nomad trash" like Wez and not part of the community.

The black feathers projecting from Wez's shoulders also evoke the spectacular fashion of glam rock, especially when combined with his bare midriff and arms. It was a subculture of empowerment through individual style and personal expression that transgressed gender boundaries.<sup>282</sup> Wez not only displays these glamorous feathers, he *performs* more than any other character besides the Feral Kid, hissing, growling, leaping, swinging through the air, doing back flips, etc. Glam rock emphasized theatrical gestures

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<sup>281</sup> This reflexive sadomasochism is what Savran argues "reproduces a tough male subject who proves his toughness by subjugating and battering his (feminized) other." Citing Silverman, he explains that "the male subject can indulge his appetite for pain without at the same time calling into question . . . his virility" (190).

<sup>282</sup> In *Performing Glam Rock* (2006), Philip Auslander posits that the music genre was a reaction and opposition to the psychedelic rock of the late-1960s and early 1970s: "If psychedelic rock addressed its audience as a collective whose actions could ultimately transform global politics, glam rock addressed its audience as individuals with the power to transform only themselves" (7). It was music for self-fashioning.

that the “serious” counterculture dismissed as mere performance (Auslander 10).<sup>283</sup> Glam rock emphasized the masquerade to the point of satire and parody. There was a bias at that time against visual spectacle in rock concerts associated with masculine performance (Auslander 15).<sup>284</sup> The audience was supposed to witness the virtuosity of the musicians as they demonstrated their mastery over their instruments. Rebelling against this ethic, glam rock engaged “publicly in nonnormative performance of gender and sexuality” (Auslander 228). Auslander argues that “glam rock’s central social innovation was to open a safe cultural space in which to experiment with versions of masculinity that clearly flouted social norms” (228). Wez’s performance draws on this history of costume and performative masculinity to position him as Max’s chief rival and antagonist who also serves as a mirror for Max’s masculine drag, exposing his performance of manhood. It also troubles the distinction between civilization and savagery that Max himself already destabilizes. Max is positioned as more “civilized” due to his “manly self-control,” while Wez must be restrained by Lord Humungus to the point of being chained (Robinson

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<sup>283</sup> As Savran observes, “rock may have been the most popular and influential art form during the late ‘60s, ‘the deepest means of communication and expression’ that negotiated the incompatibility of the postmodern with the pre-industrial by attempting to unite ‘a mass culture’ with ‘a genuine folk culture’” (138, citing Reich). Glam Rock exposed this contradiction, embracing the postmodern culture of identity.

<sup>284</sup> Analyzing the performances of Marc Bolan, transvestite guitarist, vocalist, and front-man for the band T-Rex, one of the first famous glam rock ensembles, Auslander notes the continual gender reversals that Bolan employs, remarking that “this performance illustrates what Judith Butler calls the ‘proliferation’ of gender identities that has the effect of destabilizing gender norms” (103). David Bowie took this even further: “If Marc Bolan brought an implicitly theatrical sensibility to bear on the performance of rock music, David Bowie sought explicitly to perform rock *as theater*. Bowie achieved the synthesis of rock and theater toward which he had worked since the mid-1960s with his creation of glam icon Ziggy Stardust, the bisexual space alien, in 1972. . . . Bowie sang in many voices and from many subject positions without identifying clearly with any of them. By asserting the performativity of gender and sexuality through the queer Ziggy Stardust persona, Bowie challenged both the conventional sexuality of rock culture and the concept of a foundational sexual identity more fully and directly than Bolan” (Auslander 106).

“Emotional Constipation” 163). In the following movies, it will be Max who is chained, bound, and restrained.

Indeed, since he performs more daring stunts in the film than Max and is given significant amounts of close-up screen time to display his emotional turmoil from losing his blonde lover, the Golden Youth (Jimmy Brown aka Jerry O’Sullivan),<sup>285</sup> sitting behind him on his motorcycle in the film’s first chase sequence, Wez becomes an action anti-hero of this film and deserves our sympathy at least as much as Max. His tenacity seems to have no bounds in the final harrowing chase sequence as he continues to bedevil Max even when clutching precariously to the grill of the truck. He only fails because he comes between Max and Humungus in their final climactic embrace of vehicles, the logical conclusion to the road game.<sup>286</sup>

Wez’s chaps, which leave his buttocks exposed, also position him as a member of the S/M subculture, as does the leash and collar on the Golden Youth, later to be used on him. Leather has been used by deviant sexual subcultures, both hetero- and homosexual, since the nineteenth century. This is due largely to its affective value as a second skin, noted above in the examination of the leather jacket. In *Fetish* (1996), her examination of fetish fashion, Valerie Steele argues that “certain materials have a powerful erotic appeal by virtue of their tactile, olfactory, and visual characteristics” in addition to their semiotic

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<sup>285</sup> This is one of the many ways that this action film uses melodrama, not the least of which is the treatment of Max’s body. As Linda Williams explains, “even happy-ending melodramas are heavily interested in displays of bodily suffering as the means to the recognition of virtue. . . . Virtue can be recognized through suffering alone, or in the action variants of melodrama by the suffering that calls for deeds” (29).

<sup>286</sup> I am indebted to Katherine Kinney for introducing me to this line of thought.

cultural associations (143). Rubber and leather both provide a sense of enclosure and protection, but they also induce a tactile affective sensation, have a distinct smell, and even a pleasing creaking sound (Steele 149-151).<sup>287</sup> We hear such when Max moves around during quiet scenes in all of the *Mad Max* films.<sup>288</sup>

Max's relationship to this cultural practice through his leather outfit is complicated and problematic. He is not Max without the costume (recognized by the Feral Kid when he returns it to Max after he recovers from crashing his car as an attempt to make him whole again), but he rejects membership in the subculture to which it belongs just as he does not belong to Humungus's horde. As a perpetual fugitive, Max belongs to no one and nowhere. In the next film he is equated with the desert, what they call "the nothing." His leather is a psychic armor that keeps him detached from the brutality of the road and connection or commitment to other people, allowing for his stoic, pragmatic attitude towards an eternal present with no future. His one human connection in the film is with the Feral Kid, also dressed in a second animal skin out of practical need.

In distinction to the nomadic road warriors, the community of survivors living around an oil well that Max saves represent "civilization" in this scenario, a socius like that in *Ultimate Warrior*, with an ersatz democracy but also a patriarchal leader, a shepherd for the flock like Richard Harris becomes at the end of *Ravagers*. Like these other post-

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<sup>287</sup> Steele's research found that, "whereas latex is 'introverted' and 'auto-erotic,' leather . . . is more 'symbolic,' a 'statement to society,' 'like being tattooed and pierced'" (153).

<sup>288</sup> After noting the Nazi and biker connections I have already mentioned, Steele remarks that "black leather has also long been associated with sadomasochistic sex. In the 1920s and 1930s, many pornographic photographs showed people dressed in black leather and engaged in SM activities" (154).

apocalyptic communities, they act as an extended family for each other, a postmodern kin-group maintaining a practice of altruism in this bleak landscape. For example, Pappagallo dies trying to rescue the Feral Kid. This is important if the Great Northern Tribe is to have any kind of future, for children learn justice and the ethical treatment of others from their kin. As political philosopher Susann Okin argues, one cannot have a just society without a just family structure; “unless the first and most formative example of adult interaction usually experienced by children is one of justice and reciprocity, rather than one of domination and manipulation or of unequal altruism and one-sided self-sacrifice, and unless they themselves are treated with concern and respect, they are likely to be considerably hindered in becoming people who are guided by principles of justice” (17).

The lack of a water well like that in *Ultimate Warrior*, a film with essentially the same plot structure as *Road Warrior*, was not an oversight on the part of the filmmakers, but instead indicates the geopolitical values at the time of its release, a time we now call “peak oil” because the global powers were realizing that the exponential use of fossil fuels was coming to an end and with it the Fordist industrial capitalism it fueled as well as the unjust family structure that it required to reproduce labor. As Hester proclaims, “a truly emancipatory gender politics needs to think beyond *biological* reproduction and extend more thoroughly towards *social* reproduction (a point that activists of color have been careful to stress)” (118). Now that, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, access to clean water has become a global crisis, the recent installment to the series, *Fury Road*, has its Citadel built around a water well, but there is still a “Gas Town” that pumps and refines petroleum to fuel the War Boys’ vehicles, and the primary, most vital resource of the film is fertile women.

The oil refinery in this film associates these people with industrial society and resource extraction, even though their compound, full of chickens, seems more like a medieval walled town or a wagon train in a classic Western, continuously circled by vehicles “like angry ants mad with the smell of gasoline.” The “Gucci Arab” costumes evoke this sense of past simplicity with the use of tunics, and their warriors wearing large shoulder padding to make them look armored and larger-than-life. The community dresses in light colors, wears jewelry, and their leader, Pappagallo, wears white and light tan; only the mechanic wears black. Unlike the leather worn by Max and the other nomads, their clothing is soft fabric, alluding to how they are “soft” and vulnerable, easy prey compared to the hard “savages” clamoring at their gate. This is also reinforced by the nomad’s punk-styled hair and dress, a gesture that draws attention to the conventions of costuming savages in Hollywood; this mode of primitivism is a genre convention and a way to “other” a group of people by equating white supremacy and Western expansion with civilization and progress, cleanliness and “respectable” clothing. Complicating the easy dichotomy, however, Lord Humungus’s horde acts like a colonizing force, taking on the mode of Western expansion, manifest destiny, and pretense of civilizing order.<sup>289</sup> This is all depicted through a structuring absence of actual indigenous people, which serves to foreground their displacement from, not only the land, but history.<sup>290</sup> The imagining of

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<sup>289</sup> It stands as such a figure not only in its excuse of brutality, but also in the rhizomatic way it exploits whatever it encounters. It can “alter its shape” and “absorb its surroundings . . . without remorse” (Povinelli 5).

<sup>290</sup> David Theo Goldberg writes, “Erased in the name of a universality that has no place for them, the subjects of real political economy are denied and silenced, ontologically and epistemologically and morally evicted” (156).

hegemonic masculinity as an autonomous white man mastering his environment is subtended by this displacement, creating the dialect between the invisibility of other subjects as non-standard and the invisibility of the disembodied reason of the white master.

A brief overview of the significance of punk style will help elucidate its use in this film as anti-fashion and anti-aesthetic that destabilizes the difference between civilization and barbarism, masculine power and performativity of a masquerade. Because of this costuming choice, Max is not a typical action hero, among other reasons I have elucidated. It is also significant that, in the dozens of films produced around the world that copied the *Mad Max* series in an attempt to duplicate its success, although they often stray from the plot of Max's life, they almost all use the tropes of custom-modified vehicles and punk fashion. Monica Sklar, in her book *Punk Style* (2013), notes that much of it "can be traced back to its use in gay culture after World War II" (36). The S/M subculture and punk subculture both evolved a style of dress from the gay subculture of the 1950s and 1960s, with punk becoming such an exemplary subculture that it was the object of study for the first monograph on the subject of subculture and style, *Subculture: the Meaning of Style* (1979, Dick Hebdige). Punk style acts as a self-fashioning through transgressive performance that indicates a disenfranchised or outcast status, a gesture "that is analytical and critical of the art, politics, popular culture, consumerism, and sexual and social mores of its era" (Sklar 137).<sup>291</sup> Like glam rock fashion, punk foregrounds the masculine

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<sup>291</sup> "Chunky, oversized boots have universal appeal because in addition to comfort, they give an air of intimidation, symbolically solidifying footing in this world as valid, not treading lightly but making a real stand that cannot be messed with" (Sklar 41). This film is full of close-ups of just such footwear.

masquerade, but instead of queering it with signs of the “feminine,” it does so by overcoding the masculine. However, as Johan Kugelberg argues, it is also the performance of the “unfiltered nihilism of romanticism” that enacts the embrace of no future (44).<sup>292</sup> It is a mode of apocalyptic thinking and a way to dress up apocalyptic manhood. In defiance of a lack of agency, it says “fuck you” to the very idea of trying to “succeed” in society. It serves as an anti-aesthetic espousing the loss of idealism after the failures of the counter-culture.<sup>293</sup> It is a mode of apocalyptic thinking and a way to dress up apocalyptic manhood. In defiance of a lack of agency, it says “fuck you” to the very idea of trying to “succeed” as a “man” in society. Kugelberg depicts punk as situationist theater of the ridiculous and ugly. Hence, the adoption of the leather jacket in punk, with its addition of spikes foregrounding it as a sign of violence, *detourned* the macho Brando and Dean aesthetic of stoic masculinity while embracing its use in underground gay culture as a deviant act of defiance (Kugelberg 45).

Moreover, wearing punk or glam style in the 1970s and 1980s not only brought on the threat of physical violence from those who would police the boundaries of normality

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<sup>292</sup> Jon Savage argues that punk “alerted the culture to the terrors and dangers in its midst. This is what your future could be: no future, a nightmare” (149).

<sup>293</sup> Kugelberg goes on to argue that “the history of the punk aesthetic cannot be told, only shown, and if the envelope needs to shift its placement further, remember the immortal words of Marco Pirroni, who with maximum hindsight came to exclaim that punk never did happen” (45). Gibson disagrees with the idea that there even is a punk aesthetic: “The way I see it operating is that it was just a rolling ball of code, and the people who were using the code wouldn’t have been able to define it or describe it” (341). Auslander notes: “Robert Palmer argues that one can see ‘punk’ as a recurrent sensibility in rock rather than a style confined to a specific moment in the 1970s” (231). He extends this logic to observe that there is also a recurring glam sensibility.



as if we still operated under sumptuary laws,<sup>294</sup> it also “carried an inherent demand for a reaction from everyday strangers and became a potent means to the end of experiencing life as authentic” (Kugelberg 46). Not just a rejection of a future of progress, it was also an embrace of an irredeemable now, an authentic life with no intrinsic meaning. It hailed a subject as defiantly different while also positioning the wearer in a recognizable subculture, providing belonging to a group of like-minded people and the safety that comes with community. Miller’s series of films convey the same messages of bleak nihilism in a situationist mode, and the use of punk fashion alludes to the antagonist horde as more nuanced than just the “bad guys,” but instead as an oppressed group of marginal identities vying for recognition and authenticity in a world that does not accept them. Unlike Max and his stoic lack of affect, these men feel intensely and act out their rage against the world.<sup>295</sup> Savage argues that punk was always “very science fiction . . . informed by J. G. Ballard, and by *The Man Who Fell to Earth* [1976, Nicholas Roeg], among other things” (345). William Gibson, father of cyberpunk, argues that “punk was the last crusade of [a 60’s counterculture] millenarian moment, very much like the children’s crusades in France and Germany, springing out of the manifest corruption and mercenary sensibilities of the previous crusades” (342). As I will examine in the coda that concludes this study, Miller

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<sup>294</sup> Goshorn notes that, “at a time when it was becoming harder for cops to vent frustrations on Blacks and Latinos in the traditional local manner, the multi-racial and androgynous –looking punk crowds became known as the ‘new niggers’ for the L.A.P.D.” (43).

<sup>295</sup> In *Angry White Men*, Kimmel notes that “being numb . . . is a response to what happens to us, the tragic mismatch between who we think we’re supposed to be and what our society allows us to become” (218).

makes the third film in this series into an overt children's crusade, drawing from this same set of tropes while emphasizing its link to rock music.

This costuming choice lends the films an outsider status while typifying the theme of defiance that runs through the narratives, one found in many Australian films, but made appealing to an international audience through the use of subcultural signifiers that present such defiance as "authentic" while also part of a brutal drag show that proves the virility of the men through facing danger and pain. Ultimately, this hypermasculine pageant is left behind by those who survive, treated like the legend of Robert Neville, as a cautionary tale of masculinity gone awry. The films reject the overt individualism represented by the punk aesthetic in favor of community and living for the other, and Max is left to be among his hypermasculine compatriots. The style of a subversive subculture is appropriated by *The Road Warrior* and placed on a newly dominant class who live the logic of punk's "no future" to its extremity, but where the punks espoused this nihilism as a reaction to the neoliberal capitalist realism of a newly dominant consumer culture, these men represent the lack of futurity that informs apocalyptic manhood. They represent not revolt, but the vestiges of masculine patriarchal authority over a world ruined by this system.

### **Max's Refusal to Be Mastered: Taking it Like a Man and Pain as a Means to**

#### **Feeling**

*Inscribed within contradictory histories, queer S/M remains a deeply conflicted phenomenon in American culture. On the one hand, it attests to the violent social and political oppression of lesbians and gay men and to the inevitability that desire (that most apparently individualized of drives) is always socially produced and always marked by a history of oppression. On the other hand, it also testifies to the relative economic and cultural empowerment of lesbians and gay men as a class. . . . It also bears witness to the vexed relation between the political and the sexual in American culture and the fact that queer identities at once disrupt the binary opposition between the public and private and*

*reinforce the belief that the private is the central determinant feature, not just of subjectivity, but of the social as well. (Savran 238)*

*Where Savran suggests that white men's sense of their own victimization causes the crisis in hegemonic masculinity, I am arguing that the recourse to victimization attempts to solve that crisis. Not only did the sixties and seventies produce a new ideal of 'soft' masculinity—which, in Savran's reading, later required remasculinization—but these decades also witnessed the marking of white masculinity precisely as the embodiment of the sadistic, traditionally masculine force that Savran reads as having lost its dominance. (Robinson 197)*

*If the male body is to be a point of security, the hero a figure who can be relied on, then bodily integrity and heterosexuality in particular need to be maintained. (Tasker 15-16)*

Does Max conform to the stipulation made above by Yvonne Tasker that a masculine action hero be heterosexual and inviolate? The action protagonist outlined in her work codes the heroic as belonging to white men, a heroism “often articulated as ‘rugged individualism’ and self-reliance. In this narrative, social contradictions are displaced onto personal ills, with the consequence that larger social and historical forces are rendered irrelevant” (Robinson *Marked Men* 40). The action hero depoliticizes the plight of white men in America and makes it a personal problem for them. But does this apply to Max? Unlike the rapacious men in Lord Humungus's horde and the Gyro Captain, Max seems to be asexual after losing his wife. The one woman we are shown in the camp of the horde, revealed as a tent is disrupted in Max's mad drive of the truck back into the compound, is shown nude and copulating with one of the gang members, much like the woman raped earlier is disrobed and her nudity made a problematic spectacle for the audience. However, in the action sequences, some women can be seen among the men dressed in similar masculine drag. The only romantic couple appears to be Wez and the Golden Youth. The

Gyro Captain's relationship with a young girl (Arki Whitely) is engineered by her father with the intention of saving her.

Max does not act out of altruistic or heroic motivation to save the threatened innocents.<sup>296</sup> Indeed, his bodily integrity is not even maintained in this or any of the films in the series. He sets the mold for punishment that an action hero must endure that would inform such popular films of the decade as *Die Hard* (1988, John McTiernan) and *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985, George Cosmatos) which would be taken to hyperbolic lengths in the action movie satire *Darkman* (1990, Sam Raimi).

Max is not looking for companionship, as his rejection of the Gyro Captain's idea of partnership indicates. Helping the camp of besieged people is merely one more way for him to continue surviving on his road to oblivion. When he rescues one of the victims caught trying to escape and brings him back to the refinery compound, he does so only to treat the wounded man as currency with which he will buy fuel. He makes no pretense of heroism, responding to the thanks of the people with, "Save it. I'm just here for the gasoline." In this way, he is not that different from the marauders who attempt to take the fuel by force; they operate by the same road warrior logic. Max is accused of "trading in human flesh," and this theme of human trafficking frames the later narratives of *Beyond Thunderdome* and *Fury Road*.

Lord Humungus also trades in human flesh, but as a threat of violence and extortion that he blames on the survivors because they will not act "reasonably" and conform to this

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<sup>296</sup> A group of people that Americans can identify with at the time due to the imagination that America was being "held hostage" by the Middle East, with the Iran hostages emblematic of this fear (Robinson *Marked Men* 45).

road warrior logic. Like Toecutter, he is ringmaster to a performance of force and cruelty with the addition of a loudspeaker adding to his fascistic persona (reinforced by an Eastern-European accent). To the men in his horde, violence is not only a means to an end, but has become just another form of entertainment, laughing raucously when The Toadie (Max Phipps), one of their own, loses his fingers to the Feral Kid's razor-sharp boomerang. Violence has become a roadside attraction with no consequence or accountability since nothing matters anymore but the juice. Like so many of the men analyzed in this study, these men treat violence and the war of the road as a game they need to win to prove their manhood.<sup>297</sup> The Humungus, on the other hand, is all business and never laughs. He flatly states, "No more games. We are here for a purpose." He employs a rhetoric of manifest destiny, which, as Kimmel points out in *Angry White Men*, was considered by Americans during western expansion to be "regenerative" and "creative, restorative, even healing" for both men and the nation figured as a masculine subject (178).<sup>298</sup> In this way, the violence done to those who halt the progress of this destiny is legitimated as retaliatory. As Kimmel argues, "you have to feel entitled to use violence" (*AWM* 181). These men feel entitled to rape, torture, and take what they want because they can; they own the road.

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<sup>297</sup> This raises a question asked by Braudy: "Which then comes first—war or masculinity? . . . Would war, aggressive if not defensive, become outmoded as the definition of masculinity expanded, or would it become the occupation solely of professionals? . . . Wars consume resources, but they also consume men, and they feed especially on the idea that men naturally go to war—an idea that enshrines a masculine heroism that will inspire men to go to future wars" (521).

<sup>298</sup> The duel of "chicken" so often used in these films is another form of restoration because the practice of dueling, according to Braudy, "purports to muster an ideal warrior energy to help reinvigorate a defunct or deficient civil sphere . . . the public social world furnished an arena in which male honor was either gained or lost" (353). This public arena in these films is the road.

Lord Humungus wears probably the most outlandish costume in the film, one that covers his genitals but leaves most of his huge muscular body exposed, covered with scars and bulging veins. Thus, unlike the hard-bodied heroism of Sylvester Stallone, his hypermasculine physique is pathologized as monstrous. Although many critics writing about the Rambo films do pathologize and feminize Stallone's body, the success of his career indicates that his fans do not agree. This combination of a tightly-clothed hip area with metal studs, resembling a cod-piece, combined with straps of black studded leather over the shoulders, is a copy of not only a look popular in S/M leather bars, but also previously used in another post-apocalyptic film, *Zardoz* (1974), a John Boorman production wherein Sean Connery wears a red version of this outfit which visibly distinguishes his muscular hirsute body and bulging groin from the effete bodies of the immortal, privileged people in the Zone who wear diaphanous, translucent, silky cloth draped over their soft bodies.<sup>299</sup> In *The Road Warrior*, the harness and exposed muscular flesh, although hairless,<sup>300</sup> indicate the superior physicality of this character, and his mask, which looks like something forged during the days of the Holy Inquisition, extends this hypermasculinity into a monstrous demonstration of violent dominance.<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Boorman's film, like much of his *oeuvre*, dwells on a crisis of masculine agency and the problem of men "losing" their masculinity and becoming "soft." As in that film, the Gucci Arabs in *Road Warrior* are depicted as decadent, soft, childish victims compared to the rugged, brutal masculinity of Lord Humungus. Unlike that film, the rhetoric of Humungus aligns him with civilization, not barbarity. *The Road Warrior* positions the conflict as between family and business, altruism and the social contract, the common good and social hierarchy.

<sup>300</sup> The difference in body hair indicates that Lord Humungus is "civilized" as opposed to the barbarous "brutals" in Boorman's film.

<sup>301</sup> Miller doesn't stop there; the character also uses the *largest* pistol invented, one that fires rifle rounds used in big-game hunting. The big game that he uses it against is mechanical.

Faludi argues that angry white men act out in defensive aggression after “being caught out, exposed as weak and insufficient” (144).<sup>302</sup> Violence then conceals the vulnerability that was always already there, but has been made visible by social changes. Savran argues that, during the decade of the 1970s, men used reflexive sadomasochism as an empowering strategy: “No longer having others on whom to inflict his power and his pain with impunity, the male subject began to turn against himself and to prove his mettle by gritting his teeth and taking his punishment like a man” (176). As the epigraph above shows, Robinson extends this logic to argue that white men understood the new scrutiny they were under as a marked subjectivity that wounds them, thereby turning this victim status into re-empowerment. In an observation that explicates the use of MFP uniforms in the first two *Mad Max* films, especially by Max, Faludi notes that men obsessed with uniforms are similar to drag queens, referring to them as “male illusionists” (149). They partake in the masculine masquerade in a similar way that drag queens perform the feminine masquerade.

Humungus’s codpiece is emblematic of this self-fashioning and posturing to cover over any sign of weakness or vulnerability. In Early Modern England, this garment brought attention to the masculine masquerade. Even when writers criticized its inclusion in British fashion of the time, they still linked it to manhood. Will Fisher argues that “it was an item through which male bodies and masculinity were culturally constructed. . . . It was in reality

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<sup>302</sup> Kimmel argues that men experience masculinity *as powerlessness*, “painfully aware of the power they don’t have and that other men do” as well as the power that women have over them to make them feel vulnerable (*AWM* 185). The patriarchal structure of society makes them feel entitled to the power they do not have, causing the frustration and anger that makes them lash out.

as much a model for the genitalia as a model of them” (68). It went out of fashion because it ultimately failed as a sign of manhood, perhaps because it could be taken off, thereby showing that masculinity was detachable from male bodies (Fisher 75). Humungus’s garment is linked as well to the rise of body-building in the 1970s and 1980s, which required men to wear as little as possible to showcase their oiled musculature, a cultural practice that also required a hairless body. It also partakes in the discourse on the penis that occurred in the 1970s, a time Robinson argues “witness[ed] a hyper-visibility of the penis, as radical feminists, men’s liberationists, and the chroniclers of human sexuality all turn[ed] their attention to the penis and its (dys)functions” (*Marked Men* 159). This discourse, which began by positioning “male sexuality as dangerous and predatory in the early days of the feminist movement has given way to a much more conflicted view of the penis as *both* powerful ‘weapon’ *and* vulnerable organ,” thus perpetuating a masculine crisis of embodiment (Robinson 159, italics hers). Hence, in addition to the codpiece, Humungus has a hard “armored” body that itself, especially with its lack of hair and bulging veins, resembles an erect penis, a metonym of masculine potency.<sup>303</sup> This same discourse informs the scene where the men laugh at The Toadie’s dis-member-ment. He is clearly positioned as less of a “man” than his Lord, not only by this act and his name, but also his need of glasses, and these signs position him as one of the effete “soft” intellectuals lampooned in Boorman’s film, so his symbolic castration is farcical.

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<sup>303</sup> In early drafts of the screenplay, Miller planned for this character to be Max’s old friend Goose, and his horribly scarred face remains as testament to this idea of former friends becoming enemies. Hence, he is equated with Max as having the same origin with different outcomes.



Thus, the carnivalesque theatricality<sup>304</sup> of the members of Lord Humungus's horde acts as a drag show of male illusionists, demonstrating the vulnerability of masculinity while linking it to authoritarianism through hyperbole, and Max attempts to shore up his own vulnerability and lack of agency by saving the community of survivors who just want to travel to the tropical north "and breed."<sup>305</sup> This conflict between masculinities, over what counts as manhood, like all of the others I have canvassed, involves the problem of "fitness" and the threat of reproducing the "wrong" kind of men, ironically positioning the most "fit" character as also the most monstrous and only a performance of the illusion of authority and superior masculinity. Max is also part of the performance on this stage of manhood, his hegemonic heterosexual white masculine position from the first film was lost with his family, and he also does not fit in the new future of this burgeoning Great Northern Tribe.<sup>306</sup> As Okin puts it, "while [the family/kin group]'s forms are varied, the family in which a child is raised, especially in the earliest years, is clearly a crucial place for early moral development and for the formation of our basic attitudes to others" (18).<sup>307</sup> These

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<sup>304</sup> This can be seen most clearly in the montage sequence of horrific torture as they burn captives alive while Humungus pontificates at his microphone while flexing like a bodybuilder in a competition.

<sup>305</sup> I should note that the character saying this line, who owns the racy post-card on which they all place their hope (called the Curmudgeon in the credits and played by Syd Heylen), is dressed in the garb of a military officer, one whose authority as military masculinity is shown to be as obsolete and unreliable as the swords that he wears, a sign of the impotence of his aged and outmoded military masculinity. Thus, his expectation that Humungus is an "honorable man" and that he can negotiate is shown to be a fantasy based on historical precedent that no longer holds.

<sup>306</sup> A Tribe that nurtures its members, and it is this aspect of *being* a nurturer that is so important to a just society (Okin 18). Max cannot fulfill this role, even though it is urged on him in the third film.

<sup>307</sup> She notes that the great social philosophers of the Enlightenment all believed that the family structure (although they had problematic models for it) was "centrally important for the development of morality in citizens" (Okin 19).

men and the cycle of violence to which they are beholden are left to fend for themselves in the desert, and their fantasies of mastery are shown to be just that. The fact that the film ends with the narrator proclaiming that Max lives on only in their memories indicates his always already fantasmatic ontology and the dangerous fantasy of masculinity that he represents.

Unlike the first film, the sequel of *Mad Max* is less concerned with his personal identity crisis and more interested in further punishing his body as a spectacle of his taking it like a man. Like its predecessor, the film depicts heteronormative culture as endangered by alternative subcultures that deliberately flout cultural norms, much like the Family does in *Omega Man*. The film registers two modes of male victimization. The queer barbarians at the gate represent the performance of victimization as an empowering “mastery of subjection,” as Savran argues in his book (236-237).<sup>308</sup> The act of voluntary bondage or pain becomes a way of controlling the subject’s own subjugation, even if only fantasmatically. In this way, the practice of S/M and its sartorial gestures becomes “an imaginary and privileged escape from and transcendence of a hateful and murderously homophobic culture” (Savran 237). On the other hand, Max’s victimization is more melodramatic, using his status as victim “to reimagine a new conceptualization of masculinity, and one that just might evade the passive-feminine-masochist, active-masculine-sadistic binaries” represented in the brutal gang and the civilians behind their walls (Robinson *Marked Men* 197). But it imagines this evasion as a form of apocalyptic masculinity, one that cannot survive in a social setting, demonstrating it as problematic for

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<sup>308</sup> They represent what Keith Goshorn calls a “counter-public” (42).

the future. Deleuze and Guattari write that “society is not first of all a milieu for exchange where the essential would be to circulate or to cause to circulate, but rather a socius of inscription where the essential thing is to mark and be marked” (142). The recurrent breaking of Max’s body by and on the road marks him as a validated part of the community, even though he can never be one of them because it would be a loss of his rugged individuality and mastery over the road and would again make him vulnerable to feel the pain he felt when losing his family and best friend. Pappagallo offers Max such when he says they can give him “a future,” but Max prefers to be what Pappagallo labels him after rejecting the offer, “nothing.” Max is a figure for a doomed subject position.

As I previously observed, Max does not act out of heroic motivation, and this fact is foregrounded by his initial rejection by Warrior Woman (Virginia Hay), the masculine woman who “mans” the ramparts with her bow, wearing the armor of her people and whom subsequently volunteers to help Max by guarding the big rig in the final chase. Indeed, her death in the last chase sequence is due largely to her attempt to aid one of her friends in an act of sacrificial altruism. She dies because she cares for the welfare of others. As I will discuss in the next chapter, the only person Max evinces concern for is the Feral Kid.<sup>309</sup> When he volunteers to drive the big rig for the film’s climax, he does so only because he no longer has any other option after his own vehicle has been destroyed (along with his only companion, his dog). Pappagallo, with his plan to make Max into the diversion that allows the others to escape with the fuel, takes advantage of this state of affairs, using Max

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<sup>309</sup> Significantly, he gives him attention when no one else notices him.

as a valuable prize much like Max uses the dying man to gain access to the compound. Pappagallo also trades in human flesh. These men only have value when of use to others, and the meaning of their labor relies on the technology they use to prove this worth.<sup>310</sup> They are a means of producing violence. This willingness to use others as disposable tools would seem to be what separates the people of the compound from the gang as when Pappagallo tells Max, “We’re still human beings with dignity, but you, you’re out there with the garbage.” The fact that Pappagallo uses Max as a decoy, treating him with no dignity, would seem to contradict this clear difference between “civilized” and barbarian.

After the man that he has saved dies, becoming useless as currency, Max is bound to the place with hand cuffs, a figuration of him in bondage that will become a recurring motif for the rest of the films in the series. Max’s free agency is always in question. I want to draw attention to the device that is used in this particular bondage scene, one that he himself used in his formal life as a police officer to restrain violent criminals and ultimately to devise a death trap for Johnny the Boy, indicating that he is now equated with this criminal and victim status and is in need of restraint, but the cuffs fail in this regard as he easily frees himself and aids in the subsequent action sequence to repel another attack from the gang, taking over the operation of the flame-thrower after Pappagallo is wounded, showing that he is “quick” like Wez and better equipped to fight off the marauders than the “soft,” slow men and women in the compound.

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<sup>310</sup> Max uses the Gyro Captain as manual labor for example, then as transportation when the gyrocopter is refueled.

This theme of bondage is further referenced by the bodies of captured community members, both living and dead, lashed to the front of vehicles as crucified trophies or post-apocalyptic hood ornaments, a display of cruelty and performance of absolute domination. As stated above, this cruelty is justified as inevitable due to the unreasonable behavior of the victims, and Lord Humungus blames the suffering of the captured men on the obstinacy of the people in the compound.

When the men laugh at The Toadie's wounding, it implicates the film audience in this display of brutality and lack of empathy as well. Miller cleverly supplies viewers with the violent spectacle they desire while also urging them to question why they find pleasure in displays of such mayhem. This gesture equates the film audience with these cruel barbarians, not the civilized victims in the compound, just as Max, the film's antihero, is constantly equated with them and not the "good" people.

Having lost all hope, the community wants to give in to the demands and be dominated, but Max offers them a way out, a line of flight only available through his driving alacrity. Taking part in a discourse popularized during the 1970s in a series of exploitation films about heroic truck drivers, the film validates the working-class masculinity of the truck driver through Max and demonstrates his worth to the survival of democratic community even though it is all a clever ruse. *The Road Warrior* indicates in this gesture how disposable working-class men are to society. Max represents hope for the future even though personally he has none. He is not the hero who gets the girl in the end. The Gyro Captain does.

Kimmel notes that hegemonic white masculinity “is just right” compared to the hypomascularity of women and wimps and the hypermasculinity of black men; the “wrong” kinds of masculinity are often depicted as uncivilized or *over*-civilized, effeminate or animalistic (*AWM* 258). Hence, Max stands between the hypermasculinity of Lord Humungus and the hypomascularity of the Gyro Captain, but curiously the one who will continue the species and society as such is the “weaker” man; The Gyro Captain becomes the leader of the people with the demise of Pappagallo and ostensibly a father figure for the Feral Kid, our narrator and the leader who follows the Gyro Captain. Indeed, Max, Pappagallo, Wez, and Humungus are all shown to be problematic patriarchs while the Gyro Captain, even though used for comic relief, is resourceful without having to dominate, skilled without having to be a master, and able to literally leave the cycle of road violence by leaving the road itself with his ability to fly.

The thing that sets this man apart from the other men, and what makes him a good choice for a mate for this girl, is his ability to diverge from the destiny of these other men. His footwear, soft shoes compared to the leather boots worn by Max, indicates this vertical privilege. He is not bound to the road like they are, but flies above it untethered but still reliant on the Juice. His is not a physical warrior working-class masculinity, but one more like that of the professional/managerial class; as he says, he has “brains.” Spence’s lanky body serves as comic relief when juxtaposed with Mel Gibson’s for the first half of the film, dressed in aviator’s goggles and long underwear with tan codpiece, covered by a brown duster adorned with a lavender scarf and yellow cloth flower in his pocket; he is a post-apocalyptic dandy. He proves resourceful, first by saving Max by airlifting him to

safety after he is run off of the road and loses everything (a reference to the figure of a soldier in Vietnam and *Apocalypse Now* (1979, Francis Ford Coppola)), then by strategically dropping his poisonous snake and later firebombs during the final chase sequence. *His* is the masculinity of the future, not Max's, which is "nothing." In the last shot of the film, the camera dollies away, leaving Max standing alone in the desert from which he emerged at film's beginning, a desert that, in the next film, will be called "the nothing."

Max uses the Gyro Captain as another tool, a means to an end, but the Captain thinks of this as a partnership. He wants to work with Max, coupling his mental masculinity and skill with machines to the physicality of Max, much like the figure of Master Blaster in the next film, but Max has no partners, rejecting the companionship of the Feral Kid as well. He carries his wound, the loss of his family and best friend, like a badge; without this victim status he is just a murderer like Lord Humungus. But, as he is reminded by Pappagallo, everyone lost something when the world ended, and he only seems to be feeling sorry for himself, an indication of the narcissism that subtends white male victimhood and the anger it produces. Being nothing and on a trajectory towards oblivion, he denies human contact and the role of father that embracing the Kid would entail. He has left behind such roles and embraced instead the bare life of surviving on the road to nowhere. But rather than indicate Max's maintenance of individual autonomy with such gestures, it instead demonstrates his abdication of agency and the ethics it entails. The following two films depict his eventual learning and embrace of this intersubjectivity, a posthumanist ethics of care. He makes choices in this film out of necessity and

contingency; in *Beyond Thunderdome* he is even more a figure at the whim of fate, but significantly makes moral choices, and I will address this in the conclusion of this study.

In a quotation of David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), in which he captured on film the derailment of a train engine as a film stunt (an echo of an even more spectacular train crash staged by Buster Keaton in *The General* (1926)), Miller ends his groundbreaking, longest-ever (at the time) chase sequence with the spectacular crash of the big rig, but not in slow motion as Spielberg treats the crash at the end of *Duel*. Miller then frustrates the finality of this sequence by undercutting its drama and tragic closure when we see a close-up of sand pouring out of the tanker. The camera slowly details the crash as the dust settles, equating this destroyed vehicle with the broken body of Max as he crawls from the *second* vehicular disaster he has suffered in the same day. The diffusion of the scene with the pouring sand dilutes the proof of his masculinity this punishment should mark. Instead, it indicates that he was an expendable resource and only served in this last action-packed scene as a *distraction* from the real story and what really matters. The film urges us to understand this and smile along with Max at the joke while seeing the futility of Max's fantastic form of masculine agency.

Thus, *The Road Warrior* demonstrates the ways in which masculinity as a technology that enables male domination is linked to masculine technologies like vehicles, and thereby problematizes the ascendancy of this model of masculinity even while it revels in the spectacle created by high-speed stunts and the inevitable crash and burn. The glamorizing of working-class vehicular masculinity that occurred in the 1960s and 1970s is turned on its head and shown to be a road to nowhere, a violent mode of masculinity that



proves its worth and free agency through mastery of mobility as such by demonstrating it as a masculine masquerade. It is a cautionary tale that takes the conflict of “hard” and “soft” masculinities foregrounded in *Zardoz* and, instead of the ending of that earlier film where the “hard” man reasserts masculine dominance by destroying the soft, elitist, decadent society, shows, like *Omega Man*, how barbaric civilized men really are, while presenting a more nuanced view of the proper “fit” man who will populate the future. We are to hope that the story’s narrator, the Feral Kid, who explains in voice-over that he became leader of his people after having grown “into the fullness of manhood,” does not practice the competitive masculinity on display, and tells us this story to narrate the way that he was able to escape the cycle of violence and learn to be part of a community instead of autonomous from it, to live for others and not just himself, for men are not born but made, and all begin as boys who learn the expectations their society attributes to manhood. In this way, the film aligns with *Omega Man* and its depiction of Dutch, but this boy is not a privileged white man who was training to be a doctor, he is more of a tabula rasa, and I read this as more hopeful than the ending of that previous film. That being said, the film remains conservative in its depiction of heterosexuality and fatherhood as the future and the deviance from this norm of the nomads as essentially harmful. The next chapter will more thoroughly examine this problem of apocalyptic boyhood as it is shown in several films produced in the 1970s.

## Chapter 5

### Apocalyptic Boyhood: The End of Innocence or the End of Patriarchy?

*I regard these phenomena not as givens, but as part of the existential ‘problem of order’ that all societies must solve by encouraging people to act in certain ways, ways that facilitate both individual development and group adaptation. Gender roles represent one of these problem-solving behaviors. (Gilmore 3)*

*Like her antecedents, the child as resource is freighted with expectations and anxieties about the future. Unlike them, however, she is tethered to a future that can no longer be taken for granted. . . . The child exited the nineteenth century as the nexus point coordinating life, species, and reproduction with history, race, and nation. (Sheldon 2-3)*

I begin this chapter with these epigraphs because it will be useful to synthesize the work done by these books in my analysis of the figure of boyhood in apocalyptic films as both a stage preceding manhood and a stage on which to perform manhood. David Gilmore’s cross-cultural ethnographic analysis, *Manhood in the Making* (1990), traces “tendencies or parallels in male imagery around the world, a ubiquity rather than a universality,” which he uses to explain why so many disparate cultures have rituals and training that boys must undergo to achieve the status of manhood (3).<sup>311</sup> Many of the texts that I will examine in this section of the study articulate anxiety over what happens to boys deprived of this social teaching and more importantly some form of test that proves their ascendance from the status of boyhood to that of men. Kimmel asserts, in *Manhood in America*, that American men particularly define themselves in opposition to boys: “A man was independent, self-controlled, responsible; a boy was dependent, irresponsible, and

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<sup>311</sup> This work also documents many cultural variants of masculinist discourse that position male subjects who do not perform appropriate “manly” behaviors, like fishing in the case of Mehinaku culture, as feminine and/or child-like because manhood is often equated with producing defined against consuming (Gilmore 86). Such logic informs the anxiety over manhood that I have been tracing in this genre of films.

lacked control” (18). For the purposes of this study’s investigation of masculinity defined as autonomous agency, this description sums up the masculinist discourse that defines this agency. Most important for my argument, Gilmore’s work demonstrates that the various tests and rites of passage that boys must undergo do not serve the common-sense purpose of curbing male aggression and putting it to use for a community; the inverse is actually the case. Boys must be coerced into putting their bodies at risk and engaging in toil or violent activity, and these discourses and practices encourage such behavior. Bill Nichols describes this idea of manhood structuring patriarchal society and the producerist ethic referred to by Gilmore: “Men make things, including themselves. . . . They structure and control organizations from the family to the state. These things reflect back an image of man that assures him of his rightful place within society, his status as subject, independent of the need for others” (27). As a work of anthropology that uses psychoanalysis to understand cultural practices comparatively, Gilmore’s book also serves as a repudiation of the primitivist discourse many of these films espouse that figures boyhood as in danger of becoming “savage” unless restrained, as if “culture” limits the behavior of men rather than licensing it as Nichols argues above. As the following analysis of *A Boy and His Dog* will show, this logic culminates in masculine crisis when a man’s usefulness is measured only by his ability to make babies, and he rejects patriarchal authority for a life of perpetual boyhood.

Indeed, many cultures’ models of masculinity encourage brutal behavior for “proper” men, entitling them to violence and domination rather than restraining an inherent

propensity for harm.<sup>312</sup> Boys are also encouraged to be sexually active, to “score” with girls to prove their manly virility, but the traditional norm of manhood equating masculinity with fatherhood has changed since the rise of Playboy masculinity and the gamification of manhood. A family, and especially children, is seen in this model to emasculate a man by taking away his agency with demands on his time and resources.<sup>313</sup> Fitness is redefined from serving a community, even one as small as the family unit, to one that proves itself by rejecting the needs of others and the need for others.

The idea of children as symbol of the future and capitalist resource is complicated and expanded into an examination of environmentalism in Rebekah Sheldon’s *The Child to Come* (2015), becoming a speculative tool of biopower that stands in for a managed future that always portends catastrophe.<sup>314</sup> Sheldon’s book examines the figuration of childhood “as cipher for the future of the adult and the child as cipher for the future of the species intertwined . . . [which] engender[s] the vulnerable, innocent child whose rescue

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<sup>312</sup> Eller observes that, “once we have learned violence from our models, we become models for others (particularly children), who observe and imitate our behavior. Violence or any other behavior ends up as ‘our way’ of being” (44). Likewise, Nancy Chodorow argues that “aggression . . . is not an innate drive needing expression and gratification” but is actually connected to “selfhood and object status”; in her model, it is an expression of agency panic and a defense of an illusory bounded subject afraid of being treated as an object (243).

<sup>313</sup> This self-directed masculinity diverges from the selfless sacrificial masculinity documented by Gilmore. Okin observes that the family structure is where children first learn about “fairness” or its lack, an empathic ability to think from the position of the other (98). If boys are supposed to gain some kind of autonomy to prove their manhood, then they have no need to learn such behavior and any notion of emotions as important for moral reasoning is discarded.

<sup>314</sup> Using Foucault’s investigation of discourses of sexuality, she notes that, since sexuality as such is so important to the production of biopower, this makes it its “principle technology,” and that, “through the child, concerns over reproduction merge with and emerge through the social reproduction of norms” (Sheldon 4). This notion of gender as a function of regulatory sexuality in service of biopower echoes Gilmore’s figuring of gender as tool for organizing social relations and group solidarity.

from harm appears tantamount to the future safety of us all—a future that is in any case already irremediably harmed” due to biological degradation brought on by the advent of capitalist industry (Sheldon 4). In this logic, apocalyptic boyhood represents the ambivalent subjectivity of boys who are not “men” but also not “women” or “not-man” by the terms of the gender binary. As Nichols puts it, “He may be not-woman to some extent, and yet he does not capture the full power of the negation of woman that is man” (32). Apocalyptic boyhood navigates this neutral status as perhaps perpetual when manhood has become apocalyptic. If men can no longer prove their manhood, then boys will have no rites of passage into the stage of manhood and remain neutral terms, further queering gender opposition and its performance. This ambivalence structures the performance and narrative importance of the Feral Kid in *The Road Warrior*.

Lee Edelman’s book, *No Future*, is key to Sheldon’s argument because of his insight about the discourse of reproductive futurism that the idea of “the Child” represents, although she remains skeptical about the masculinist figuration of the Child in Edelman’s book. Indeed, since the species would have a logical imperative to continue, appeals to reproductive futurism seem “impossible to refuse” (Edelman 2).<sup>315</sup> Thus, the logic of

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<sup>315</sup> So much so that it is imbricated in every social discourse since, according to Edelman’s model, “the image of the Child invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought” (2). Politics is then defined by the image of the Child as “an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations” (2).

reproductive futurism mandates transmission of an “authentic” social structure into the future through the figure of the Child (Edelman 3).<sup>316</sup>

By this logic, children must be interpellated into the binary system of gender to ensure the immanence of the future, and boys must be taught how to be “men” through a never-ending test of this status that proves they are neither women nor children. This imagining of the rhetorical appeal of the figure of the child and childhood as a problem is complicated by Naomi Morgenstern’s concept of the “wild child,” a subjectivity resulting from the parent-child bond, one in which a parent is forced to interact with their child as a person who is a “stranger” and realize that “our children are not us,” and if the child stands in for the future, the “future . . . is beyond our own narcissistic projections” (16, citing Andrew Solomon).<sup>317</sup> In the following, I synthesize these arguments about the figure of the child with the sense of masculine crisis I have been tracing in this film genre and the ways this crisis of boyhood is also imagined as a national crisis.

Kimmel documents in *Manhood in America* that the history of the nation has been punctuated not only by crises of masculinity that take the form of national crises, the nation being imagined as masculine in rhetoric of strength and white with rhetoric of purity, but

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<sup>316</sup> Edelman’s argument links queerness with the Lacanian death drive because it resists positive social value by refusing the value of futurity as such, reveling instead in pleasures of the present that produce nothing of value (Edelman 6). Queer subjectivity then troubles the “faith in the consistent reality of the social,” showing such to always already be fantasy (6).

<sup>317</sup> The wild child figures the problematic ethical situation of precarious “relation and responsibility” (16). Morgenstern, responding to the theories of Edelman, argues that, “if contemporary critics are rightfully wary of the sentimental, idealized, or essentialized child that anchors heteronormativity (if ever there were an effect posing as an origin by posing as an effect!), such a child . . . has also been invoked to help secure the very idea of the human—the human of orthodox human rights theory and of much neo-Kantian philosophy” through association with innocence and purity (17).

also by worry over the production of proper, fit men from a generation of boys imagined as emasculated by a variety of social practices such as school, mothering, masturbation, or even diet, later becoming the threat of comic books, television, and popular music or mass media as such.<sup>318</sup> Thus, America has been using apocalyptic thinking about boyhood since at least the nineteenth century.<sup>319</sup> The creation of the Boy Scouts of America was created as a remedy for this. Braudy observes that the organization was “a central part of an early-twentieth-century focus on the ‘boy’ that brought earlier preoccupations with national degeneration into a pragmatic scheme of moral, physical, and intellectual training that might undo its worst effects” (364). My use of the above analytical structures will aid in understanding the increasingly fraught discourses of “juvenile delinquency,” wayward youth not fully interpellated into hegemonic identities, which, for boys, takes the form of hypermasculine violence and hypomasculine passivity, figures that populated film texts during the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, and continuing into the 1990s, as the subject of anxiety in post-apocalyptic films shifted from boys to girls as they become reified into a necessary resource for future prosperity. As a sign of futurity, the boy becomes a site of

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<sup>318</sup> Andrew Ross, in “Demonstrating Sexual Difference” (1987), observes that “sexual difference can never be simply assumed, it must be demonstrated” (47). Braudy notes that this concern over national manhood was a modern production occurring in the nineteenth century in which propaganda about national superiority became commonplace, “when loyalty to the nation and its manhood became a shibboleth compounded of race, language, and an often partially manufactured national history” (318). The assumed manhood of nations he explains as being tied to the notion of European culture as “civilization” that naturally conquered the world.

<sup>319</sup> Nichols iterates the ambiguousness of sons that contributes to this anxiety: “In a culture that assigns the qualities of logic, rationality, deductive skills to men and subjectivity, gnostic or tacit knowledge, relationality, and analog (a continuum of conditional, contextually qualified) decision making to women, the son often embodies many more of the latter qualities than an adult male can manage without being marked as marginal, outsider, pervert, or deviant” (33).

concern over the potential he represents, a dynamic potential like that of labor-power defined by Virno, as such it can never be present, and it subtends the logic of capitalist exchange (82). This potential does not have a clear telos, however, as Nichols asserts by noting that “the performance principle may loom as the measure of man [for a boy], but it is not yet internalized as the son’s own imaginary credo. The son is *eligible* for full manhood and a place within the patriarchal order, but it is a place *reserved* more than *occupied* and a *temptation* more than a compelling desire” (33, emphasis mine). The narratives of post-apocalyptic films evolve from a concern over disciplining young male subjects who are either not masculine enough or hypermasculine, articulating anxiety about the production of a population of fit men who fit in a future society into narratives about disciplining girls to produce docile subjects reified into a technology of reproduction in which the now female protagonists revolt.<sup>320</sup>

This chapter will look at several films that portray such lost boys in danger of never maturing, of never living up to their potential as “real men,” which has less to do with a lack of fatherhood as a role-model than that of a community to which the boy can belong, supplying him with and certifying his usefulness as a man and something in which to invest his interest and time. These boys represent the on-going anxiety presented in the decade of the 1950s in films like *Rebel without a Cause* and *Blackboard Jungle* who are having

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<sup>320</sup> Thomas argues that, “although it may seem an ahistoricizing gesture to gather the objectifying tendencies of infancy, patriarchy, and capitalism under the rubric of ‘reification,’ one can nonetheless argue that these three instances seem, on a specific level of political intervention, to have a single element in common: the passivization of women into objects of exchange and the denial of their status as active, speaking, desiring subjects” (95).



difficulty conforming to the masculine dictate that a man rejects boyhood by mastering his world rather than depending on others and being responsible to them (Kimmel *MiA* 18).

### **Boys Being Boys: Apocalyptic Boyhood in 1960s terms**

*As each man's own strength and liberty are the chief instruments of this preservation, how can he merge his with others' without putting himself in peril and neglecting the care he owes to himself?*(Rousseau 60)

*Science fiction as a genre does not claim to actually predict the future. Rather, it works to extrapolate elements of the present, to consider what these elements might lead to if allowed to reach their full potential. That is to say, science fiction is not about the actual future but about the futurity that haunts the present.* (Shaviro *No Speed Limit* 2)

*Law first locates itself squarely within the family, and the issue facing the son is whether he will militate for or against the law of the father.* (Nichols 35, citing Hayden White)

Susan Faludi observes that two visions of America competed after World War II: a future for the “common man” or the “American Century,” in other words, care/nurture of the people versus national dominance (21). These are gendered choices, and the country chose dominance. This engendered not only the “baby boomer” generation as a whole, “but truly it was the era of the boy. It was the culture of *Father Knows Best* and *Leave it to Beaver*” (Faludi 24). However, Brian Baker, in *Masculinity in Fiction and Film*, notes that, “while Faludi locates the crisis in contemporary masculinity in a failure of fatherhood . . . the postwar American life constructed for the GIs’ return was, in fact, a major factor in their own alienation and dislocation,” not just their ascribed roles as fathers (1). He contends this was due to how “the returning soldiers were corralled by a new economic and cultural system designed to enforce their domesticity” often seen as taking away autonomous individual agency (Baker 1). Note how Baker, by using the verb “corralled,” equates domesticity with being fenced in and limited in movement and agency. Thus, there

were, according to him, two major “anxieties surrounding masculinity in the immediate postwar era” (Baker 1). He identifies these as the threat of hypermasculinity, a propensity for violence that men may bring back from the war, an inability to switch from military masculinity to domestic masculinity, opposed to suspicion of the homosocial bonds produced in the trauma of the event that threatened the family structure and heteronormativity, the queer figure of Edelman’s theory made monstrous in films like *Mad Max*.

Some of these fears are transferred to the sons produced by this new enforced domesticity. To qualify this assertion, I must cite Cohan’s observation that, although “the war years saw the radical disruption of the culture’s understanding of male youth’s normal transition into manhood, the referential field named by the category of ‘boy’ was by no means unique to a postwar mentality” (237). Indeed, as Gilmore’s work documents, concern with boyhood occurs in many cultures as well. Cohan describes the importance of an opposition of boyhood to manhood in nineteenth-century that expressed manliness as restraint and discipline contrasted with a boyish lack of “self-control.” Also, as Burrill asserts, “boyhood is more a position that can be accessed throughout the subject’s youth and maturity” than a stage of development (15). Boyhood is not an age-group so much as an idea of wildness and play, it indicates a lack of discipline, but, by the end of the nineteenth century, there was a growing interest in adolescence and the continuity from boyhood into manhood and the two categories converged so that boyhood was no longer equated with femininity against manhood, the figure of the homosexual assuming this position in the masculine hierarchy instead. Cohan cites Marjorie Garber’s notion of

boyhood as a “category crisis” due to its liminality, which puts the opposition of the gender binary into question with its border-crossing (Cohan 259-260). As I will discuss below, a figure like the Feral Kid in *The Road Warrior* reveals the gender masquerade in a similar fashion to the post-apocalyptic dandies that I discussed in the last chapter by playing the game of manhood, and the “wild” road warriors treat violence as play as they act out never-ending apocalyptic boyhood.<sup>321</sup>

As the first chapter of this study demonstrated, the post-apocalyptic films produced in the 1950s present a situation where the older generation must abdicate authority to younger hands, usually by perishing, but this new generation is represented by young *men* indicative of those returning from the war in Korea, not the new generation of boys who will cause so much consternation in the following decade. As such, children only appear in the narratives as objects of threatened futurity, like the infant in *Five* who succumbs to radiation sickness and perishes or the largely unseen children in *World Without End* who are described as weak and sickly due to their underground, pampered existence. During this decade, as I have mentioned, a cycle of juvenile delinquency films also appeared, consisting of large-budget studio productions like *Rebel without a Cause* as well as lower-budget exploitation films produced by filmmakers like Roger Corman and Russ Meyer, and short pseudo-documentaries (now called “shockumentaries” for their intended effect) made for teens to instruct them in proper behavior by showing cases of venereal disease or

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<sup>321</sup> Burrill notes how obsessed boys tend to be with rules when they play their games, noting that “boyhood, like games, is an enactment or mimesis of social and psychic rules, rules that appear to be naturalized and normalized by external cultural forces” (44).

unwanted pregnancy as well as drug and alcohol use.<sup>322</sup> These films often articulate what Eller calls “protest masculinity,” which “arises when males feel the urge to forcefully express their sex- or gender-identity and importance, especially when that identity or importance has been somehow threatened by social circumstances” (Eller 25-26).<sup>323</sup> One of the most striking instance of this figuring of youth in rebellion occurs in Orson Welles’s *Touch of Evil* (1958), wherein a group of leather-clad teenagers drugs and possibly rapes (although we are told later this is only for show and she has not been sexually assaulted) the wife of the film’s protagonist (Charlton Heston), played by Janet Leigh, in a remote motel near the Mexican border. Biskind observes that, in earlier films with teen crime, they “came from slums on the wrong side of the tracks” and were created by social conditions (198). By the 1950s, this had changed significantly. Rather than criminals with a bad upbringing, they were figured as “sick” and came from “degenerate families” often middle-

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<sup>322</sup> Biskind notes that, “in 1954, while the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency . . . was holding hearings, sociologist Negely Teeters wrote that ‘no social problem has wrought deeper concern in the United States’ than juvenile delinquency. . . . the inflation of the problem into a national obsession reflected more than a social reality; it reflected a mood—the first wave of conservative backlash against what William Whyte called the ‘filiarchy’ and what Ehrenreich and English, in their book *For Her Own Good*, later called ‘the century of the child.’ . . . A number of factors had conspired to create the new youth culture, ranging from World War II, which sent parents off to war or factory jobs, leaving the kids to their own devices; to postwar affluence; the baby boom; the erosion of the authority of the father; and last, but by no means least, recognition by business that teen-agers . . . constituted, in short, a market” (197-198).

<sup>323</sup> Gilmore locates this anxiety in the defining and defending of territory: “Machismo, seen as the willingness to respond to a challenge, and as found in Truk, Mexico, or the American West, is in my opinion only an exaggerated version of a much more widespread male defensiveness in dangerous contexts. . . . Beneath the posturing and the self-promotion lies a residue of practical expectations that men everywhere shoulder to some extent. The histrionic displays should not blind us to the deeper structure of a stressed manhood with similar ends: the need to establish and defend boundaries” (76-77). As this study has iterated, these boundaries are both physical properties, like the body and home, as well as imaginary properties like autonomous agency and self-mastery.

classes, not poverty (Biskind 199). Unlike the fear that returning soldiers might be violent because they were trained to kill, this paranoia locates the propensity for brutality in youth culture as such and the failure of family to properly discipline youth in morality, suggesting that violence has just become another entertainment for them, both a participatory and spectator sport. Since play was not properly transformed into work for this generation of boys, their idea of manhood becomes a game.<sup>324</sup> This game is often dangerous and violent, and because of masculinist notions of how “boys will be boys,” there often fails to be a “distinction between normal and pathological male fantasies and acts [making them] legible in the normalization of violence as part of the psychopathology of male everyday life” (Seltzer 143). Encouraged to be aggressive and competitive, less empathic, violence becomes naturalized and normalized.

This paranoia regarding the wayward subjectivity of the new generation occurred outside of the US as well, most particularly in films produced in the UK in the 1960s. In 1960, the British film, *Village of the Damned* (Wolf Rilla), presented a poignant version of this sentiment when all of the women in a rural village become simultaneously pregnant, giving birth to children with white hair and icy eyes, different because they are the same, thereby usurping the patriarchal control over reproduction and emasculating the men of the village to the point where the children take control telepathically. A document of agency panic, the film shows us the children acting in concert as if with one mind and using mental

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<sup>324</sup> Savran argues that the communal practice of sharing that structured many counter-cultural communities was part of the emergence of a generation of Americans who consumed more than they produced, a working-out of a consumer ethic replacing the older producer ethic (116). The anxieties over youth culture can be seen as reverberations of this transformation in social mores and goals as having fun and consuming industrial goods becomes more important than producing things; play replaces work.

powers to control the behavior of others. George Sanders plays a scientist whose son is one of these wayward reproductions. He is unable to understand or counteract the power of the children and ultimately orders the village destroyed by nuclear missile with him in it to rid the world of these children. In *Village of the Damned*, national security is conflated with paternal crisis, and the failure of men to manage reproduction results in patriarchy coming under threat worldwide by film's end. A post-patriarchal society is depicted as monstrous and horrible, making men into tools for the whims of children. Ironically, these albino youths actually enact masculinist ideals of behavior with their treatment of emotions as weakness and their entitlement to dominance, and the film, like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, equates a lack of affect with a lack of individuality.<sup>325</sup>

Youth was not always thought of as dangerous. John F. Kennedy's youthful vigor was used by his campaign for President in 1960 as a rhetoric of manhood ascendant and virile. He was not a symbol of domesticity, but performed Playboy masculinity, even having an alleged affair with Marilyn Monroe. His campaign targeted the youth market. In a speech at the Democratic National Convention, "he spoke not of the populace at large, but principally of 'young men' . . . What Kennedy implicitly presented was not so much a political platform as a new rite of passage for an untested male generation," and in this rhetoric the space race became "a government-backed program of man-making, of federal masculinity insurance" (Faludi 25). Kennedy supplied a new frontier to conquer and a place

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<sup>325</sup> Patriarchy is rescued ten years later in the British film *No Blade of Grass* (1970, Cornel Wilde), a post-apocalyptic narrative where all grains have died due to a blight and the scarcity of food causes the social order to crumble. It treats the journey of a macho middle-class man trying to protect his family as they flee London for a farm, a trajectory similar to *Panic in Year Zero*. Like that film, the father ultimately fails in his paternal role of provider and protector.

to test and prove manhood. But what of the fathers still fenced in by their family lives and the sons who were never given a chance to conquer this frontier?

Independence from family was not always positioned as liberating in the discourses of this decade. *The Last Man on Earth* begins after Morgan has already lost his wife and child to the disease. He spends most of it brooding about this fact, and the film contains a lengthy flashback sequence to detail this loss and his failure to prevent it. By the film's end, he discovers that he has been killing "normal" people who survived the virus, including women and children, and he dies in order for the future to be born, so that the survivors can live, leaving his legend of brutality as a legacy. The future is posthuman, and, now that the threat he represented is gone, hopeful. It may even be post-patriarchal. Hester cites Muñoz to refute Edelman's positioning of the queer as against futurity rather than just heteronormative futurity, suggesting that the "call for utopia . . . offers for thinking 'queer' – not contra the future, but as the unrealized, the emergent, and the still to come" that is expressed by the ambiguous endings of many of these films, such as that of *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*. The future imagined as potential for change instead of a reproduction of the same is imagined, however, as only possible after the destruction of modern life as we know it.

### **Boys in a Man's World: 1970s Articulations of Youth as Counter-Cultural Threat to Reproductive Futurity and the Possibility of Post-Patriarchy**

*A crisis – whether economic, ecological, or political – is a turning point, a sudden rupture, a sharp and immediate moment of reckoning. But for us today, crisis has become a chronic and seemingly permanent condition. . . . Crises never come to a culmination; instead, they are endlessly and indefinitely deferred. (Shaviro No Speed Limit 9)*

*The child's definitional emptiness – her lack of sexual knowledge and adult rationality – makes the child the perfect figure for figuration as such. . . . The child is made of narrative.*  
(Sheldon 10)

*Men in contemporary North American society are never forced to complete the rites of passage. Instead, they attempt to skate the edge of boyhood and maturity, securing a foothold in each realm to ensure psychic and social leeway in response to peer pressure.*  
(Burrill 29)

*The Omega Man* most drastically diverges from its previous versions, *Last Man on Earth* and the novel of *I am Legend*, by its inclusion of not only children, but a variety of racially marked children, like the Asian boy we first encounter behind a huge machine gun pointed at Neville. The film uses these diverse children as its inclusion of hope for the future of the human race, whereas Matheson's novel and its first adaptation have no hope for a continuing humanity and leave the planet to the new posthuman survivors of the plague. Neville becomes the savior of humanity in Heston's version because he saves these children from both the Family and the disease, but he must also die to let them inherit the world.<sup>326</sup> Adulthood is figured in this film as a problem for the young, much like in the *Star Trek* episode "Miri," as a sickness both physical and psychological. The children fear growing old enough to "cross-over" and become one of the fanatical night dwellers. They are left at film's end in the hands of Dutch, who exists in the liminal state between boyhood, represented by his treating the action in the film as play and his rebellious leather jacket,

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<sup>326</sup> Benjamin suggests that "the course of history, seen in terms of the concept of catastrophe, can actually claim no more attention from thinkers than a child's kaleidoscope, which with every turn of the hand dissolves the established order into a new array. There is profound truth in this image. The concepts of the ruling class have always been the mirrors that enabled an image of 'order' to prevail.—The kaleidoscope must be smashed" (*SW Vol. 4* 164). Note how he uses the figure of a child playing with a toy to allegorize thinking about history and progress toward a better future. The obsession with keeping "good" and "bad" separated "de-realizes" social relations and renders persons as things (Chodorow 241).



and manhood, represented by his former status as medical student and role as provider and protector.

Rejecting his former life of bioscience, he does not want to become “The Man” like Neville anymore, even though he used to idolize his work, reciting it to an astonished Neville as a rebuke of an episteme that turns knowledge of healing into a weapon of mass destruction. Dutch acts as an icon of 1960s counter-cultural youth rebellion in this narrative, just as Lisa acts as an icon of Black Power. The question the film leaves open is, if he has rejected Neville as role model, what will be his model of masculinity now? Will he and Lisa start a new community no longer based on hierarchical distinctions and power asymmetry? Will he defer to her age and experience? Will they become new parents for the children? As I indicated in the second chapter, I fear that he will only reproduce the same model of angry white masculinity represented by Neville because he seems to have so much fun riding his motorcycle and throwing bombs. Richie would have been a more hopeful choice for the future of manhood, but his optimism was shown to be foolish and led to his death, only proving that one cannot argue with an ideology rooted in binary logic. Dutch’s acts of violence in the film have a different reasoning than that of Neville’s. Dutch is not trying to protect his property, and, unlike Neville, he does not consider the Family inherently “bad”; he recommends Neville move out of his apartment and is not trying to eliminate the Family like Neville is. A hopeful reading of the film can register this difference as indicating that he will likewise not treat this new group as his property either, for they do not form a new family so much as a new kin structure that does not require the family structure and its roles for them to be familiar with each other. This new post-

patriarchal, post-white society invites a reimagining of what it means to be American, since, as Billig writes, “if nationalism is an ideology of the first person plural, which tells ‘us’ who ‘we’ are, then it is also an ideology of the third person. There can be no ‘us’ without a ‘them’” (78). What kind of society will they have without a “them”? Neville’s death is not a sacrifice for his nation, which his status as officer in the military would suggest, but one that is necessary to imagine a world beyond patriarchal family and nation.<sup>327</sup> Dutch is not one of the reckless boys who take whatever they want that populate films like *Panic in Year Zero* and *Ravagers*; their lack of accountability lies in a rejection of future consequence and responsibility to others, and Dutch is still concerned with the future and consequences of his actions. He does, however, act entitled to violence defending against the Family and seems to embrace a form of military masculinity necessary in a violent future that he also seems to enjoy. Can he stop trying to win this game? But the other children also seem skilled in the use of military technology. We hope that they can leave such behavior behind them after escaping the city and its territorial violence, much like the transformation of the warrior, Carson, in *The Ultimate Warrior*. Environment is key for determining norms, and Dutch can cease playing the game now that he has left the game board and its pieces behind.

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<sup>327</sup> Billig illuminates the logic that subtends Neville’s and Mathias’s rivalry: “When competing visions of homelands draw different boundaries around the same places, the rivals can dream of cleansing each other’s vision, and each other’s very being, from the geography of their own imagined homeland. Then, semantic and material ‘cleansing’ become fatally united” (78).

## **Dangerous Boys and Repressive Regimes: Homosociality and Domestication**

*War had brought with it a larger sense of the entire nation as a unit. But for many all that seemed to remain of that wider perspective was the uniformity and the need to not deviate from the norm. (Braudy 507)*

*What we see then is a cultural contradiction or irony. Gisu literally create a kind of man that they do not particularly value or want and that they suffer from. At the very least, they accept the negative consequences of creating such brave and angry men, who will be a potential problem for society later on. They, apparently, do not perceive the irony in their own behavior, and it is difficult to imagine what they might think about it if they did. (Eller 92)*

*As [Playboy's] title intimated, American men experienced their manhood most profoundly when they were boys at play, not men at work. (Kimmel MiA 255)*

Nostalgia for traditional small-town America and the innocence it evokes takes a rather sinister turn in *A Boy and His Dog* (1975, L.Q. Jones), a film marketed with a tagline that called it “kinky” and adapted from the novella *Vic and Blood* (1969) by Harlan Ellison. The film begins, as many other post-apocalyptic films from this decade, with the bombs dropping, significantly labelling this as WWIV, WWII being assigned to the smaller post-colonial proxy wars fought between WWII and this one, including those waged in Korea and Vietnam, while predicting the on-going conflict that would erupt in Afghanistan during this decade. The film appeals to the men who returned from such failed military exercises, especially that of Vietnam, which was coming to a close as the film was being released.

The America that survives aboveground in the film, which, in Ellison's novella, consists of the ruins of Los Angeles, but has been displaced to a mountainous desert area in the film adaptation, perhaps Phoenix, has been so utterly destroyed and buried that no structures stand. It is imagined as inhabited by bands of rapists, as if those depicted in *Panic*

*in Year Zero, The Ultimate Warrior, and Ravagers* inherited the Earth. They find food in a mode of resource extraction from the ruins buried beneath them, mining the past for its consumer plenty. In contradistinction to the “noble” farming of a heroic artisan, they violently loot the canned foods of the past through excavation using explosives. This surface world has neither future nor family, imagined as a masculinist homosocial space of immediate gratification where nothing is produced.

The fathers in this narrative reside underground in a vast bunker, protected from the depravity of the surface world in a self-contained society called Topeka which is a micro-managed land of plenty structured around social ritual that maintains the façade of an ideal pre-war small town partaking in constant picnics, with marching bands and hot dishes. The normality of such banal displays is defamiliarized and made monstrous, demonstrating that normality is only ever a case of believing what you see without question and defined by those in power. This supposedly safe refuge is shown to be no better than the wilderness above and vulnerable to penetration and contamination from outside as well as dissent from within. It is a tribute to the death of the rage and struggle that brought the wasteland into being. In the newest edition of the novella on which the film is based, Ellison added epigraphs from “the wit and wisdom of Blood,” the telepathic dog referenced by the film’s title (voiced by Tim McIntire in the film). One of these comments on the illusion of order and safety represented by this artifice of normality: “It’s probably not productive to codify civilization in terms of how many fire hydrants it has” (Ellison preface). This clever allusion indicates the danger a fire hydrant exists to guard against and contain, hence the more of them, the more danger. The hydrant represents civil defense while at the same time

indicating the threat of fire, which works as an allusion to nuclear weapons. As a dog, however, Blood is also referring to the cliché of canines urinating on such landmarks to mark their territory, thus also indicating the defense of borders. In Ellison's version, Topeka is stuck in the first or second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, before the trauma of WWI, but the film's costumes present a pastiche that mixes the end of the depression and 1950s, especially in the attire of the young men; it nostalgically imagines the American Dream spread over the first half of the century before the country was embroiled in conflicts in Asia that resulted in the disillusion of that fantasy.

The wasteland aboveground is populated by men wearing whatever rags they can find since the only thing produced anymore is violence, but Vic (Don Johnson), the boy of the film's title, is dressed in a conspicuous costume that was not described in the novella. When seen in one of the many long shots of him and Blood walking through the wasteland like a post-apocalyptic *Lawrence of Arabia*, his attire resembles that of a Civil War soldier, especially with the inclusion of the rifle that he carries. This historical link to previous national disaster depends on gender coding.<sup>328</sup> Vic, a teenager in the novella, but played by a decidedly older actor in the film version, is equated through costume to one of the boys who lost their lives or boyhood innocence in the crucible of the Civil War, emerging as a man or not at all, a process detailed in Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895). But Vic can never become a "man" in this postwar world if manhood is understood as

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<sup>328</sup> Kimmel notes that the "Civil War was also a gendered war in which the meanings of manhood were bitterly contested" in the national imaginary (72). For example, he argues that it marked the end to a validated masculinity performed by southern gentry he labels the "Genteel Patriarch," replaced by the figure referred to in this study, the "Heroic Artisan."

masculine responsibility, agency, and mastery. Robinson remarks that “the tragically defeated Rebel evinces the failure of chivalry and, indeed, a failure of masculinity that will haunt southern men far into the twentieth century. Because the Reb is the figure for an independent white masculinity idealized *as* defeated, he becomes a reservoir from which other white men can draw when seeking to image a victimized but still heroically fighting white masculinity” (*Masked Men* 164). This evocation of boyhood lost to battle, occurring after the last, bitterest years of a lost war in Southeast Asia, alludes to the status of returning veterans from Vietnam, a war which, according to Faludi, “would become a defining event of American masculinity, the bridge that collapsed just as the nation’s sons thought they were crossing to manhood. Conventional wisdom holds that this collapse was triggered not by the decisions of the fathers but the choices the sons made” (298).<sup>329</sup> The veterans were thought to shoulder all of the blame of defeat. Later, in films like *Deer Hunter* (1978, Michael Cimino) and *First Blood* (1982, Ted Kotcheff), the Vietnam veteran becomes a national image of a defeated, victimized, but heroically fighting man. Vic is an allegory for one of these sons who has been failed by patriarchy but suffers the blame for this failure, a defeated masculinity that continues to fight and prove its value.

The film soon shows long shots of the wasted denizens of this world. Survival in this space comes to those entitled to violence, as we see in a sequence showing a large post-apocalyptic dandy, with bright flowing robes and a huge moustache, commanding a group of slaves excavating a cache of food from which Vic recklessly steals a meal. This warlord

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<sup>329</sup> She also notes that this war was the first movie war, a performance of masculine action that played out on the television screens of the nation (359).

is transported by these slaves in a wagon fashioned from an old vehicle and is wealthy enough to have a slave whose sole purpose is entertainment, playing a damaged guitar for his amusement. Gangs like this are called Rover packs.

Vic and Blood are a team because, as Blood has explained to Vic, when dogs gained telepathic abilities after mutating, an event unexplained in the film, resulting probably from radiation, but elaborated in the prequel story that Ellison later wrote which explains that they were deliberately altered and trained for military duty (13-14), they lost the ability to sniff out food, but gained the ability to detect “females.” If we consider Vic and Blood as analogues of each other, this story about discipline causing the canines to lose a vital part of their “natural” ability can be seen as an allegory for the disciplining of boys taking away the “natural” wildness they are born with. The boy and his dog mirror each other in other ways, as will become evident below. Another Rover pack encountered by Vic captures one of the few remaining females, and the boy and his dog track them to an underground structure of some kind. Vic provides sustenance and Blood provides him with a sexual outlet by identifying and tracking sexual objects. Unlike the heroes of the other films examined here, Vic is no better than any of the other rapists on the surface. When he discovers that the Rovers whom Blood has tracked have killed the woman, shown bloodied and nude in a quick medium-shot meant to shock and titillate the audience simultaneously, he is outraged not by the violation of her body, but rather the way the other men have rendered her useless for his carnal intentions. She was used and thrown away. This is a disposable world.

It is a world of detritus. There is no sense of futurity, just an eternal present that takes the form of a search for either food or sex. In Edelman's theory, it is a queer world without the heteronormative structure of family and the reproductive futurity it promises. History, likewise, is disappearing, even though Blood tries to teach it to Vic in comic voice-over while the two trod from place to place, but the boy finds such things tedious, frustrating, and useless. The boy refuses to be disciplined in the ways of man. The duo decide to go see a movie after they have stolen cans from the aforementioned Rover pack, using some to barter. The film shown at this open-air theater is a grainy no-budget pornographic story filled with violence, much like many films supplying the grindhouse circuit in the 1970s that would come to be labelled "exploitation films" and equally resembling this film. *A Boy and His Dog*, by making such a reference, ironically comments on the way that it also participates in this genre of independent filmmaking while also indicating that the audience for this film is little different from that watching the film in the diegesis.

Men are dangerous in this world, to each other as well as women. There is no sense of accountability to others; without a community one has no person for whom or to whom one is responsible, one to whom one must respond. Given too much liberty and agency in a world with no law above survival of the "fittest," they continue the destruction which began with the war on a smaller scale. The only communities we see aboveground are the entrepreneurs who run the movie enclave, the Rover pack who attacks Vic and Blood, and the slaves driven by their brutal master, a man who ultimately takes over the whole territory. These groups are sustained with a homosocial bond maintained by violence,



either that of the slave master over his abject subjects or that directed at other Rovers and women. Competitive homosocial behavior allows men to disavow the “affective, let alone erotic, component in their interactions” (Cohan citing Chauncey xiv). However, in this queer, non-heteronormative space, homosexuality is commonplace and no longer considered an emasculation, a fact alluded to in the film but directly referenced in the novella (Ellison 27).

In contrast, we are shown the ambivalent, affective bond between Vic and Blood, one based on a social contract where each treats the other as a means to an end, but also a real friendship that transcends all other attachments, as the film’s problematic ending attests. Blood goes out of his way to assert his superior intelligence to Vic. He attempts to “civilize” the boy through education, teaching him history and language, but this tends to only enrage Vic rather than pacify him as being civilized is imagined to do. The novella is a first-person narrative from Vic’s point of view, but the film seems to identify more with Blood in this relationship, giving him not only the upper-hand in every conversation, but also significant close-up screen time in which the well-trained dog seems to act and emote like one would expect of a human actor.<sup>330</sup> For example, in the novella, when the two go to the movies, and Vic must check his weapons at the gate, he notices water dripping and demands that they be moved so as not to rust (24). In the film, Blood is the one who notices this and tells Vic the weapons need to be moved; the dog has more power in the

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<sup>330</sup> Ellison extends this superiority and centrality in the prequel and sequel stories that he later wrote to flesh out the novella, which are both first-person narratives from *Blood’s* point of view wherein he sardonically comments on events in a way that constantly denigrates the boy.

relationship.<sup>331</sup> This is a curious reversal of the racial buddy-story that appeared in American classics like James Fenimore Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* (1827-1841) and Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1884). In these narratives, the racialized partner is positioned as "closer to both nature and nurture" and takes care of the white protagonist as a kind of "male mother" in what Kimmel calls "an asexual counter-marriage" that depicts the racial other as tame because "one must be tame to be primitive and wild to be so tame" (66). Blood, in this relationship, is the one who is attempting to tame Vic, to make him less wild and primitive, much like how women have been thought of as civilizing influences on men, a figure replaced in 1980s Hollywood films with a child (Kimmel 60).<sup>332</sup> Women become a "moral restraint" because men are imagined as unable to restrain themselves (Kimmel 54).<sup>333</sup> "Freedom" is a complex concept in this film, and restraint is depicted as harmful to men. Thus, the character of Quilla June (Susanne Benton) troubles this traditional idea of women as taming influence; rather than containing Vic's brutality, she encourages it.

"Down-under," what the men on the surface call Topeka, contains boys and men who are shown to be too civilized, emasculated and pacified by the society that nurtures them. The boys want, but are unable to resist, the will of the Committee that runs things, a

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<sup>331</sup> As in the other films in this study, firearms are an important commodity in the struggle for dominance.

<sup>332</sup> Kimmel observes that this rhetoric impels men to be "exiled from the home, unable to return without fear of feminization" by this taming influence, thereby impelling men into homosocial spaces that exclude women (58).

<sup>333</sup> He elaborates, "Self-control, exclusion, and escape . . . have been the dominant themes in the history of American masculinity until the present day" (44).

trio of two older men and an older woman, ruled by a genteel patriarch played with eerie efficiency by Jason Robards. This division of men into a dichotomy of “soft” and “hard,” like that articulated in other films like *World Without End* and *The Road Warrior*, figures a masculine crisis noted by Cohan that began after WWII, when “Cold War politics further complicated the picture by projecting contradictory ideals for American manhood, requiring a ‘hard’ masculinity as the standard when defending the nation’s boundaries [and interests], yet insisting upon a ‘soft’ masculinity as the foundation of an orderly, responsible life” (xii). This film extends these two models to their extreme, but the hard men on the surface no longer defend any boundary beyond that of their own body. The Committee needs Quilla June’s rebellious ability to act, sending her to the surface to lure Vic down, whom they describe in ominous voice-over as a “good specimen,” (recall the “good stock” from *Ultimate Warrior*) while the camera watches him in extreme long shot with sets of legs clad in clean blue-jeans and powder-blue bags over shoes taking up the foreground. We watch with them as they measure his value but are unsure what aspect of him they require, which, in a usual action film would be his martial prowess, like Carson in *Ultimate Warrior*. During the film’s climax, the young men who were going to be part of Quilla June’s revolution stand impotent and allow themselves to have their skulls crushed by the large robotic man that the Committee uses for its legitimized acts of violence and domination, a tool that allows them to disavow the brutality of the Committee work, a technology that assumes for them the dominance of masculinity.<sup>334</sup> The violent

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<sup>334</sup> This is also reflected in their use of euphemisms. When a citizen is found to be unable to conform, they are shipped to the “farm,” which, of course, in this underground space does not exist, and are in fact executed, presumably to be composted and used in growing food.

hypermasculine has been tamed here and rendered into a piece of technology to keep social order, pacified, and the men in the society no longer know how to behave like this robot named Michael; they are double pacified. The state monopolizes violence underground with the same sense of entitlement as the violent men on the surface. These young doomed men not only have no agency in the community, but they are unable to resist being manipulated into rebelling by the seductive Quilla June. Vic, on the other hand, although at first seduced into the Down-under through her sexual whiles, refuses to aid her in her struggle against authority, choosing instead the lack of such authority or structure aboveground as a homosocial space where men are encouraged to be wild, and he can play like a boy for the rest of his life. Curiously, reproductive futurity is threatened in both spaces. Above, the homosocial queer bond precludes using women for any purpose besides sex, and they are treated as disposable. No one is making a family and raising children; such values are now meaningless. Topeka, even though it continues with the practice of heteronormative coupling, cannot produce children because such sterile living conditions have sterilized its men; and they are impotent in more ways than one.<sup>335</sup>

In a review of the film published in the first issue of *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* not long after the film's release, Joana Russ cogently argues that the depiction of Quilla June uses a rhetoric that counters feminism disguised as a feminist statement. She is forward, liberated, and shows the only agency of any character in the film

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<sup>335</sup> Brady, studying the nineteenth-century obsession with norms, calls this "an odd but perhaps companionable combination of tyranny and freedom. Tyranny was the assumption that the norm was the only way to be, from which there could not or should not be any deviation; freedom was the substitution of a wide array of human possibilities for absolute distinctions between the normal and the abnormal, the acceptable and the eccentric, the standard and the freakish" (313).

besides Vic and Blood, but these qualities are linked to her will to power and her Machiavellian use of people as tools to that end. The film presents a powerful woman as dangerous and inherently selfish, the feminist as a social problem and villain. She defies the Committee because they refuse to make her a member. Unlike actual feminists, she does not want to liberate everyone from patriarchal control, but instead to usurp that power for herself. She performs a female masculinity that includes masculinist values of autonomy, agency, and mastery. Not having power like the Committee, she needs a “special kind of man” so that she can take control over Topeka. She ostensibly lures Vic down into the bunker at the behest of the Committee and its program for technologized reproductive futurity, but really wants to use his propensity for violence, to harness his masculine aggression for her own ends. She wants to reproduce his brutality, not his child, and is another queer figure that rejects the futurity of reproduction and her role in the family structure. Feminism is then equated with a rejection of the future as well as the unmaning of men by controlling them rather than liberating them from the constraints of hegemonic masculinity and its contradictions, but, as Robinson argues, “the real crime of feminism and multiculturalism [in the anti-feminist model] is not that they make *truth* relative, but that they make *white masculinity* relative, by placing white men within the field of identity politics, by marking them as the embodiment of a particularity that ‘just happens’ to coincide with the normative, and putatively, unmarked self” (86).

This notion of white masculinity “just happening” to be the superordinate subject of history informs the scene in which Vic and Quilla June meet. At first, he voyeuristically watches her undress out of the masculine drag she was wearing to travel unmolested on the

surface as a man, replaced by 1950s-styled feminine undergarments and a frilly dress. We are impelled to identify with Vic as the camera cuts between watching her disrobe from Vic's point-of-view as a kind of strip-tease and demonstration of clothing's gender coding to close shots of Vic's face lustily watching while hiding. When he subsequently attacks her, forcing her at gunpoint to undress once again in preparation for rape, and begins to disrobe himself, he is made uncomfortable by her gaze, snarling, "What are you lookin' at?" Watching her is one thing, but he refuses to be made such an object of the gaze himself. This expression of vulnerability evidences that the gaze is not inherently male, but can only be wielded by women at their peril. Vic's "normal" masculinity is made strange, and he becomes a marked subject when placed in the context of Quilla June's artificial community and its standards, pacified to the extremity of being rendered into an object functioning in an apparatus of reproductive futurity in which he becomes mere resource.

Vic clearly does not "fit" in this space, even though they require his "fit" sperm for reproducing the next generation of citizens. The conformity of the populace and the need to repeat forever a form of sameness, to always fit in, is foregrounded by the clownish makeup worn by every member of the town, even the android enforcer, that makes them look comical and hyperwhite. It reads as a minstrel show in whiteface that lampoons the banality of whiteness. This is an indication of the fact that, as Martinot puts it, "white entitlement is self-referential" (200). This makeup also adds another layer of "feminization" to the society as it also reminds the viewer that the sameness of the community is racially coded, indicating that the community exists in a nostalgia for not only a past where patriarchy maintained order, but racial homogeneity contributed as

well.<sup>336</sup> In the novella, Vic narrates that “the clean, sweet, neat, lovely way they lived was enough to kill a guy. No wonder the men couldn’t get it up and make babies that had balls instead of slots” (56). Vic’s experiences here figure domestication and fatherhood as a feminizing trap from which he must escape to keep his masculinity intact. At first elated when told by the Committee that he has been chosen to father a new generation of children because the men here are impotent, he soon finds that he is little more than a tool of reproductive futurity when he is strapped to a table and his semen extracted by a pump, a technological apparatus instead of sexual intercourse. He is not only prevented from performing his “superior” masculinity, he is utterly robbed of his agency, and his potency becomes just another resource to extract, much like the patriarchal figuration of women as incubators and producers of new national subjects that discourse about reproductive rights and women’s agency opposes. In this scene, Vic is put in a traditionally and historically “feminine” position in the name of reproductive futurity, treated, like the figures of motherhood analyzed by Sheldon, as a biopolitical resource.

Ultimately, homosocial bonds are more important than heterosexual desire in masculinist texts such as this, and, upon returning to the surface to find Blood dying of starvation, Vic feeds his girlfriend to his buddy off-camera.<sup>337</sup> The film ends with a long

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<sup>336</sup> Martinot argues that “white people cannot individually abandon whiteness in order to abjure their white skin privilege, because they do not produce that whiteness; it is bestowed by the social institutions in white society. It will be continually reimposed by social institutions that preserve and reconstitute it, as well as by all others one encounters in society. . . . That is, to abandon being white will also mean to stop imposing a white-defined concept of blackness on black people, or Nativeness on Native Americans (or femininity on women in the masculinist paradigm)” (201).

<sup>337</sup> Ellison likes to remind interviewers that Vic never eats any of her. He is not a cannibal, and this is not a case of cannibalism since Blood is another species. Earlier in the film, Vic feeds him popcorn, and one of my students was understandingly upset that the film thus equates Quilla June with popcorn, which

shot of the two walking into the sunset like a romantic movie while we hear their voices bantering about the meal, and Blood makes a misogynistic, truly tasteless joke about how she was lacking in taste. Ellison remarked in many interviews how this addition changed his story in tone, and he often dismissed the film as more misogynistic than his novella. In what could be seen as a response to this adaptation of his work, he wrote a sequel story about what happens to the duo after these events, which is told from Blood's point of view. This first-person commentary establishes the dog as a ruthless pragmatist who cannot understand why Vic finds it impossible to get over the demise of his girl, brooding to the point where he ultimately gives up and dies himself. Although unfazed by eating Quilla June, Blood is deeply affected by the loss of his human companion. Ellison ends the saga thus: "And I was never again troubled by the ghosts of little girls in shredded frilly pink dresses. No ghosts of little girls: just one ghost . . . a fifteen-year-old ghost that stared up at me from a hollow stump with eyes that no longer cared what happened to Man's Best Friend" (79). This ending reinforces the horror of this post-apocalyptic situation and the choice the boy must make, a trauma brushed off as laughable by the film. In Ellison's version, Vic fails this rite of passage. A woman comes between these men, and it ruins their relationship by interfering with their co-dependency. The surface world of this post-apocalyptic landscape is no place for women or intersubjective relationships.

*The Ultimate Warrior*, as we saw in the second chapter of this study, is a redemptive tale about a violent man who learns how to have intersubjective relationships once more,

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brought up a discussion of the way that women are a commodity to be consumed in Hollywood films that cater to a masculine gaze by sexualizing them and making them victims.



to be responsible for others and not just himself. The first baby in the film is treated as a problem, another mouth to feed, but the one born at the film's end represents the hope of reproductive futurity and a world beyond the violent city. There are no other children in the metropolis, just desperate men entitled to violence struggling over dwindling resources and the women and racialized others who serve them. Likewise in *Ravagers*, but the film is preoccupied with its protagonist's impotence. He may not be able to impregnate or protect his wife, but, similar to Dutch, he finds a new kin group at film's end, what the film calls a "flock" in a Biblical reference to Moses as shepherd over his people, leading them out of bondage to a new land. Also, like Dutch, we are to hope that he will put aside the military masculinity he has learned to survive in this space and embrace a nurturing masculinity instead. They leave in search of a space where things still grow, where they can embrace an agrarian existence. The next decade saw a proliferation of post-apocalyptic films, and most of them were low-budget copies of Miller's *Mad Max* series, so I return now to these influential texts that impacted international filmmaking but also were immensely popular in the United States, narratives that become increasingly interested in the plight of children and the threat to reproductive futurity.

### **1980s, A Decade when Sons "Redeemed" Fatherhood and the White Line Nightmare:**

#### **The (Not Quite) Feral Kid and Warrior Masculinity as a Dead End**

*The posthumanist wild child often appears in a physical or ideological space in which the easy distinction between the wild and the civilized or rational has collapsed. [This figure] appears at the center of an ethical or ontological wilderness that allegorizes the relationship between parents and children and registers, in displaced fashion, particular forms of cultural anxiety about reproduction and futurity and about the relationship between the human and what has traditionally been quarantined as 'the animal.'*

(Morgenstern 2)

*The child's "taming" and incorporation into the Great Northern Tribe thus replays early celebrations of the colonial inscription of "civilization" onto the tabula rasa of Australia, but in this refiguring of the story from a new beginning, contemporary discourses of postcolonial nationalism are read back into a universal, timeless landscape of "postness" where all parties are vulnerable and all claims are equal. (Falconer 262)*

As these epigraphs imply, this analysis of the figure of the Feral Kid (Emil Minty) in *The Road Warrior* will problematize the ideas of reproductive futurity and civilization by troubling the boundary between the binary oppositions of wild/civilized and human/animal while also indicating that the individualist autonomy expressed by the figure of the lone hero is superseded by the necessity for social unity and the common good, individual agency replaced by interpersonal relations and actor-networks.<sup>338</sup> An examination of this post-apocalyptic wild child will continue queering the figure of Max by thinking of him as what Robinson calls "a simmering male body whose psychophysical energies are always circulating and recirculating in an effort to avoid both destruction and self-destruction [which] constructs a masculinity that embraces pain as a manly credential even as it threatens to release those natural male energies that cause pain to others" (152).<sup>339</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> This will also trouble the distinction of the Feral Kid as "deviant," just as the film disturbs an easy reading of a character like Wez as such. These are social labels: "Edwin Lemert (1951) and Howard Becker (1963) advanced the theory of social labeling. Lemert emphasized the 'societal reaction' to deviant behavior, which tags a particular behavior and its perpetrators as deviant; this behavior and the reaction to it are termed 'primary deviance.' However, in a next step, called 'secondary deviance,' the perpetrators accept the identity of a deviant and commit themselves to deviance or violence as an adaptation to or defense against society's response to them. Thus, the reaction of society not only defines but encourages such conduct" (Eller 56). Normality produces deviance.

<sup>339</sup> She goes on to say that this model of manhood posits that "men *must* restrain their dangerous impulses, but men *cannot* restrain them; men *must* restrain their blocked emotions, but men *cannot* release them. It is in the space between the 'must' and the 'cannot' that the physically and psychically wounded man emerges, *not* as a pathological, or even 'failed' man, but as the norm of a masculinity that can only attempt to be 'healthy' (Robinson 152, italics hers). Often, women and children are called upon to aid in this path to health, but the Feral Kid does not perform this role for Max, and he further troubles the idea of manly restraint.

The film presents the journey of the Kid from an autonomous individual living on the margins of social space to part of a tribe, a member in a larger body politic. Martin remarks that both the Gyro Captain and the Feral Kid are “bundles of diverse associations” (51). But they both become leaders of the Great Northern Tribe, and this film acts as their rite of passage to that status; they both, as I indicated in chapter four, operate in a vertical axis that defies the control over horizontal space represented by the road warriors (Martin 53).<sup>340</sup> Martin describes the Feral Kid as androgynous, a child, but with adult abilities, natural, but becoming civilized, Aboriginal, but white (52). I will take up these contradictions here; however, before discussing this figure of apocalyptic boyhood in detail, I need to establish another context in which he operates, that of boyhood unfettered by society, and I will do so through a discussion of an important intertext for this figuration, Peter Brook’s adaptation of *Lord of the Flies* (1963). This will indicate why I argue that this Kid is not really “feral” as much as marginal and racialized and why he becomes the focal point of the film without “redeeming” Max from his lost status, why the Kid can learn to fit into a post-apocalyptic community but Max never will.

*Lord of the Flies* is a horrific coming-of-age story. Gilmore notes that virtually all cultures have steps that a boy must take to attain manhood, guided by rewards and punishments, which differ mostly in the details of this process (124).<sup>341</sup> In this film, boys

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<sup>340</sup> This identifies them as problem-solvers, perhaps the reason they become leaders. “The theme of solving collective problems figures in most mythologies of the world as the basis of the myth of the culture hero (J. Campbell 1968). But it is not only among workers or primitives that such ideas rule gender attitudes and ideals. Among scholars, literary critics, and poets, this connection between heroic resourcefulness and manhood is also often celebrated, if only in hypothetical terms” (Gilmore 113).

<sup>341</sup> He explains that women also are impelled through discipline to become proper female subjects in society, however, “Because men usually exercise political or legal authority, and because they are bigger

spend their days playing in a tropical paradise, but the rules of the games they play become more violent as they become determined by the dominant group of boys who are also, not insignificantly, the choir group from the school they all attend. The narrative begins with a montage of still shots documenting typical English school discipline, the organized institutional violence that shapes boys into proper English subjects, subservient parts of a “civilized” empire.<sup>342</sup> This sense of order is disrupted by war, another kind of structural, though more direct, violence, and the film presents a montage of still photographs of warfare and its consequences. Evacuated from a war zone in the Pacific area, the schoolboys’ plane crashes on a remote island, which the boys will ultimately transform into yet another war zone.

The jungle space as a space of nature, a wild space, is at first a place where the boys can frolic freely away from the strict discipline of their school. Brooks in fact put together the finished film from hours of beautiful black-and-white footage that he took of the boys at play without a script. Like Morgenstern, I “want to privilege the category of aggression . . . insofar as this conceptual state can be said to constitute the primal or ‘wild’ condition of the subject—the subject not yet in relation” (24). Danger surfaces in the narrative as

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and stronger, they can usually coerce women into compliance by force or by the threat of force, that is, if conventional morality fails to do the job. Men, however, especially in atomistic social contexts, are not always under the domination of others and are therefore harder to control socially. It may be because of this difference that a special moral system (‘real manhood’) is required to ensure a voluntary acceptance of appropriate behavior in men” (Gilmore 221).

<sup>342</sup> Sheldon notes that, “once upon a time, perhaps, the figure of the child served as a link between the domestic interior and the national domestic, thus centralizing sexuality and reproduction as the basis for economic vitality and designating the vigor of the household as the mechanism by which the nation rises and falls” (116). But these boys need to be domesticated, and the film imagines what they do without such discipline and devotion to work.

something “out there” on the island, but it really comes from the boys themselves as they learn how to relate to each other without the strictures of their school. Virno calls this “disorientation in the presence of the world in which we live; it is identified with the absolute insecurity which lives in the human animal, in as much as the human animal is lacking in specialized instincts. One might say: fear is always anguish-ridden: circumscribed danger always makes us face the general risk of being in this world” (33). The film shows the tragic consequences of the boys’ imagining and personifying this inchoate fear while also establishing a hierarchy based on aggression and the need for play to mean something, to prove a boy’s emerging manhood, to articulate masculine emergency. This raises the question of whether manhood represents an essential wildness in need of restraint or the taming of a wild boyhood by the responsibilities and expectations of manhood. Furthermore, it problematizes boyhood as another form of homosocial space in which boys must sublimate any affective relationships they have with other boys or appear “weak” and not fit in.

Early in the narrative, the older boys attempt to organize a signal fire for a possible rescue and agree to protect the younger children, establishing a dichotomy between play and work, individual fun against responsibility to the *group*. Hence, they already begin to act like *men* by forming a social order, a hierarchy of “fitness” with the smaller children and the bespectacled, intellectual, emotional, and portly Piggy (Hugh Edwards) positioned as “weak” and in need of care. Piggy emphasizes this distinction between play and work, repeatedly not joining in with the other boys in their frolic, stating that “auntie wouldn’t let me.” He defers to an ideological authority based in English “decency” (also indicated

by how he cares for his clothing, always wearing shoes for example, when the other boys go barefoot), while the other boys show more agency by rejecting social mores away from the watchful eyes of such “aunties.” Piggy’s middle-class deference to decorum is contrasted with the discipline of the choir boys whose regimentation and privileged status at the school indicated by their black uniforms and hats mark them as “above” the others. They have a homosocial bond the other boys lack. They march and chant in unison, but they reject the interpersonal democratic community that the boys form and instead take over another part of the island and form a “tribe” of their own, having perpetual fun instead of performing the tedious work of keeping a signal fire going or caring for the young.<sup>343</sup> They create a homosocial space for themselves, described by Robinson as a “world of male bonding, in which it is possible to indulge in the exclusive pleasures of a privileged homosociality” not limited by domestic or social constraints (81). This links them to the nomad gangs depicted in the films already analyzed, and, like post-apocalyptic gangs, they constantly treat life as a game they need to win. Their favorite pastime, hunting, marks them as predators and foreshadows their later activity of raiding the other boys’ camp as well as, in the context of the British class system, displaying their status, the fox hunt being a pastime of gentry.

Piggy’s only friend is the protagonist and focal point of the film, Ralph (James Aubrey), who acts as the most reasonable and responsible boy, one who cares about and for the others and not just himself. Naomi Morgenstern, in her analysis of literary examples

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<sup>343</sup> Adorno writes, “Because reality does not deliver the autonomy or, ultimately, the potential happiness that the concept of democracy actually promises, people remain indifferent to democracy, if they do not in fact secretly detest it” (99).

of intensive parenting and wild children, *Wild Child* (2018), observes that, “since at least the end of the eighteenth century, the figure of ‘the child’ has functioned, in Western thought, to protect and preserve the border between the ‘natural’ world and the world of the rational and independent adult human being for whom Nature is at once reassuringly innocent and frighteningly other” (3). Kant, for example, argues that boys need proper moral training to become fully human, and exist in a liminal state before this between animal and human (Morgenstern 3). In this “natural” space of a deserted island, Ralph maintains this divide between human and animal, while Jack (Tom Chapin), the leader of the choir boys, becomes a problem for the community when he loses the popular vote for leadership and chooses instead to reject interpersonal responsibility and humanist morality. Jack thinks that his size matters, and he is the only boy with a knife, an indication of his phallic power and propensity to violence that he constantly displays to the other boys. He later uses this to make spears out of sticks, and, as Shaviro reminds us, “our tools incessantly modify us, even as we produce and extend them” (*NSL* 20). This knife later extended to spear encourages his entitlement to violence and his “animality,” and he becomes a figure of the “savage primitive” with which the Eurocentric Colonial imagination populated such islands. Sheldon notes that the figuration of childhood as an innocence “before the inevitable fall into adulthood” creates the potential for being other than a hegemonic hetero-patriarchal capitalist subject, that this “innocence is really a queer threat to the status quo (119). Thus, the rite of passage from boyhood into manhood, which involves taking on the responsibilities of interpersonal community norms, is equated with becoming human, or at least *more* human. Like the father in *Panic in Year Zero*, Ralph

establishes rules for the boys to follow to demonstrate that they are “not savages” which they all vote for, allowing for democratic norms to be set.

The boys were on an airplane trying to escape war, but, as Piggy reminds us, they “never got there,” to a place of refuge, and instead reproduce the war among themselves. The island acts as an analogy for their arrested development; the boys cannot arrive at the destination of manhood equated with civilization and a Western humanist notion of full humanity, so this space teaches them fatal moral lessons and serves as a liminal zone where they can never mature “properly.” This morality learned the hard way is figured as responsibility to others and toil for a common good opposed with free play and limitless agency, and this communal commitment centers around the signal fire over which the boys soon fight, ultimately setting the whole island ablaze in an allusion to nuclear war and planetary conflagration, for the world’s civilizations also have not evidently learned the moral lessons the film posits.

Jack argues that the hunt is more necessary than the fire, but they do not need either for food. Rather, they both serve a symbolic purpose. He and the other boys treat the hunt as play, and it acts as little more than a game that Jack wins to prove his dominance, whereas the boys tending the fire are serious and devoted to the task as necessary for a greater end. One group of boys exist in a queer present that refuses the future while the others work towards producing the future through a rescue. The mythical Beast that Jack sacrifices his kills to, the personification of the danger “out there” in the Jungle that all the



boys fear, cannot be slain because Jack *is* the beast.<sup>344</sup> “Maybe it’s only us,” says Ralph at one point while the camera lingers in a close shot of his face contemplating their situation as a “rational” and civilized, interpellated British citizen wondering why the world is at war. As Gilmore argues, “it is important to note that . . . stressful male rites are not always associated with conditions of male dominance and gender opposition or hierarchy, but always with *fecundity*, *service to kin*, or *collective defense*. More significantly, they also occur in many societies where men are physically gentle and where the sexes exist in relative equality” (167, emphasis added). The rite of passage to manhood ensures that the interpellated man *wants* to devote his energy to reproducing the future of his community, whether by making war, making things, or making babies. Ralph learns a lesson through this ordeal that Jack never does, marking him as fit to reproduce a future more peaceful than the present. In the end, violent strength and the will to dominate become more important to the other boys than the communal rules and thought of rescue. They give up hope for the future to live in an eternal present, much like the road warriors who populate the *Mad Max* films or the urban gangs in the urban apocalypse films, and like them, the film positions this as monstrous. Piggy, the group’s storyteller and primary civilizing influence, is killed when one of the boys rolls a boulder onto him, drowning him in the sea to prevent him from telling the truth about “the Beast” (which is just the sound of wind rushing through the fuselage of a downed fighter jet containing the corpse of its pilot, an

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<sup>344</sup> Sacrifice is “a phenomenon precisely about violence—not just doing violence to the victim but communicating something about, and controlling or channeling violence in, society. . . . We misinterpret sacrifice as a cultural act when we view it as a ‘theological’ act, that is, as one ordered by the gods or one that placates the gods or mediates with the gods. Sacrifice is not about the anger of the gods but rather the anger of humans in social groups” (Eller, citing Rene Girard 171).

allusion to the bestiality of warfare) and dispelling the necessity for warriors on the island. Instead of renouncing conflict and working together to escape, life for the boys becomes never-ending war games to prove who is fit, and they run amok; Ralph can do nothing to stop them. Without “personal dependence,” the boys lives become “an *unchecked proliferation of hierarchies*” leading to conflict (Virno 41, italics his).

At the beginning of the film, Piggy and Ralph find a huge conch shell that they use as a signal horn to unite the boys; it becomes a sign of community and commonality, a phenomenon of shared thinking that Virno calls a “public intellect” needed for democratic freedom to unite the people (41). This is replaced by film’s end with the spear as a sign of individual power over life and death; personal dependency and a sign of coming-together becomes independence and personal ability at great cost. The tribe of dominant boys, echoing their boarding-school training, use corporal punishment to discipline boys and maintain hierarchy as we are shown scenes of boys being spanked for transgressions and the camera captures both the pain of the punishment and the pleasure on the faces of those meting it out. This is not an instance of “civilization” “decaying” into a “primitive” state, but rather what happens when the boys use the dominance and hierarchies that structure civilization in a liminal space without supervision. Taking poetic license with Benjamin’s aphorism, this film demonstrates that every document of barbarism is always also a document of civilization. The practice of punishment is not an instinctual act but one the boys learned at boarding school, and the film demonstrates through this and the hunt that society encourages boys to be violent and to punish one another rather than restraining such impulses. Social mores just determine who is to be punisher and punished. Morgenstern

notes the emergence of the figure of the child in modernity as “an ontological ‘problem’ – as a ‘wild child’” that, in the nineteenth century, attracted great amounts of “disciplinary attention” and “was the subject of a constitutive ‘freedom’ that, for the first time, could be lost (and, therefore, nostalgically or romantically idealized) or that had to be carefully contained and managed” (4). This film presents precisely this dilemma and contradiction, an ontological problem that focuses on boyhood and the production of a fit manhood that fits in society. The idyllic long shots of boys playing on the beach indicates an idealized nostalgia for innocent play and the freedom from social constraint it requires while boyhood is also depicted as a dangerous problem where play can get out of hand and harm, but the discipline of manhood is a complicated and contradictory answer to this dilemma. The film ends with the surviving boys being rescued by men in white naval uniforms whose faces are never shown, as if they represent the generic idea of masculine authority and discipline, of restrained and directed violence, but we do not know if they are taking the boys to safety or just a new violent situation coded as civilized, if they will now be subject once again to a regime of discipline to curb their proclivity to play and be encouraged to determine the hierarchies of patriarchy or to work for a common good and be responsible to others. The fact that the rescuers are military men suggests that they are bound to reproduce a patriarchal system and become warriors themselves and that Ralph, like Piggy, will not prevail, not boding well for the future.

The Feral Kid is in a liminal state of playful boyhood before being interpellated as an adult male subject through his encounter with Max, but he does not become like Max, and is rather “at home after the end of ‘the world,’ which is also to say, after the end of

the patriarchal-humanist ‘end of the world’ . . . the form of a future [fathers] cannot command” (Morgenstern 28). His lack of name and language allude to his not being subject to the law of the father and familial interpellation. Morgenstern observes that “the child is . . . constituted performatively by the parental address” that it can never quite fully understand (118). “One’s name, for example, is a parental message; we spend our lives reading and becoming our names” (118). The Feral Kid, on the other hand, rather than just “reading” a signifier assigned to him, can instead craft his own form of signification beyond traditional familial ties. This is significant when one considers his role as storyteller for the second film and that “all cultures need some kind of Tell, a story that sustains them in their conduct” (Combs 34). He does not need to be spoken for or authorized but does so himself, authorizing Max as a way of authorizing himself. This places him in a unique position to determine new and better social norms for his people.<sup>345</sup>

There are two other reasons that this Kid is not really “feral”: his clothing and use of an Aboriginal tool and the fact that he becomes the actual focal point of the narrative, replacing Max. Scott Bukatman observes that,

by the 1980s the ontological certainties of an earlier science fiction cinema yielded to increasingly tortured attempts to contend with challenges to human definitions that remained rooted in Western, masculine, heterosexist – “natural” – paradigms. . . . The loss of power over the form of the human, the visible sign of our being, combines with the absence of the moral certainties that once guided that power. (17)

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<sup>345</sup> As Morgenstern puts it, “every child . . . is a wild child responding to the ruse of personhood. Every adult (everyone) is responsible for all those others whom they first and continuously call into being *as if* they were persons” (206, italics hers). “All language speaks the desire that there be language, all language articulates a hope for or promise of language, and thus all language, as irreducibly phatic, includes an irreducible meaninglessness. This is the wildness of language that the animal and the child are mobilized to contain either by confirming an unbridgeable divide or by performing the recapitulation of an evolutionary advance from primitive to rational communication” (203).

This Kid focalizes the ambiguity sketched by Bukatman, one that not only challenges the line between human and animal, wild and civilized, but also the idea of moral action at the end of the world with its endless deferral of accountability. Following Morgenstern, it is instructive to think through this ambiguity in such a way that, “rather than designating the space of exteriority with respect to the civilized, the educated, the law-abiding, ‘wildness’ . . . will come to designate a space of ethical and ontological undecidability that helps bring beings into relation and that is inseparable from any attempt to render justice or protect the possibility of a future” (29).<sup>346</sup> The wild child then figures the unpredictability of the future as such and both the possibility of coming into relation with the other as well as a threat to a humanist idea of totalized subjectivity and agency. Children need others to care for them and they need to learn how to care for others.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>346</sup> As Okin argues, a just society begins at the family structure, and any just family would divest gender from family roles: “Gender, with its ascriptive designation of positions and expectations of behavior in accordance with the inborn characteristic of sex, [would have to] no longer form a legitimate part of the social structure, whether inside or outside the family. . . . [A truly egalitarian society would] not assign family responsibilities in a way that makes women into a marginal sector of the paid work force . . . render[ing] likely their economic dependence upon men” (103-104). She goes on to argue that “our current gender structure is incompatible with the attainment of social justice, but also that the disappearance of gender is a prerequisite for the *complete* development of a nonsexist, fully human theory of justice” (Okin 105). As I will trace in the conclusion to this study, my next research project will examine further post-apocalypse films that explore precisely this problem of gender and justice from the point of view of women.

<sup>347</sup> Hester writes, “This is not, to my mind, because of any special status to be awarded to the very young, but simply one expression of a generalized investment in, as far as possible, reconstituting refuge for the precarious and the oppressed. There is reason to hope, perhaps, that a reorientation away from reproductive futurity and towards various models of kinship and xeno-solidarity might actually encourage a deeper hospitality towards the Other, and that a generalized cultural rejection of the absolute privilege of the family line might be framed less as the dismissal of parents and guardians, and more as an act of solidarity with new arrivals of all kinds (from migrants to new caregivers, to the very young)” (61-62).

The film depicts the Feral Kid's spectacular coming-of-age story, one in which he learns not manhood, but interpersonal relation and how to be part of a community while developing an expressive selfhood through signification, one in which he learns to reject Max's model of masculinity because it is dangerous and harmful to the common good.<sup>348</sup> Most importantly, he learns that violence is not fun and that he does not need to "win" or take it like a man, he needs to be cared for and care for others. Unlike what the narrator says during the film's prologue, Max does not "learn to live again" in this story, if this means living with others, but the Kid, the narrator of the story, does. As a figure of the child, he does not represent the sameness of reproductive futurity outlined by Edelman but rather the possibility of producing something else. As Sheldon's figuration of the child as sign of future ecological disaster and miracle, he is a figure of the child in danger, but he is also indication that the story continues. Rather than passing from boyhood to manhood, from an imagined animality or primitive state to humanity, he suggests a reimagining of manhood and the human away from masculinist values of autonomy and agency and towards interpersonal responsibility, away from mastery and towards cooperation.

As I argued in this study's third chapter, there is always an aspect of play in the death race life has become for the road warriors. Life has become a game they either win or die trying. Rather than producing anything, these men only consume through scavenge and theft; they have no thought of the future, only present gratification. The film judges

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<sup>348</sup> Morgenstern remarks, "Responsibility is not an obligation that the subject chooses but rather an incarnate relation that precedes the intentionality of consciousness. Responsibility is not a calculation to be performed. It is a relation always already integral to the world's ongoing intra-active becoming and not-becoming" (citing Barad, 29).

them for this rejection of futurity when, at the end of the chase that opens *The Road Warrior*'s narrative in which Max finds the truck he will later drive in the chase that concludes the film, it has a message painted across it in large yellow letters: "The vermin have inherited the Earth." Reproductive futurity and its logic of sameness has been abandoned for a logic of no future and radical difference. Max is later derided as one of these "vermin" by Pappagallo, and we are introduced to the Feral Kid as he crawls out of a hole in the ground in a literalization of this message since he seems to have been produced by the earth, an autochthonous child with no parental heritage. This first shot of the Kid is framed with a fence in the foreground to mimic the first time we see the boy protagonist, Joey (Brandon De Wilde), of the film *Shane* (1953, George Stevens). The plot of the film deliberately mimics this classic Western, with the significant difference that, instead of the ending of the Western, in which the gunslinger Shane (Alan Ladd) rides away from the town he has saved from corruption with his gun while the boy Joey shouts his name and professes his love, in *The Road Warrior*, the boy leaves Max behind, and by doing so, he leaves behind this stage of his life. We are reminded by the narrator, who is the Kid, that this story comes from his fading memory of the event.<sup>349</sup> Thus, the film places the Kid at the center of the narrative like *Shane* does with Joey, but also posits the story from his point of view by making him its storyteller. It narrates his passage from boy to man, which can

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<sup>349</sup> As Morgenstern documents, separation is a "necessary ordeal" that "reproduces the social," and "perhaps parenting is the art of the broken promise . . . How can the parental narrative *not* be one of failure?" (30-31).

only occur after he is removed from this milieu and learns an invaluable lesson about manhood and the need for the right kind of stories to structure life.

Whereas the warriors of the road operate over horizontal space, and Max's superiority is marked by his vaunted perspective on events from his mountain perch, only two characters operate exclusively in a vertical way, the Gyro Captain with his privilege of flying, and the Feral Kid with his surreptitious movement underground. He is shown to be part of the desert and equated with one of its animal denizens through *mise-en-scène* and performance.<sup>350</sup> He dresses in what looks like rabbit or wallaby hides. Stephen Seely argues that fashion has the capacity to bring the human into contact with nonhuman elements in order to provoke what Deleuze and Guattari call "becoming animal." For Deleuze and Guattari, becoming is not about imitation or identification, but rather is "a zone of indetermination, of indiscernibility, as if things, beasts, and persons . . . endlessly reach that point that immediately precedes their natural differentiation." Animal hide clothing "undoes the rigid stratifications between animals and humans by placing them in so close a proximity that their differentiation is no longer possible or simple" (Seely 253). This is emphasized by the inclusion of a furry tail attached to the back of the Kid's loincloth. When introduced to us, then, the Kid is becoming animal, and his fascination with Max may be a continuance of this becoming. Max, similarly clad in animal hide, is also becoming animal, indicated by his lack of speech. They both live alone, on the margins

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<sup>350</sup> Paul Williams notes that "a recurrent motif of post-nuclear-war fiction is the use of Australia and the South Pacific as the location of human survivors. . . . On the level of visual representation, there are profound continuities between the colonial past, speculated post-apocalyptic futures and certain (supposedly) barren and featureless geographical areas of the world, of which the Australian desert is a paradigmatic example" (17). It is treated often as a generic wasteland.



of social groups, and choose to shun human interaction until they meet each other. The Kid may lack articulate speech, but he communicates affective states with growls and reacts to Max's gift of a music box that plays "Happy Birthday" with a smile and laugh, indicating an interest in music and his entry into a symbolic world in which he will ultimately learn speech, another aspect of his character that keeps him from being considered feral.<sup>351</sup> He also not only uses a tool, he is visibly fascinated by technology and must be shoed away from the Gyrocopter in his desire to touch and understand it.

As a figure that operates intertextually with the boy in *Shane*, the Kid also comments on the Western genre and its imbrication with settler colonialism. *The Road Warrior* dispels the pastoral illusion of colonial expansion to reveal that this process of enclosure was always about resource extraction and the expanse of capitalism. Brian McFarlane, in *Australian Cinema 1970-1985* (1987), observes that, in films produced in Australia, "if the prevailing image is of a man's world, it is also that of a *white* man's world. Representations of the country's Aboriginal population have been few in number and their *absence* testifies to white neglect – and worse – of Aboriginals" (53, italics his). The Kid's weapon, one he must have been taught how to use by an indigenous person versed in the use of a boomerang, positions this character less as an animal and more a racialized subject, marginalized and endangered by the struggle around him over oil.<sup>352</sup> The Kid, therefore,

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<sup>351</sup> Max also pays attention to the Kid, recognizing his humanity as a person that could end up like him, hence the fact that he rejects the Kid's companionship. He cares about the Kid's future and knows that he would have none as Max's companion.

<sup>352</sup> He is also visually, and through his barking and growling, aurally equated with Max's dog, linking him to the history of racial buddy stories discussed in the above section on *A Boy and His Dog*. The Kid uses this knowingly when he saves Max from discovery while sneaking out of the compound under cover of darkness by howling and barking like a dingo.

draws attention to the absence of indigenous people, a displacement and replacement, even as his animality acts as a derogation of indigeneity as “uncivilized.” As such, his role as storyteller becomes more significant. Indigenous Australians consider stories sacred, and the storytellers are also the “clever” with privileged knowledge and magical ability. The erasure of the indigenous people from this story shows that they do not populate the future; they do not get to tell the story, especially their own. Stories are another way that the future is reproduced by humans, and the erasure of these people from the story erases them from both past and future.

Storytelling is magic in as much as it involves action at a distance in its affective effects on others. As storyteller for his people, he now helps to define their dominant fictions and serves an ideological function.<sup>353</sup> Silverman notes that the

“dominant fiction” is opposed . . . neither to an ultimately recoverable reality, nor to the condition of “true” consciousness. “Fiction” underscores the *imaginary* rather than the delusory nature of ideology, while “dominant” isolates from the whole repertoire of a culture’s images, sounds, and narrative elaboration through which the conventional subject is psychically aligned with the symbolic order. (54)

These fictions enable the illusion of totalized subjectivity as well as the unity of community. It must be added that European and American dominant fictions usually attempt to posit a heterosexual subject (modeled on a white father) that requires the repression of the “abject vulnerability of the male body” by displacing it onto the feminine, the queer, and the racialized other (Thomas 61). This film, as the analysis in the fourth

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<sup>353</sup> Christine Gledhill, examining film noir, notes that a voice-over storyteller “is put on much more of an equal footing with the audience,” since they are removed from the events depicted and can make judgements about it (29). Their words are given more weight than those uttered in the film’s diegesis.

chapter of this study and this investigation of the figure of the Feral Kid indicate, subverts the hegemonic dominant fiction by foregrounding this abject vulnerability in the bodies of everyone, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. It also reminds us that masculinity “is a category” to which boys are relegated, and as such, hegemonic masculinity glosses over the difference and particularity within its demarcation as well as the contradictory demands it places on men. However, now that men are no longer considered the norm of subjectivity, or unmarked, masculinity “marks” them, which was a very new experience for many white men in the 1980s (Robinson 150).<sup>354</sup> Indeed, the major lesson learned by the Feral Kid is just how vulnerable he is, regardless of how gender has marked him. He begins the film by attacking Wez with his boomerang, treating the action as a game in which he laughs and smiles, but ends it in a face-to-face confrontation with him in fear of his life; the zero-sum game of masculinity is shown to be a race no man can ultimately win.<sup>355</sup>

After retrieving the truck in order to fulfill his contract with Pappagallo, Max tries to escape this narrative about others to continue his lonely wandering on his own, but he instead becomes a character in the Kid’s story when, while convalescing after being chased down by Wez, causing his car crash and nearly killing him (his dog is not so lucky), the

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<sup>354</sup> Gilmore uses evolutionary biology to understand the variety of masculinities presented by cultures around the globe. “All mammals . . . excrete the hormone adrenalin [which] . . . primes them for an appropriate survival-enhancing response. Though this hormonal priming is the same from a chemical point of view, the behavioral outcome differs radically from species to species. . . . Evolutionary pressures have predisposed some animals to fight, others to flee. . . . In man [sic], the behavioral response is conditioned not by instinct but by learning. Those cultures that have a pronounced manhood ideology seem to be the ones that have chosen fight as a survival strategy” (219).

<sup>355</sup> Wez is linked to the Kid not only through the animosity of revenge after his lover is killed, but also through performance. His constant hissing and growling bears remarkable similarity to that of the Kid. He is what the Kid might become if he continues down this road.

Kid brings Max his uniform, restoring his knightly armor if not his honor, covering over his broken, vulnerable body and giving him back his identity.<sup>356</sup> But this is not a case of paternal redemption like so many other films produced in the 1980s such as *Return of the Jedi* (1983, Richard Marquand), or *Back to the Future* (1985, Robert Zemeckis). When Max emerges to volunteer to drive the big rig, he can barely stand and must use the Kid for support. The Kid wants Max to be a hero, but learns that such is only a fool's errand. Max is just a decoy, a distraction. Even while things become dire in the following chase sequence, the Kid continues to smile and laugh, treating it all as a big game. This changes when he becomes a potential victim. Pappagallo loses his life trying to rescue him; then, after Max has lifted him into the truck's cab, a closeup shows the fascination he has for Max's shotgun, registered on his face as he tries to operate it. When Max sends him out onto the hood of the vehicle to retrieve its shells, and Wez suddenly reaches up to grab his hand, he finally shows fear and recognizes the danger of this game.<sup>357</sup> This is an event that shows him "the violence and the self-undoing of patriarchy" (Morgenstern 44).<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Morgenstern observes that "one can't be both 'free' and responsible . . . because one would then be responsible as oneself and therefore, in a sense, only to oneself. . . . The ethical, as opposed to what I'll call the contractual, relation . . . profoundly disrupts selfhood . . . even as it might also be said to *give* selfhood in the first place. . . . the very conditions for being in relation with another" (41).

<sup>357</sup> Miller had difficulty getting Minty to portray the proper affect for this shot, since it was a process shot where the child actor sat on a stationary vehicle being rocked back and forth and treated the whole experience as great fun. He ultimately captured the shot we see in the film by secretly giving Vernon Wells a blood squib to hold in his hand which burst when he reached up, shocking Minty into the state we see in the momentary shot in the film.

<sup>358</sup> This loss of innocence motif as a coming-of-age for boys is common in Australian films. As McFarlane puts it, they often combine images of "youthful innocence with incipient heroic achievement," presenting "young men . . . on the brink of manhood, a status they can achieve only by grappling with heroic challenges," making them analogous to Australian nationalistic subjectivity and the taming of a wild frontier (50). He lists "among the most commonly recurring images projected by Australian films of the last dozen or so years are those denoting (a) a man's country, (b) mateship, (c) anti-authoritarianism, (d) a

Our protagonists seem doomed. After the spectacular crash that ends the final chase, and Max has crawled from the wreckage clutching the Kid, both having miraculously escaped serious injury and death in the collision, the camera pans over sand pouring out of the tanker, and ends in a medium shot of Max holding the unconscious, limp Kid. This moment shows what the real precious cargo in this sequence actually was, not the imaginary oil, but a living, breathing person. Morgenstern argues that adults “need children, and we need them like a hostage taker. This is the wilderness of the social. We take each other hostage in order to come into being and survive—to continue to reproduce (our) being” (67-68). Max refuses the Kid’s companionship because he refuses to be taken hostage in such an affective way. Instead, the Tribe takes him on, and he takes them hostage as they provide and care for him. He is the future, not oil, and not Max, but he represents more than just reproductive futurity and a heteronormative standard. As Kimmel remarks, “boys learn that violence is not only an acceptable form of conflict resolution, but one that is admired” (*AWM* 75).<sup>359</sup> The Kid tells us in voice-over that he “grew to the ‘fullness’ of manhood” and became the leader following the leadership of the Gyro Captain, but Max lives only in his memory, and, since he learned interpersonal responsibility, we can infer Max acts not as a role model, but as a kind of man the Kid learned never to become. Like

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wide, open land, the Aussie battler, and (f) the competitive instinct” (McFarlane 47). The *Mad Max* films play with all of these elements.

<sup>359</sup> Post-apocalyptic narratives are as concerned with the reproduction of the social as the reproduction of the species, demonstrating that the two are indeed separable. As Hester writes, “neither the genetic inheritances nor the carefully orchestrated upbringing of the embodied child can guarantee smooth generational continuity or exact duplicability,” leading to the fraught interest of our times in the figure of the child, the subject of the next chapter (67). The apocalypse is a space where the imagining of a newer society becomes possible.

the girl who refuses to escape with the Gyro Captain because she now feels connected to this kin group and does not want to abandon them because they need her, the Kid learns to be part of the group and rejects the independence and “freedom” represented by Max and all that it costs. This is not family belonging; he does not belong to any father, but rather to the community. They escape at film’s end from the cycle of violence centered on the production and use of oil and instead, we can hope, embrace a new social logic and structure that produces art like this story and men who do not need to prove their manhood on the road or anywhere else, but rather live to care for, and be cared for by, others.

The Feral Kid challenges the gender binary and assumptions about boys that essentialize masculinist values and behaviors. His story points towards the narratives of the next films and the ways in which they challenge the role and value of women in society, suggesting that boys can grow up to be just as other-directed and empathic as women are imagined to be. Okin writes,

If the inequalities that [Unger] attributes to liberal capitalism need to be confronted, then surely it is even more necessary that he challenge the division of labor between the sexes, centered in family life, which is a peculiarly *preliberal* anomaly in modern society. The gender structure, based as it is on an accident of birth, is far closer to feudalism or to a caste system than to most institutions fostered by or tolerated within liberal societies. (122)

Silvia Federici documents how women were an important part of an anti-feudal movement, and argues that witch-hunts were a tactic of disempowering them and an instance of capitalist enclosure that “destroyed the possibilities” that this early struggle created for a more egalitarian *socius* (21). The post-apocalypse narrative creates a space for this possibility again. Okin goes so far as to suggest that “a just future would be one without

gender” (171).<sup>360</sup> According to Gilmore, many rituals and trials that transform boys to men represent a “critical threshold represent[ing] the point at which the boy produces more than he consumes and gives more than he takes” (226). In this model, the road warriors that the survivors escape have yet to attain such manhood; like the digital boyhood theorized by Burrill, they remain boys playing a game in which they prove their manhood or die trying to avoid the responsibility and psychic danger of interpersonal relationship.<sup>361</sup> The Great Northern Tribe does not need another hero, and this becomes a central motif in the next film, exemplified by the theme song for the film produced by the actor playing its primary antagonist, Tina Turner. I turn to this film in the coda that acts as a conclusion to this study as it outlines the project to follow this one, an investigation of apocalyptic femininity and the fraught role of women in a post-apocalyptic space, a topic that has increasingly become central to such films since 1984.

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<sup>360</sup> The message of the need to abandon violent masculinity and autonomous agency that the film makes was not heeded, as Kimmel documents in *Angry White Men*. Indeed, in the late 1980s and early 1990s school shootings shifted from gang-related violence perpetrated by melanated boys to white suburban boys with military hardware who, rather than killing another boy out of revenge, shot at random to attack “them” and prove to the “world” their manliness. It became a way of becoming famous through acts of violence that proved the worth of the boy belittled by the culture of their school (Kimmel *AWM* 73).

<sup>361</sup> It is no coincidence that, increasingly, the imaginary digital space in which this takes place is a post-apocalyptic one in games such as the series *Fallout* (1997-present), *Wasteland* (1989, 2014), *Mad Max* (2014), *Metro 2033* (2010) and the like.

## Coda:

### Further Developments of Apocalyptic Manhood and the Turn to Apocalyptic

#### Women

*Defining “masculinity” and “femininity” as exemplary standards by which to measure normal human experience have . . . been crucial ways for cultures to express their basic values. Masculinity particularly has occupied a position of special privilege because, in most such male-female distinctions, women are characterized as the victims of their biological nature as childbearers. Men, in supposed contrast, are free to escape from (or to express) biology, often in elaborate rituals of competition. . . . In this way, male violence, and the “masculinity” it suggests, is both regulated within a society and sanctioned against that society’s enemies. (Braudy xv)*

Donald Trump, a business man of dubious reputation and lifetime media personality, assumed the role of the forty-fifth President of the United States in 2017. During his campaign, he relied on a hyperreal media persona of a “tough” business man, and called the previous President, Barack Obama, “weak” on many occasions, at rallies and on his Twitter account.<sup>362</sup> He promised his constituents that they would “win again” with a campaign slogan deliberately nostalgic for a fantasy of past grandeur: “Make America Great Again.” This rhetoric relied on an imagining of the decade of the 1980s as the last time we “won.”<sup>363</sup> The sense of anger, resentment, and betrayal that supports such sentiments is overdetermined, but I can point to some crucial factors that influence it,

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<sup>362</sup> I use the term “hyperreal” in the sense of a mediated supplement that stands in for and replaces the signified object, or in this case, person, becoming more real than the original by way of manufacture and artifice. Recent journalism about Trump revealing the fact that he receives much of his “news” from less than credible sources on television, as well as the fake news of Alex Jones, only adds to his hyperreal status. His presidency acts as a procession of simulacra.

<sup>363</sup> Steven Shaviro notes that nostalgia “is a phenomenon of the moment in which it is savored, and not of the time to which it ostensible refers” (*Cinematic Body* 224). The 1980s, in this rhetoric, become a myth of Reagan’s “success” that current affairs can be compared to in a classic straw man fallacy.



especially since it is linked to a rise in nationalism, masculinist discourses of “strength,” and xenophobia, if not obvious racism. This has happened before. Andrew Jackson was elected under similar circumstances, but Trump resembles Ronald Reagan in his rhetoric and in his hyperreal status as a media artifact. For these reasons, we can better understand our current historical situation by looking at Reagan’s regime during the 1980s and the masculinist discourses of that time that emerged from the wreckage of the 1970s like Max at the end of *Road Warrior*.<sup>364</sup>

In *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*, Susan Jeffords calls Reagan the first “Hollywood President.” His election and the success of his presidency relied on his persona as an actor.<sup>365</sup> He presented a strong but smiling face for industrial capitalism, making it seem like a friendly neighbor rather than an amoral money-making machine. In his speeches, Reagan often borrowed not only from classic cinema, quoting films as if they were history, but also from current films, even using the enemy from George Lucas’s *Star Wars* (1977) as an icon of the Soviet Union as an “Evil Empire” (Jeffords 4).<sup>366</sup> His presidency often blurred the line between politics as state policy and politics as

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<sup>364</sup> In *White Men Aren’t*, DiPiero notes that this period saw the erosion of the authority of dead white men, replaced with the figure of the angry white man, but he reminds us that “there is really nothing new about white men being angry” (1). This rage and the violence it leads to are entitlements of white masculinity.

<sup>365</sup> “He was usually cast as a trustworthy, likeable, and good-hearted leading man, and that eventually landed him the General Electric Theatre job that launched him on a national speaking tour of GE factories,” making him a national household name before he became Governor of California (Jeffords 4). Faludi asserts that Reagan felt unmanned by Hollywood and only found his manhood as a corporate front-man after the war. He was already working for the interests of capital while an actor, informing to the FBI on union members and working with the studios to disrupt union power (Faludi 361).

<sup>366</sup> Faludi observes that this was “more than a fanciful retelling of military history, Reagan’s was a full-blown remake of postwar *masculine* history” that attempted to erase what had been done in Vietnam (360, emphasis hers).

intertextual rhetoric and spectacular media event relying for its impact on the audience's knowledge of film narratives. This was also the time when the "action movie" became one of the most reliable box-office genres, launching the role of the action hero into a primary place that it still holds in popular cinema to this day. As Jeffords argues, the action hero in the 1980s is a figure who saves the status quo of white patriarchy from the threat of racial, economic, and gendered "others," and these narratives argue for the necessity of aggressive white masculine hegemony for the future of the nation often coded as humanity itself (Jeffords 12).<sup>367</sup> The hyperreal politics of the Reagan era made the Presidency into a science fiction action movie (specifically of the nostalgic time travel variety) with the President as an action hero, and this informed the way that the Gulf War would be filmed and framed by news media at the decade's end with its adulation of American military technology which won the war so quickly.<sup>368</sup>

According to Jeffords, Reagan's "imaginary" rewrote the past just like Marty McFly does in *Back to the Future* (1985, Robert Zemeckis), redeeming fathers by returning the nation to a time before the troubling 1960s, a nostalgia problematized in *A Boy and His Dog*, as indicated in the last chapter (70). Fathers must be redeemed in 1980s films to assuage the discontent of the 1970s because "what is good for the father is good for the family and the community as a whole" in a social system structured by patriarchy (Jeffords

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<sup>367</sup> Robinson argues that action films are demonstrations of the hysterical male body and the enduring lack of closure on the problematic of "wounded" masculinity that must repress its "nature" of supposedly innate violence (141).

<sup>368</sup> The media orgy over the dropping of our MOAB bomb on Afghanistan after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 continues this violent, phallic technophilia.

73). Contrary to this reparative rhetoric and following the trend of apocalyptic masculinity traced in this study, the future is broken in the post-apocalyptic films of the 1980s because hegemonic military masculinity has failed, bringing about the end by using violence to solve problems that are about relationships, and this equates to a failure of “civilization.” These films express an anxiety about the erasure of white men from history even as they posit this as inevitable.

Reagan’s presidency, as an act of fiction, portrayed him in a global drama in which America was a benevolent white messiah, saving the “third world” from self-destruction with our superior technology and ideals when the reality of the situation involved the ongoing primitive accumulation and enclosure of common property in the spread of global capital. This was nationalist theater that utilized Reagan’s film persona as a heroic cowboy and later as the face of industry to promote the image of national strength, industrial vigor, and the illusion of unity.<sup>369</sup> Jeffords, like Billig, observes that nationalism depends on a certain kind of visibility, like flag waving, and this visibility, in determining who counts as a national subject, is linked to racial stereotyping that began in the nineteenth century with photography (6). This racialization of difference as unlike a “pure” white standard has been part of America’s history since before it was even a colony and was only a business enterprise, as documented by Martinot. Indeed, “the special temporality of nationalism is

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<sup>369</sup> This manufactured unity stands in distinction to actual democratic political unity, what Virno calls “the multitude,” which he defines as “plurality—literally; being many—as a lasting form of social and political existence, as opposed to the cohesive unity of the people. Thus, the multitude consists of a network of *individuals*; the many are a *singularity*. The crucial point is to consider these singularities as a point of arrival, not as a starting point; as the ultimate result of a *process of individuation*, not as solipsistic atoms” (76). This theory of unity leaves intact the idea of the individual without positing that this individuality necessarily depends on autonomy from a group.

founded on reproductive and racial thought” because nations must constantly reproduce themselves, and miscegenation laws serve “the complicated task of investing white blood with value,” making whiteness a property possessed by white people that must be protected (Weinbaum 10).<sup>370</sup> This concern duplicates and echoes the anxiety that drove eugenics in the earlier part of the century, which also concerned both fear of miscegenation and men losing control over reproduction, and, as this study has traced, it structures the concern over reproductive futurity featured in post-apocalyptic film.

The 1980s continued the crisis concerning the reproduction of proper national subjects that this study has been investigating as a crisis of paternity, hence a crisis of patriarchy and masculinity as well as white masculinist agency panic. According to DiPiero’s investigation and exposition of white masculinity, although it may be hegemonic in American culture, “we need to analyze it as a symptomatic reply to cultural demands, not as a self-generating ahistorical entity somehow able to endlessly reproduce itself” (3). One of these demands investigated by this study, individualism and autonomous agency, produces anxiety when this supposed agency is lacking. Feenberg notes that one of the problematic notions of individuality comes from this idea that society and the individual are separate, rather than “abstractions from a more concrete unity . . . structured [by a] process of human relations. . . . No individual exists outside . . . systems of human interdependencies. In our society, these relations are asymmetrical and position a few

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<sup>370</sup> Toni Morrison also notes that, in our national imaginary, Americans are white skinned (5). The consistent disavowal of this demonstrates that the idea of “racelessness” is itself a “racial act” performed by those always already privileged by racialization as unmarked subjects (Morrison 46). Thus, Reagan’s ideas of “colorblind” justice are just another kind of racism.

leaders to ‘manage’ the others” (85). Post-apocalyptic films attempt to work out who will “manage” the future or whether we can alter cultural demands in such a way that such management is no longer deemed necessary.

Another similarity between Jackson’s, Trump’s, and Reagan’s elections concerns the amount of voters that came to the polls in support of these candidates. These large voting bodies were motivated by anger about the place of white men in society, among other things, and this impotent rage found expression in the political rhetoric of their candidate, who promised to make the working-class man ascendant once more; the presidential candidates promised to prove America’s manhood and make manhood central to the nation’s success. Men who usually did not vote came to give their support to these men who represented their hope for the future, although the later candidates could never hope to reach Jackson’s eighty-percent turnout, largely because the voter base has been widened since the emancipation of slaves and the success of the Women’s Suffrage movement.<sup>371</sup> Reagan won the presidency in 1980 by appearing “manlier” than Jimmy Carter.<sup>372</sup> Reagan’s campaign used pictures of him on horseback at his ranch to equate his masculinity with the cowboys he once played on screen (Jeffords 12). Carter wore a

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<sup>371</sup> Kimmel attributes the crowds in Jackson’s case to his masculine rhetoric: “Since 1840 the president’s manhood has always been a question, his manly resolve, firmness, courage, and power equated with the capacity for violence [and] military virtues” (38).

<sup>372</sup> In his book, *The Real War*, Richard Nixon attacked Carter’s policies and laid out what would become the Reagan Doctrine; the 1970s, according to him, were “a failure of will” (Jeffords 7). In the book, Nixon depicts Carter as lacking “strength” and “resolve”; he asks whether the U. S. “is a nation of ‘steel or mush’” (Jeffords 8).

sweater and took advice from his wife.<sup>373</sup> Jeffords argues that the “hard body” that visibly represents this aggressive posturing with its muscled, armored appearance of possible violence that populates action movies acts as a “lynchpin of the Reagan imaginary,” informing all of his policies (25). As the analysis in previous chapters shows, post-apocalyptic films began to demonstrate this hard body as a fragile façade and the aggressive masculinity it represents as a masquerade covering insecurity. Hence, the investigation of costuming in the fourth chapter reveals that the garments that signify masculinity serve as “masks” and, as argued by Cohan, “that there is no ‘authentic’ or unitary identity presupposed by this metaphor; there is nothing underlying the mask. The masquerade *is* subjectivity, constantly performed” (Baker 70, emphasis his). Apocalyptic masculinity reveals this self-perpetuating performance as engendering a cycle of violence.

This study has traced the evolution of an imagining of apocalyptic masculinity as indicative of both an on-going crisis in definitions of hegemonic masculinity in the latter-half of the twentieth century and also a revelation of the logics that lead to such apocalyptic gendered thinking, explaining the violence to which this reasoning often leads. Sheldon notes that the urtext of apocalypse, the book of Revelation in the Christian Bible, is a story of masculine violence meted out on women in which redemption is figured as a repudiation of the feminine (87). One of the central problems such thinking indicates is the essentialist investment of masculinist discourses in the idea of individual autonomy and masculine agency figured as mastery over people and space. As the genre of post-apocalypse films

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<sup>373</sup> The fear of becoming enslaved to an “Evil Empire,” according to Richard Nixon, came from Carter not standing up like a man. Reaganism posited a leader who appeared “decisive, tough, aggressive, strong, and domineering” (Jeffords 11).

evolves, this figuration of apocalyptic masculinity becomes more fraught, less celebratory and more cautionary, and it takes a significant turn in the 1980s as the focus of such films shifts from the plight of an individual man to that of children and women. The genre becomes interested not just in the threat of wayward reproduction and reproductive futurity, but also begins to focus on what Morgenstern calls narratives of “adults and children at the social limit or on the edge of disaster” (15).<sup>374</sup> The second part of this conclusion will treat this shift as an outline of the next project to which this research has led, that of the role of apocalyptic womanhood and the plight of what Morgenstern nominates as “the posthumanist wild child,” which

figures or personifies the philosophical wildness of a human being (and being-in-relation) to come—but not the future in a teleological, modernizing sense. . . . a child of the border between a liberal-humanist ‘world’ that might be coming to an end (a world that usually imagines itself doing so in apocalyptic terms—as the end of the world) and a posthumanist, democratic future that not only might, in a certain way, come back to us from what we had always figured was an evolutionary or historical past, but also might not even arrive as a ‘world’ in the sense in which we have often relied on that concept. (15)

This wild child is also an answer to the figure of the Child that Edelman elects as representing the ideology of reproductive futurity. It replaces the guarantee of the future carried by the Child with wildness and uncertainty, but it leaves open the potential for the different rather than the reproduction of sameness figured by Edelman’s Child. This involves development of apocalyptic boyhood as a possible threat to the future or the potential of becoming other. Additionally, the shift of gender focus coincides with a change

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<sup>374</sup> She notes that “parental narratives, organized around the frighteningly intense relationship between an adult and a child, have, to an increasing extent, displaced marriage plots in North American fiction and have become one of the dominant forms in which novelists and film and television writers theorize personal and social relations” (Morgenstern 15).

in the value attributed to the individual as an ideal as humans are shown to need one another, and interdependence becomes more important to survival than autonomous agency. The free agent, in this scenario, becomes a lost cause or a monstrous danger to community as such. This involves drawing attention to the fact that common-sense notions of human agency often, as Okin explains, “take for granted that whole vast sphere of life in which persons (mostly women) take care of others, often at considerable cost to their own advancement as individuals. . . . ignor[ing] the crucial fact that much of human labor, energy, and skill is *not* devoted to the production of things that can then belong to their producers” because it instead reproduces persons (88, emphasis hers). These films continue the reimagining of kinship away from the patriarchal family structure and its division of labor and definitions of gender roles.<sup>375</sup>

As the preceding chapters have demonstrated, post-apocalyptic films differ from each other most by their setting, whether the narrative imagines the end of civilization as coinciding with the end of urbanity. I will end my discussion of the urban apocalypse by suggesting a hypothesis of why it ceased to be a popular setting for the end of the world in the 1980s and subsequently reappeared on screens in the first decade of the twenty-first century by looking at yet more adaptations of Matheson’s *I Am Legend*, borrowing from

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<sup>375</sup> The shift begins in 1984 with *Night of the Comet* and *The Terminator* and includes B-films such as *The Sisterhood* (1988), blockbusters like *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome* (1985), *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), *Waterworld* (1995), and continuing into the current century in the proliferation of young adult fiction adapted to film such as the *Hunger Games* and *Divergent* franchises.



Amy Ransom's recently published study of Matheson's work and its adaptations that argues for its mythic status.<sup>376</sup>

### **New York as Ground Zero: Urban Apocalypse Articulating Trauma from the Events of September 11**

*White people had established universal principles for themselves in order to withhold them from universality as ideals and principles. They were to mean only what white men had established for themselves that they would mean. . . . The white male view of "all men" meant only what white men had shown "all men" would mean through the hegemony granted by universalizing "all men." "All" meant "not all." . . . To deal with racism, and to analyze it, we must think in terms of its structures, as a new form of thinking, beyond that of ordinary reasoning or logic. These structures perfuse and pervade the way in which racist thinking proceeds. Racism confounds attempts to use ordinary reasoning, or experience, or philosophical reasoning against it in argument because it obeys a different thought process. (Martinot 6-7)*

The urban setting for post-apocalypse films did not fully disappear after *Ravagers* and *Escape from New York*, but it was the setting only in marginal, often Italian, productions trying to use the setting as a trope to sell the film, like *Escape from the Bronx* (1983, Enzo Castellari) or *City Limits* (1984, Aaron Lipstadt). These low-budget made-for-video exploitation releases differ from their predecessors not only in scope, but also because they use the urban space as a generic backdrop for warring gangs and not as a definable icon of civilization as the previous films had. They also do not treat urban space

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<sup>376</sup> The only urban apocalypse films released after *Escape from New York* were low-budget films made for VHS produced mostly in Europe that used the tropes of gang warfare from the 1970s urban apocalypse films such as *1990: The Bronx Warriors* (1983, Enzo Castellari) and *2019: After the Fall of New York* (1984, Sergio Marino). A fascinating, small film was produced in 2001 in San Francisco called *Ever Since the World Ended* (2006, Calum Grant). It is a no-budget film in the mode of a documentary made twelve years after most people have died due to plague and the population of the city has been reduced to 186. The urban apocalypse became a setting for major productions again with Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002) and its depictions of post-apocalypse London.

as racialized in the same way American productions do. One exception, *The Quiet Earth* (1985, Geoff Murphy), a New Zealand production, posits a scenario much like that of *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*, wherein a white man thinks he is the last man on Earth until he meets a black man and white woman. He is a scientist who knows how the world ended, and they work to undo this and bring everyone back. The film dwells on its protagonist's guilt and hubris but redeems him with his sacrificial act of heroism at the end. It was never popular outside of Australia and New Zealand. Another exception I will discuss in the next and final section, *Night of the Comet* (1984, Tom Eberhardt), is an urban apocalypse that fuses the zombie trope popularized by Romero with the urban apocalypse setting and focuses on the plight of two white suburban sisters, one of whom significantly survives the cataclysmic comet event because she is safely ensconced in a movie theater.

There were no urban apocalypse films released in the decade of the 1990s, instead replaced by a proliferation of overpopulated, racialized urban dystopias with rampant crime dominated by totalitarian police states, such as *Demolition Man* (1993, Marco Brambilla), that articulated the media events of the decade such as the Rodney King story and subsequent uprisings. *Falling Down* (1993, Joel Schumacher) treats urban Los Angeles as an apocalypse for a white man trying to live the fantasy of agency to which he thinks he is entitled. Overpopulation by the wrong kind of subjects rather than the emptying of urban space became a dominant theme in many SF films, culminating in a film that combines the trope of totalitarian urban control with the 1990s trope of virtual reality<sup>377</sup> to present a post-

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<sup>377</sup> Films such as *Lawnmower Man* (1992, Brett Leonard), *Strange Days* (1995, Katherine Bigelow), *eXistenZ* (1999, David Cronenberg), and *The Thirteenth Floor* (1999, Josef Rusnak). In *Mindwarp* (1992, Steve Barnett), a young woman rejects the perfect virtual world for something more authentic, is

apocalyptic film where the urban space has become imaginary, but no less deadly, and the real planet is a post-apocalyptic hell fit only for machines, as if the resistance in the post-apocalypse of the *Terminator* franchise has lost: *The Matrix* (1999, Lana and Lilly Wachowski).

A recognizable urban space as the setting of the end of the world returned to American screens in the next decade, an articulation of American trauma after the fall of the World Trade Center towers, a collective working-through of a new understanding of urban precarity. These films are of two varieties, ecological catastrophe, like in *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004, Roland Emmerich), or an epidemic (with or without zombies), such as *28 Days Later...* (2002, Danny Boyle). *I Am Legend* falls into the latter category.

In 2007, two adaptations of Neville's story were released, one a Warner Bros. blockbuster, starring Will Smith, and the other a made-for-DVD release, starring martial arts actor, Mark Dacascos, called *I Am Omega* (Griff Furst), a title that melds the Matheson title with Heston's version. Both change Matheson's infected people into the new figure of the "fast zombie" popularized by Zack Snyder's remake of *Dawn of the Dead* (2004) (Ransom 151). By casting the Neville character with a black, in the case of Smith, or multi-racial, in the case of Dacascos, man, these newer versions of the narrative reveal how much the earlier versions, and post-apocalyptic narratives in general, are centered on whiteness and the fragile masculinity of a white man.

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abandoned on the post-apocalyptic surface to face horrific perils, and ultimately realizes this is just another virtual reality and was in fact a test by her father who wants her to take over as "controller" for everyone else's virtual worlds.

*I Am Omega* is a pastiche of elements from *The Omega Man* that updates the material by shifting the racial dynamics. It is similarly set in Los Angeles, but the last man lives outside of the urban sprawl in the rural hills and only enters the city secretly via sewer and drainage tunnels. Unlike Heston's Neville, he does not "own" the city during the day. In this version, white supremacist militia men are pitted against a protagonist played by a multi-racial Hawaiian action film star to determine who will survive and populate the future, and the white men lose. The melanated man drives off at the end of the film with the (white) woman this time, gesturing towards a post-white future, though one still reliant on military masculinity (Ransom 176). The virus in this version, like in *Omega Man*, "attacks the *skin*, the visible site of a fictional category" that we call race (Ransom 177, emphasis hers). However, in a radical change from Matheson's and the Corringtons' versions, this woman is now the carrier of the cure; a woman saves the future, and in keeping with the feminine turn I will discuss in the next section, she shows more agency than Lisa in *Omega Man* even though she is in need of help and rescue.

*I Am Legend* also examines the problem of whiteness. The inversion of racial valence by making Robert Neville into a black man alludes to how dominant, militant, angry white masculinity, since the 1990s, has been increasingly portrayed as "toxic," violent, and dangerous to American society (as *Falling Down* attempts to do), but it uses an iconic black action movie star as a "cure" for this rage, as if his very presence on screen as protagonist and last man on Earth changes the structures and discourses of white supremacy still active in American culture and becoming increasingly visible after the

election of Barack Obama.<sup>378</sup> These Nevilles are different, just as the star images of the two actors diverge, but they are both physically active, use firearms, and cure the disease, traits that diverge from Matheson's version of Neville.

This version of Matheson's story, even more than Heston's project, emphasizes the theme of redemption, to the point of cliché as Bob Marley's "Redemption Song" plays over the end credits. It is a re-working of *The Omega Man*, crediting the Corringtons' script as a source, but it also uses *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil* as an intertext by borrowing tropes and through visual quotation and can be seen as an adaptation of that work as well. Utilizing a rhetoric of enlightenment like its predecessor, this film intends to "light up the darkness" through the heroic efforts of a wise-cracking black man, depicting this "darkness" as a hyperviolent whiteness that must remain hidden during the light of day in the form of the infected zombies. Like in Heston's version, Will Smith as Neville is remembered in legend as the hero who sacrificed himself to save everyone else, but the film also has a "director's cut" with an alternate ending wherein Neville does not die, but instead makes peace with the violent white man who is hunting him after a moment of self-realization as he gazes at pictures of his test subjects on the wall, suddenly seeing their humanity and the cruelty of his experimentation. He realizes that this man was only trying to rescue his mate, the woman on whom Neville has been testing vaccines. This better ending links his work to cure the disease to America's history of medical experimentation on black people, both as slaves, and, in cases such as the syphilis tests done at Tuskegee,

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<sup>378</sup> Ransom notes that Smith's star image makes him seem more "moral" than other black actors, such as the darker-skinned Wesley Snipes, who only ever plays villains and anti-heroes (152)

free citizens. Ransom observes that the photos he keeps of his victims tacked to the wall resemble the documentation of concentration camp victims as well (172). The redemptive ending also allows Neville to see that, as in racist judgments, he has made a hasty generalization about a whole group of people, and it leaves him as an agent in the future society in which the infected can be cured instead of destroyed, whereas the theatrical release ends with his death in a blaze of glory, intimating that there is no hope for either the white man or the black man to change (Ransom 170).<sup>379</sup> Smith's Neville is similar to Heston's; he is even introduced in the film's opening sequence by similar overhead shots of a red sports car driving the deserted streets, but this Neville is not trying to destroy the infected, just cure them so he can fix the world, and he has a companion, a dog named Samantha, whom we are introduced to as "Sam" to play with assumptions of homosociality from the trope of a boy and his dog (Ransom 154).

The infected people in this version are even more hyperwhite than in *Omega Man*, and they are significantly bald, making them look like neo-Nazi skinheads as much as zombies. Neville calls them "Darkseekers." They are also not played by any actors, but are rather produced through computer graphics, which enables them to perform superhuman feats, making them more threatening than the easily-dispatched foes that Heston kills, and this is important if they are seen as a sign of the threat of angry white men to a black man alone in the city and an indication of their privileged entitlement to violence.<sup>380</sup> Unlike the

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<sup>379</sup> Ransom notes that this same hasty generalization applies to the War on Terror and its inability to distinguish terrorists from civilians (171). Gender assumptions can be included in this category of generalization.

<sup>380</sup> Ransom writes, "The white hordes represent the American white underclass who feel disenfranchised by the success of the middle-class black" man (168).

Family and their cult-like rhetoric, these creatures are inarticulate, instead making creepy noises provided by the experimental vocalist Mike Patton, but this does not mean that they are not expressive; like the Feral Kid, they express pain and anger.

The disease that fills them with inarticulate rage is cured by injection of blood from a black man, disturbing the purity condition that makes whiteness a standard for humanity, instead positing melanin as standard and whiteness as aberrant, since, as in *The Omega Man*, the cure *restores* pigmentation (Ransom 168-169). These violent men as figures of apocalyptic masculinity represent an animal-like rage, but they are still clever and trick Neville into a trap by preying on his questionable sanity and use of mannequins posed around his neighborhood for a semblance of normality.<sup>381</sup> As Ransom puts it, this film shifts the anxiety of Heston's version about a "fear of a black planet to a fear of a planet dominated by ignorant and/or greedy whites" (181). The personification of mannequins is one of the many quotations in the film of *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*, the most obvious being the relocation of the action to New York rather than Los Angeles. This change also allows *I Am Legend* to articulate the trauma, fear, and impotent rage about the events of 9/11 in this city. Smith's Neville is trying to fix a problem he cannot understand, one that robbed him of his family and identity, and one that changed New York forever.

Also like the Belafonte film, this version of Neville's legend dwells on the pathos of his loneliness, especially when he loses his dog to the disease. Sam is his only solace,

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<sup>381</sup> I agree with Ransom's reading of this rage as symptomatic of anger over "Western neoliberal capitalist imperialism" and as a *class* issue that is overcoded by racialization due to the importance of whiteness to American ideology (173).

acting as a tie to his lost family by standing in for his daughter and allowing him to practice nurturing, such as a scene in which we watch him wash Sam while admonishing her for not eating her vegetables (Ransom 155). The sequence is lit by the setting sun, lending intimacy to their relationship. The inclusion of this relationship in the narrative adds pathos to this version of Neville that Heston's lacks and even "maternalizes" him.<sup>382</sup> He shows more vulnerability than other Nevilles, and much of the film consists of close shots of his face emoting (Ransom 163). The audience is compelled to care more about how he feels, and this acts as an articulation of a masculinity freed of the "wound" of repression documented by Robinson. Against the masculinist discourse that posits men as "naturally" aggressive and violent, requiring such repression to make them hospitable, this film shows that the violent, aggressive men are compelled to be so due to the artifice of humanity, represented by a manufactured disease. This is not their "natural" state, and Smith's Neville, by emoting freely, naturalizes the expression of emotions for men in a way that does not make him appear "weak" or dangerous.

Unlike the Playboy masculinity performed by Heston, Smith's Neville is all business; he is usually calm and collected, dispensing his signature Will Smith one-liners, much like Heston's quips as Neville, but without the superior cynicism.<sup>383</sup> Like him, this Neville has a well-stocked arsenal, but he uses it less and is not on a mission of

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<sup>382</sup> As Ransom puts it, "The good father before the breakdown of society, he is the good mother in its aftermath" (158).

<sup>383</sup> Some critics argue that Smith is desexualized, making his black masculinity more palatable for a white audience and his use of humor aids in this. This applies to the film because, unlike previous versions, this Neville remains celibate out of choice (Ransom 161)



extermination. He co-exists in the city with the Darkseekers. Like Heston, Smith is shown shirtless, exercising his hard body so that he can stay alive to fix a problem for which he feels responsible. Like Heston, his muscular torso is on display, making him a sexual object for the audience's gaze, a role Smith has played in many films. He lives in an old brownstone in Washington Square which he keeps hidden from the Darkseekers, but inside it is stocked with canned goods rather than the luxury items of Heston's demesne. Smith's Neville is more practical, even though, like Heston's version and Ralph in *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*, he goes "shopping" (Ransom 156).<sup>384</sup> Like his predecessors in this genre, he has learned to farm. He grows corn in Central Park and, like Belafonte's survivor, makes a daily radio broadcast in search of other survivors. His functionality is without question, and his masculine mastery over tools, like Ralph, both keeps him alive and prepares for the future.

This version of Neville also refuses to leave his city, like Heston's, but not because he will not abandon his property. Instead, he sees it as his duty to remain to "fix" the problem, and, using the rhetoric of post-9/11 America, New York is "ground zero" for the disease. Considering the theme of racism, New York could also be seen as ground zero for urban segregation and structural racialization. As in the previous urban apocalypse films, this one uses the setting as staging for national crisis centered on the identity of a victimized man who struggles with his masculine identity, but it is not as concerned with his autonomous agency, and its use of reproductive futurism suggests more concern for the

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<sup>384</sup> Ransom elaborates: "Whereas Heston's Neville was 'the man, but he's cool,' the message about Smith's Neville to a majority white, middle-class audience is 'yes, he's black, but he's like us,' but this does not erase the historical inflection of his skin color (157).

roles of women and children. In this narrative, the white masculine masquerade is reduced to barking men, dispossessed and hiding in dark places, and fatherhood is again depicted as a failure. In the ending of the theatrical release, after Neville's sacrifice, the future and its "cure" is relegated to a lone woman and a boy, figures of apocalyptic womanhood and boyhood, who leave the city for the safety of an armed compound upstate.

Popular culture's need to appeal to the largest audience prevents clear political statements being made in blockbuster films. Ultimately, no film can "fix" the problems of masculinism and racism in America, even if it stars Will Smith as the last sane man fighting off hordes of white men suffering from a "rage virus." Angry white men have not only not been cured of this disease in our society since the release of the film, we can now watch the scenario of Heston's struggle of besieged white masculinity played out again in great detail on one of the most popular cable shows of all time, AMC's *The Walking Dead* (2010-), as a white police officer attempts to protect his family and maintain his authority in a world populated by mindless cannibals at the end of history, finding that his agency and authority are never adequate. Even though *I Am Legend*'s opening hunting sequence, which ends when Neville's prey is attacked by a pride of lions, establishes that he is "no longer the Earth's top predator. . . . work[ing] to decenter Eurocentric white hegemony as the human universal," white men stubbornly refuse to give up the reigns of civilization and maintain this position through discourses that posit their mastery as necessary (Ransom 164). As Kimmel asserts, if society needs to mark male bodies as masculine, we need a definition of manhood "capable of embracing differences among men and enabling other men to feel secure and confident rather than excluding them. . . . We need a democratic

manhood” (*MiA* 333). I would add to this sentiment a caveat. If manhood is to be as democratic as Kimmel suggests, then women should have as much say in it as men, and perhaps we need to recognize that, like Heston’s Robert Neville, the angry white men are the *real* walking dead, the monsters who kill out of rage over their threatened privilege, who, in a world where nothing new is produced by human agency anymore, produce instead dead bodies as their primary employment, like the brutal men depicted in Miller’s series of films, to which I will now return.

### **Apocalyptic Women: Danger and Solidarity**

*The mantra of “no future” too easily parallels the neoliberal dogma that there is no alternative. (Hester 50)*

*We desperately need to qualify this rallying call not to make babies, however. When Edelman discusses what it means to “resist the appeal of futurity, to refuse the temptation to reproduce,” he appears to rather sidestep the fact that biological procreation is not always an expressly planned or deliberately sought for process. (Hester 58)*

After the success of *The Road Warrior*, the decade of the 1980s was inundated with lower-budget films that mimicked the tropes used by Miller, but without the acting that brought the characters in Miller’s work to life, and lacking the virtuosity of montage editing that energizes his films. These films capitalize on the figure of the lone action hero who saves innocent people from barbarians, decked out in medievalized punk fashion and making use of customized vehicles as postmodern mounts for their battling warriors.<sup>385</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Rather than list these films here, I refer the reader to the list of films appended to this study. A cursory glance at the titles of the films will indicate the masculine fantasies that they articulate. Most of these movies are “exploitation” films, which does not describe how the cast and crew were treated, as if mainstream Hollywood is not the most efficient machine of exploitation devised, but instead alludes to the way that the films exploit the *audience* by offering it a fulfillment of fantasies of power. Hence, in the 1970s, there were Blaxploitation films that supplied its target African American audience the fantasy of black power, of a black man winning against “The Man” through individual agency and violence, and rape revenge films that mimicked the rampage films of Clint Eastwood and Charles Bronson, but replaced

These copies of the *Mad Max* milieu appeal to the fantasies of white men feeling disenfranchised but without the subtle criticism of the masculinist discourses that enable the sense of entitlement which structured the imagining of disenfranchisement that Miller's films offer.

*Hell Comes to Frogtown* (1988, Donald G. Jackson and R.J. Kizer) is emblematic of how these exploitation apocalypse films appealed to the fantasies and anxieties of white men in the 1980s. Like many films released by New Line Cinema at the time, it is full of scenes that contrive for a buxom woman to remove her top, appealing to the prurient interest of men, like a stripper bar. It deals with a fertility crisis, where "pure" human women (depicted as white) are producing less children and frog-like mutants are becoming the dominant population (a racialized threat that uses stereotypes of black people with oversized lips and wide noses). Pro-wrestler "Rowdy" Roddy Piper plays the protagonist, Sam Hell, who happens to be one of the last fertile men and whose usually shirtless hard body resembles a turgid penis throughout the narrative.<sup>386</sup> In this future, women run the government, and they coerce Hell to rescue the last fertile women from Frogtown and a future of miscegenation by promising that he can mate with them after. To make sure that he keeps his word, they equip him with an electronic chastity belt, so the turgidity of his body stands for the repression of his sexual urges as well as his armored masculinity. This figuration of fertile women as breeding resource, reified to a technology of reproductive

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those action heroes with a victimized woman who seeks violent retribution, appealing to the fantasy of retributive sexual and gender justice.

<sup>386</sup> The film owes some debt to *Zardoz* for its framing of hypermasculine brutality as virility and fertility.

futurity, is more monstrosly depicted by Miller in *Fury Road*, and the theme of locking up mothers to ensure that they do not produce wayward subjects conforms with Weinbaum's argument about the race/reproduction bind and Sheldon's articulation of the "human catastrophe." The mutants have kidnapped the women as part of their revolution against a racist, oppressive government, but this revolt is thwarted by Sam Hell as he saves the women and ensures a pure reproductive future. Even though the film ostensibly gives women power in this future where they run the government, every one of the women controlling Sam is sexualized and displayed nude, reducing them to sex objects for both him and the audience, diluting their political power and making them props in a masculine masquerade. As the previous investigations have shown, women have limited roles in post-apocalyptic films, either serving the function of victim or vehicle of reproductive futurity and, therefore, a symbol of hope for the future. They are rarely granted agency, and are not the focus of the narrative. This changed in 1984.

Two films were released that year which shifted the focus of the apocalyptic narrative onto the problem of apocalyptic femininity: *Night of the Comet* and *The Terminator* (James Cameron). Although the latter film takes place *before* the apocalypse and only includes short scenes depicting the apocalyptic boyhood of the warrior from the post-apocalypse future, Kyle Reese (Michael Biehn), as an action horror movie it focuses on a threatened woman, Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton), rather than this action hero. The franchise that it spawned, after spending two films attempting to avert the end of the world through the agency of this woman, then became set in a post-apocalyptic landscape, only to be rebooted by the most recent film, *Terminator: Genisys* (2015, Alan Taylor) rewriting

the events of the first film and further centering Sarah as action hero instead of victim. As I write this, another film is being made for the franchise that, like the machine killers it depicts, cannot die. *The Terminator* poses the time-travel version of reproductive crisis by putting the mother of the future in danger. Over the course of the first two films, Sarah learns how to perform military masculinity while gaining mastery over masculine technology, mostly in the form of firearms. She then passes this training on to her son, raised in apocalyptic boyhood, who will lead the resistance against the robot uprising in the future. Humanity is saved by violence, and peace is sought through strength of arms, but this is accomplished not to prove the value of a masculine protagonist's manhood and rather becomes a mode of survival for a woman threatened by a hypermasculine future.

*Night of the Comet* uses the tropes of the urban apocalypse, but the two survivors at the beginning of the film are white middle-class teenage girls. Like other urban apocalypse narratives, a third person is introduced for conflict, a Latino man (Robert Beltran) who reluctantly becomes their protector as they try to escape the city to find shelter from gangs of violent men and zombies. The sisters escape the city to find the secret government laboratory where their father works, only to discover that this refuge is a trap. The film ends with the three searching for refuge that may not exist. The threat is always imminent.

This shift from an interest in apocalyptic manhood to the role of women and their possible agency after the end of the world, hinted at in the ending of *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*, was also registered by Miller in the third film that he made for the *Mad Max* franchise, *Beyond Thunderdome* (1985, Miller and George Ogilvie). Although the film still

focuses on Max, in this narrative he has reached the end of the road, both figuratively and literally. He begins the film riding on the old chassis of an automobile retrofitted into a camel-drawn wagon which is immediately stolen from him, leaving him with nothing, walking in a desert the people of the film call “the Nothing.” Max has become nothing and no one. His name is not even used in the film. The woman who founded the last vestige of “civilization” where his quest to retrieve his belongings (and identity) leads, Bartertown, called Aunty Entity (a something who used to be a nothing) and played by Tina Turner, calls him “raggedy man,” and this refers to both his tattered clothing as well as his manhood. He has no agency in the film, led by the whims of fate to a group of castaway children who have been surviving in an oasis in the middle of the desert, awaiting the coming of a mythical messiah. Borrowing from *Lord of the Flies*, this neoprimitivist community contains apocalyptic boyhood and girlhood, represented in the rivalry between the two oldest, a boy and girl. His refusal to be their savior impels this young woman storyteller in the tribe, Savannah Nix (also a reference to nothing and the desert), to lead half of the children through the desert in search of a promised land. Max pursues them and helps them escape this nihilistic mise-en-scène, but stays in the nothing as they fly away to a life where they can make something, even if it is only more stories.

After this, increasingly, post-apocalyptic films focus on apocalyptic womanhood that must deal with the dangerous presence of apocalyptic manhood and often navigate an escape from masculinist space to freedom elsewhere. The terms of the end of the world change when that end is no longer imagined as an end for white masculine agency and centrality. Such a focus on the agency of women throws such masculinist anxiety into stark

relief, revealing it even further and queering its performance by demonstrating the limitations of the fiction of dominant masculinity and the patriarchy it structures. My next project will resume where this one leaves off and examine the development of this imagining of gender, tracking it into the present, looking at the previously mentioned films as well as *The Blood of Heroes* (1989, David Webb Peoples), *Hardware* (1990, Richard Stanley), *Mindwarp* (1992, Steve Barnett), *Waterworld* (1995, Kevin Reynolds), as well as several more recent additions to the genre, especially *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) and the next film in the franchise, *Wasteland*, now under production, a film delayed by a court battle that Miller had to fight in order to be allowed by the studio to remove Max from the diegesis of the film entirely, focusing solely on the protagonist established in *Fury Road*, *Imperator Furiosa* (Charlize Theron). The post-apocalyptic setting continues to be a space in which the intersecting definitions of gender, class, race, and sexuality continue to be worked out in the popular imagination of narrative film as a life or death struggle to determine who will populate the future, and Hollywood continues to articulate expressions of apocalyptic masculinity.



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### **Partial List of Post-Apocalyptic Film and Television in Chronological Order**

*Things to Come*. Dir. William Cameron Menzies. Perf. Raymond Massey, Edward Chapman, Ralph Richardson. United Artists, 1936.

*Five*. Dir. Arch Obeler. Perf. William Phipps, Susan Douglas Rubes, James Anderson. Columbia, 1951.

*Robot Monster*. Dir. Phil Tucker. Perf. George Nader, Gregory Moffett, Claudia Barrett. Astor, 1953.

*The Day the World Ended*. Dir. Roger Corman. Perf. Richard Denning, Lori Nelson, Adele Jergens. Golden State Productions, 1955.

*World Without End*. Dir. Edward Bernds. Perf. Hugh Marlow, Nancy Gates, Nelson Leigh, Rod Taylor. Allied Artists, 1956.

*On the Beach*. Dir. Stanley Kramer. Perf. Gregory Peck, Ava Gardner, Fred Astaire. United Artists, 1959.

*The Twilight Zone*. Prod. Rod Serling. CBS, 1959-1964. Television.

*The World, the Flesh, and the Devil.* Dir. Ronald MacDougall. Perf. Harry Belafonte, Inger Stevens, Mel Ferrer. MGM, 1959.

*The Time Machine.* Dir. George Pal. Perf. Rod Taylor, Alan Young, Yvette Mimieux. Galaxy, 1960.

*La Jetee.* Dir. Chris Marker. Argos Films, 1962.

*Panic in Year Zero.* Dir. Ray Milland. Perf. Ray Milland, Jean Hagen, Frankie Avalon. Roger Corman Productions, 1962.

*The Last Man on Earth.* Dir. Ubaldo Ragona. Perf. Vincent Price, Franca Bettoia, Emma Danieli. Associated Producers, 1964.

*The Time Travelers.* Dir. Ib Melchior. Perf. Preston Foster, Philip Carey, Merry Anders. AIP, 1964.

*Night of the Living Dead.* Dir. George Romero. Perf. Duane Jones, Judith O'Dea, Karl Hardman. Image Ten, 1968.

*Planet of the Apes.* Dir. Franklin J. Schaffner. Perf. Charlton Heston, Roddy McDowall, Kim Hunter. Twentieth Century Fox, 1968.

*The Bed Sitting Room.* Dir. Richard Lester. Perf. Rita Tushingham, Ralph Richardson, Peter Cook. United Artists, 1969.

*Beneath the Planet of the Apes.* Dir. Ted Post. Perf. James Franciscus, Kim Hunter, Maurice Evans. Twentieth Century Fox, 1970.

*No Blade of Grass.* Dir. Cornel Wilde. Perf. Nigel Davenport, Jean Wallace, John Hamill. MGM, 1970.

*The Omega Man.* Dir. Boris Sagal. Perf. Charlton Heston, Anthony Zerbe, Rosalind Cash. Warner Bros., 1971.

*Silent Running.* Dir. Douglas Trumbull. Perf. Bruce Dern, Cliff Potts, Ron Rifkin. Universal, 1972.

*A Boy and His Dog.* Dir. L.Q. Jones. Perf. Don Johnson, Jason Robards, Susanne Benton. LQ/JAF Productions, 1973.

*Planet Earth.* Dir. Marc Daniels. Perf. John Saxon, Janet Margolin, Ted Cassidy. ABC, 1974.

*Where Have All the People Gone?* Dir. John Llewelyn Moxie. Perf. Peter Graves, George O'Hanlon Jr., Kathleen Quinlan. NBC, 1974.

*Zardoz*. Dir. John Boorman. Perf. Sean Connery, Charlotte Rampling, Sara Kestelman. Twentieth Century-Fox, 1974.

*Survivors*. BBC, 1975-1977. Television.

*The Ultimate Warrior*. Dir. Robert Clouse. Perf. Yul Brynner, Max von Sydow, Joanna Miles. Warner Bros., 1975.

*Logan's Run*. Dir. Michael Anderson. Perf. Michael York, Jenny Agutter, Richard Jordan. MGM, 1976.

*Damnation Alley*. Dir. Jack Smight. Perf. Jan-Michael Vincent, George Peppard, Dominique Sanda. Twentieth Century Fox, 1977.

*Logan's Run*. CBS, 1977-1978. Television.

*Wizards*. Dir. Ralph Bakshi. Perf. Bob Holt, Jesse Welles, Richard Romanus. Twentieth Century Fox, 1977.

*Dawn of the Dead*. Dir. George Romero. Perf. David Emge, Ken Foree, Scott H. Reiniger, Gaylen Ross. Laurel Group, 1978.

*Deathsport*. Dir. Allan Arkush, Nicholas Niciphor, Roger Corman. Perf. David Carradine, Claudia Jennings, Richard Lynch. New World, 1978.

*Mad Max*. Dir. George Miller. Perf. Mel Gibson, Joanne Samuel, Hugh Keays-Byrne. Roadshow Entertainment, 1979.

*Ravagers*. Dir. Richard Compton. Perf. Richard Harris, Ernest Borgnine, Ann Turkel. Columbia, 1979.

*Quintet*. Dir. Robert Altman. Perf. Paul Newman, Vittorio Gassman, Fernando Rey. Lionsgate 1979.

*Escape from New York*. Dir. John Carpenter. Perf. Kurt Russell, Lee Van Cleef, Ernest Borgnine. Embassy, 1981.

*The Last Chase*. Dir. Maryn Burke. Perf. Lee Majors, Burgess Meredith, Chris Makepeace. Crown International, 1981.

*Mad Max 2/The Road Warrior*. Dir. George Miller. Perf. Mel Gibson. Warner Bros., 1981.

*Battletruck*. Dir. Harley Cokeliss, Perf. Michael Beck, Annie McEnroe, James Winwright. New World, 1982.

*1990: The Bronx Warriors*. Dir. Enzo G. Castellari. Perf. Mark Gregory, Fred Williamson, Vic Morrow. UFDC, 1983.

*2020 Texas Gladiators*. Dir. Joe D'Amato, George Eastman. Perf. Al Cliver, Harrison Muller, Daniel Stephen. Continental, 1983.

*The Day After*. Dir. Nicholas Meyer. Perf. Jason Robards, JoBeth Williams, Steve Guttenberg. ABC, 1983.

*Escape from the Bronx*. Dir. Enzo G. Castellari. Perf. Mark Gregory, Henry Silva, Valeria D'Obici. New Line, 1983.

*Stryker*. Dir. Cirio H. Santiago. Perf. Steve Sandor, Andrea Savio, William Ostrander. New World, 1983.

*2019: After the Fall of New York*. Dir. Sergio Martino. Perf. Michael Sopkiw, Valentine Monnier, George Eastman. Almi Pictures, 1984.

*City Limits*. Dir. Aaron Lipstadt. Perf. John Stockwell, Darrell Larson, Rae Dawn Chong. Atlantic, 1984.

*Le Denier Combat (The Last Battle)*. Dir. Luc Besson. Perf. Pierre Jolivet, Jean Bouise, Jean Reno. Triumph, 1984.

*Firebird 2015 AD*. Dir. David M. Robertson. Perf. Darren McGavin, George Touliatos, Doug McClure. Embassy, 1984.

*Night of the Comet*. Dir. Thom Eberhardt. Perf. Catherine Mary Stewart, Kelli Maroney, Robert Beltran. Atlantic Releasing, 1984.

*The Terminator* Dir. James Cameron. Perf. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Linda Hamilton, and Michael Biehn. Orion, 1984.

*Threads*. Dir. Mick Jackson. Perf. Karen Meagher, Reese Dinsdale, David Brierly. BBC, 1984.

*Warriors of the Wasteland/The New Barbarians*. Dir. Enzo G. Castellari. Perf. Giancarlo Prete, Fred Williamson, George Eastman. New Line, 1984.



*The Aftermath.* Dir. Steve Barkett. Perf. Steve Barkett, Lynn Margulies, Sid Haig. Prism, 1985.

*Day of the Dead.* Dir. George Romero. Perf. Lori Cardille, Terry Alexander, Joseph Pilato. UFDC, 1985.

*Exterminators of the Year 3000.* Dir. Giuliano Carnimeo. Perf. Robert Ianucci, Alicia Moro, Luciano Pigozzi. New Line, 1985.

*Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome.* Dir. George Miller, George Ogilvie. Perf. Mel Gibson, Tina Turner, Bruce Spence. Warner Bros., 1985.

*The Quiet Earth.* Dir. Geoff Murphy. Perf. Bruno Lawrence, Alison Routledge, Pete Smith. Anchor Bay, 1985.

*She.* Dir. Avi Nesher. Perf. Sandahl Bergman, David Gross, Quin Kessler. American National, 1985.

*Warrior of the Lost World.* Dir. David Worth. Perf. Robert Ginty, Persis Khambatta, Donald Pleasance. Visto, 1985.

*Wheels of Fire.* Dir. Cirio H. Santiago. Perf. Gary Watkins, Laura Banks, Lynda Wiesmeier. Concorde, 1985.

*America 3000.* Dir. David Engelbach. Perf. Chuck Wagner, Laurene Landon, William Wallace. The Cannon-Group, 1986.

*Hands of Steel.* Dir. Sergio Martino. Perf. Daniel Greene, Janet Agren, Claudio Cassinelli. Almi, 1986.

*Radioactive Dreams.* Dir. Albert Pyun. Perf. John Stockwell, Michael Dudikoff, Michelle Little. DEG, 1986.

*Robot Holocaust.* Dir. Tim Kincaid. Perf. Norris Culf, Nadine Harstein, J. Buzz Von Orsteiner. Empire, 1986.

*Solarbabies.* Dir. Alan Johnson. Perf. Richard Jordan, Jami Gertz, Jason Patric. MGM, 1986.

*Cherry 2000.* Dir. Steve De Jarnatt. Perf. Melanie Griffith, David Andrews, Pamela Gidley. Orion, 1987.

*Steel Dawn.* Dir. Lance Hool. Perf. Patrick Swayze, Lisa Niemi, Anthony Zerbe. Lionsgate, 1987.

*Equalizer 2000*. Dir. Cirio H. Santiago. Perf. Richard Norton, Corinne Wahl, Robert Patrick. Concorde, 1988.

*Hell Comes to Frogtown*. Dir. Donald G. Jackson. Perf. Roddy Piper, Sandahl Bergman, Cec Verrell. New World, 1988.

*Phoenix the Warrior*. Dir. Robert Hayes. Perf. Persis Khambatta, Kathleen Kinmont, Peggy McIntaggart. AIP, 1988.

*The Sisterhood*. Cirio H. Santiago. Perf. Rebecca Holden, Chuck Wagner, Lynn-Holly Johnson. Concorde, 1988.

*Warlords*. Dir. Fred Olen Ray. Perf. David Carradine, Dawn Wildsmith, Sid Haig. Cinevision International, 1988.

*World Gone Wild*. Dir. Lee H. Katzin. Perf. Bruce Dern, Michael Paré, Catherine Mary. Lorimar, 1988.

*Cyborg*. Dir. Albert Pyun. Perf. Jean-Claude Van Damme, Deborah Richter, Vincent Klyn. The Cannon Group, 1989.

*Dead Man's Letters*. Dir. Konstantin Lopushanskiy. Perf. Rolan Bykov, Iosif Ryklin, Viktor Mikhaylov. New Yorker, 1989.

*The Terror Within*. Dir. Thierry Notz. Perf. Andrew Stevens, Starr Andreeff, George Kennedy. Concorde, 1989.

*The Blood of Heroes*. Dir. David Webb Peoples. Perf. Rutger Hauer, Joan Chen, Delroy Lindo. New Line, 1990.

*Hardware*. Dir. Richard Stanley. Perf. Dylan McDermott, Stacey Travis, John Lynch. Millimeter, 1990.

*Interzone*. Dir. Daran Sarafian. Perf. Bruce Abbott, Beatrice Ring, Teagan Clive. Star Classics, 1990.

*Robot Jocks*. Dir. Stuart Gordan. Perf. Gary Graham, Anne-Marie Johnson, Pal Koslo. Triumph, 1990.

*Terminator 2: Judgement Day*. Dir. James Cameron. Perf. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Linda Hamilton, Edward Furlong. Carolco, 1991.

*Delicatessen*. Dir. Marc Caro, Jean-Pierre Jeunet. Perf. Marie-Laure Dougnac, Dominique Pinon, Pascal Benezech. Miramax, 1992.

*Mindwarp*. Dir. Steve Barnett. Perf. Bruce Campbell, Angus Scrimm, Marta Martin. Fangoria, 1992.

*The Stand*. ABC, 1994. Television.

*Tank Girl*. Dir. Rachel Talalay. Perf. Lori Petty, Ice-T, Naomi Watts. United Artists, 1995.

*Twelve Monkeys*. Dir. Terry Gilliam. Perf. Bruce Willis, Madeleine Stowe, Brad Pitt. Universal, 1995.

*Waterworld*. Dir. Kevin Reynolds. Perf. Kevin Costner, Jeanne Tripplehorn, Dennis Hopper. Universal, 1995.

*The Postman*. Dir. Kevin Costner. Perf. Kevin Costner, Will Patton, Larenz Tate. Warner Bros., 1997.

*Six-String Samurai*. Dir. Lance Mungia. Perf. Jeffrey Falcon, Justin McGuire, Kim De Angelo. Blade, 1998.

*The Matrix*. Dir. Lana Wachowski, Lilly Wachowski. Perf. Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne, Carrie-Anne Moss. Warner Bros., 1999.

*The Tribe*. Channel 5, 1999-2003. Television.

*Dark Angel*. Fox, 2000-2002. Television.

*Battle Queen 2020*. Dir. Daniel D'Or. Perf. Julie Strain, Jeff Wincott, Zehra Leverman. New Concorde, 2001.

*28 Days Later*. . . Dir. Danny Boyle. Perf. Cillian Murphy, Naomie Harris, Christopher Eccleston. Twentieth Century Fox, 2002.

*Jeremiah*. Showtime, 2002-2004. Television.

*The Matrix Reloaded*. Dir. Lana Wachowski, Lilly Wachowski. Perf. Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne, Carrie-Anne Moss. Warner Bros., 2003.

*The Matrix: Revolutions*. Dir. Lana Wachowski, Lilly Wachowski. Perf. Keanu Reeves, Laurence Fishburne, Carrie-Anne Moss. Warner Bros., 2003.

*Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines.* Dir. Johnathan Mostow. Perf. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Nick Stahl, and Kristina Loken. Warner Bros., 2003.

*Dawn of the Dead.* Dir. Zack Snyder. Perf. Sarah Polley, Ving Rhames, Mekhi Pfifer. Universal, 2004.

*Land of the Dead.* Dir. George Romero. Perf. John Leguizamo, Asia Argento, Simon Baker. Universal, 2005.

*Ever Since the World Ended.* Dir. Calum Grant, Joshua Atesh Litle. Perf. James Curry, Linda Noveroske, Dan Plumlee. Cyan, 2006.

*Jericho.* CBS, 2006-2008. Television.

*28 Weeks Later.* Dir. Juan Carlos Fresnadillo. Perf. Jeremy Renner, Rose Byrne, Robert Carlyle. Twentieth Century Fox, 2007.

*I Am Legend.* Dir. Francis Lawrence. Perf. Will Smith, Alice Braga, Charlie Tahan. Warner Bros., 2007.

*I Am Omega.* Dir. Griff Furst. Perf. Mark Decascos, Geoff Meed, Jennifer Lee. The Asylum, 2007.

*Resident Evil: Extinction.* Dir. Russell Mulcahy. Perf. Milla Jovovich, Ali Larter, Oded Fehr. Screen Gems, 2007.

*Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles.* Fox, 2008-2009. Television.

*WALL-E.* Dir. Andrew Stanton. Perf. Ben Burtt, Elissa Knight, Jeff Garlin. Disney Pixar, 2008.

9. Dir. Shane Acker. Perf. Elijah Wood, Jennifer Connelly, Crispin Glover. Focus Features, 2009.

*The Road.* Dir. John Hilcoat. Perf. Viggo Mortensen, Charlize Theron, Kodi Smit-McPhee. Dimension, 2009.

*Terminator Salvation.* Dir. McG. Perf. Christian Bale, Sam Worthington, and Anton Yelchin. Columbia, 2009.

*Zombieland.* Dir. Ruben Fleisher. Perf. Jesse Eisenberg, Emma Stone, Woody Harrelson. Columbia, 2009.

*The Book of Eli*. Dir. Albert Hughes, Allen Hughes. Perf. Denzel Washington, Mila Kunis, Ray Stevenson. Warner Bros., 2010.

*The Last Seven*. Dir. Imran Naqvi. Perf. Tamer Hassan, Simon Phillips, Daisy Head. ILC, 2010.

*Resident Evil: Afterlife*. Dir. Paul W.S. Anderson. Perf. Milla Jovovich, Ali Larter, Wentworth Miller. Screen Gems, 2010.

*Adventure Time*. Cartoon Network, 2010-2018. Television.

*The Walking Dead*. AMC, 2010-. Television Show.

*The Divide*. Dir. Xavier Gens. Perf. Lauren German, Michael Biehn, Milo Ventimiglia. Anchor Bay, 2012.

*Hell*. Dir. Tim Fehlbaum. Perf. Lilo Baur, Marco Calamandrei, Lisa Vicari. ARC, 2012.

*The Hunger Games*. Dir. Gary Ross. Perf. Jennifer Lawrence, Josh Hutcherson, Liam Hemsworth. Lionsgate, 2012.

*Resident Evil: Retribution*. Dir. Paul W.S. Anderson. Perf. Milla Jovovich, Sienna Guillory, Michelle Rodriguez. Screen Gems, 2012.

*The Colony*. Dir. Jeff Renfroe. Perf. Kevin Zegers, Laurence Fishburne, Bill Paxton. Image, 2013.

*How I Live Now*. Dir. Kevin Macdonald. Perf. Saoirse Ronan, Tom Holland, George MacKay. Magnolia Pictures, 2013.

*The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*. Dir. Francis Lawrence. Perf. Jennifer Lawrence, Josh Hutcherson, Liam Hemsworth. Lionsgate, 2013.

*Oblivion*. Dir. Joseph Kosinski. Perf. Tom Cruise, Morgan Freeman, Andrea Riseborough. Universal, 2013.

*Snowpiercer*. Dir. Joon-ho Bong. Perf. Chris Evans, Jamie Bell, Tilda Swinton. Radius-TWC, 2013.

*Turbo Kid*. Dir. Francois Simard, Anouk Whissell, Yoann-Karl Whissell. Perf. Munro Chambers, Laurence Labeouf, Michael Ironside. Epic Pictures, 2013.

*Warm Bodies*. Dir. Jonathan Levine. Perf. Nicholas Hoult, Teresa Palmer, John Malkovich. Lionsgate, 2013.

*The 100*. The CW, 2014-. Television.

*The Hunger Gamers: Mockingjay-Pt. 1*. Dir. Francis Lawrence. Perf. Jennifer Lawrence, Josh Hutcherson, Liam Hemsworth. Lionsgate, 2014.

*The Maze Runner*. Dir. Wes Ball. Perf. Dylan O'Brien, Kaya Scodario, Will Poulter. Twentieth Century Fox, 2014.

*Z-Nation*. Syfy, 2014-2017. Television.

*12 Monkeys*. Syfy, 2015-2018. Television.

*Extinction*. Dir. Miguel Ángel Vivas. Perf. Matthew Fox, Jeffrey Donovan, Quinn McGolan. Vertical, 2015.

*Hidden*. Dir. Matt Duffer, Ross Duffer. Perf. Alexander Skarsgård, Andrea Riseborough, Emily Alyn Lind. Warner Bros., 2015.

*The Hunger Games: Mockingjay-Pt. 2*. Dir. Francis Lawrence. Perf. Jennifer Lawrence, Josh Hutcherson, Liam Hemsworth. Lionsgate, 2015.

*Into the Badlands*. AMC, 2015-. Television.

*The Last Survivors*. Dir. Tom Hammock. Perf. Haley Lu Richardson, Booboo Stewart, Max Charles. Dark Sky, 2015.

*Mad Max: Fury Road*. Dir. George Miller. Perf. Tom Hardy, Charlize Theron, Nicholas Holt. Warner Bros., 2015.

*Man Down*. Dir. Dito Montiel. Perf. Shia LeBeouf, Jai Courtney, Gary Oldman. Lionsgate, 2015.

*Maze Runner: The Scorch Trials*. Dir. Wes Ball. Perf. Dylan O'Brien, Kaya Scodario, Thomas Brodie-Sangster. Twentieth Century Fox, 2015.

*Terminator Genisys*. Dir. Alan Taylor. Perf. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Jason Clarke, and Emilia Clarke. Paramount, 2015.

*Z for Zachariah*. Dir. Craig Zobel. Perf. Chiwetel Ejiofor, Chris Pine, Margot Robbie. Grindstone Entertainment, 2015.

*Cord*. Dir. Pablo Gonzalez. Perf. Laura de Boer, Michael Fritz Schumacher, Christian Wewerka. Journeyman, 2016.

*The Cul De Sac.* New Zealand, 2016-. Television.

*Embers.* Dir. Claire Carré. Perf. Jason Ritter, Iva Gocheva, Greta Fernández. Slamdance, 2016.

*The Girl with the Gifts.* Dir. Colm McCarthy. Perf. Sennia Nanua, Fisayo Akinade, Dominique Tipper. Saban Films, 2016.

*Resident Evil: The Final Chapter.* Dir. Paul W.S. Anderson. Perf. Milla Jovovich, Iain Glen, Ali Larter. Screen Gems, 2016.

*The Shannara Chronicles.* Spike, 2016-. Television.

*We are the Flesh.* Dir. Emiliano Rocha Minter. Perf. Noé Hernández, Maria Evoli, Diego Gamaliel. Arrow, 2016.

*Alone.* Dir. David Moreau. Perf. Sophia Lesaffre, Stéphane Bak, Jean-Stan Du Pac. StudioCanal, 2017.

*The Bad Batch.* Dir. Ana Lily Armapour. Perf. Suki Waterhouse, Jason Momoa, Jayda Fink. Neon, 2017.

*Here Alone.* Dir. Rod Blackhurst. Perf. Lucy Walters, Gina Piersanti, Adam David. Vertical, 2017.

*Hostile.* Dir. Mathieu Turi. Perf. Brittany Ashworth, Grégory Fitoussi, Javier Botet. 4Digital Media, 2017.

*It Comes at Night.* Dir. Trey Edward Shults. Perf. Joel Edgerton, Christopher Abbott, Carmen Ejogo. A24, 2017.

*The Survivalist.* Dir. Stephen Fingleton. Perf. Mia Goth, Martin McCann, Barry Ward. IFC, 2017.

*A Quiet Place.* Dir. John Krasinski. Perf. Emily Blunt, John Krasinski, Millicent Simmons. Columbia, 2018.

*Cargo.* Dir. Ben Howling, Yolanda Ramke. Perf. Martin Freeman, Anthony Hayes, Susie Porter. Netflix, 2018.

*Genesis.* Dir. Freddie Hutton-Mills, Bart Ruspoli. Perf. Olivia Grant, Chiké Okonkwo, John Hannah. Vertical, 2018.

*Future World*. Dir. James Franco, Bruce Thierry Chung. Perf. James Franco, Suki Waterhouse, Jeffery Wahlberg. Lionsgate, 2018.

*I Think We're Alone Now*. Dir. Reed Morano. Perf. Peter Dinklage, Elle Fanning, Charlotte Gainsboroug. Momentum Pictures, 2018.

*Maze Runner: The Death Cure*. Dir. Wes Ball. Perf. Dylan O'Brien, Ki Hong Lee, Kaya Scodelario. Twentieth Century Fox, 2018.

*Molly*. Dir. Colinda Bongers, Thijs Meuwese. Perf. Julia Batelaan, Emma de Paauw, Joost Bolt. Artsploitation, 2018.

*Mortal Engines*. Dir. Christian Rivers. Perf. Hera Hilmar, Robert Sheehan, Hugo Weaving. Universal, 2018.

*What Still Remains*. Dir. Josh Mendoza. Perf. Lulu Antariksa, Colin O'Donoghue, Mimi Rogers. Gravitas Ventures, 2018.

*The Worthy*. Dir. Ali F. Mostafa. Perf. Ali Suliman, Maisa Abd Elhadi, Mahmoud Al Atrash. Netflix, 2018.

#### **Other Film and Television Cited**

*Antony and Cleopatra*. Dir. Charlton Heston. Perf. Charlton Heston, Hildegard Neil, Eric Porter. J. Arthur Rank, 1972.

*The Asphalt Jungle*. Dir. John Huston. Perf. Sterling Hayden, Louis Calhern, Jean Hagen. MGM, 1950.

*Back to the Future*. Dir. Robert Zemeckis. Perf. Michael J. Fox, Christopher Lloyd, and Lea Thompson. Universal, 1985.

*Back to the Future Part II*. Dir. Robert Zemeckis. Perf. Michael J. Fox, Christopher Lloyd, and Lea Thompson. Universal, 1989.

*Back to the Future Part III*. Dir. Robert Zemeckis. Perf. Michael J. Fox, Christopher Lloyd, and Lea Thompson. Universal, 1990.

*Billy Jack*. Dir. Tom Laughlin. Perf. Tom Laughlin, Delores Taylor, Clark Howat. Warner Bros., 1971.

*Blackboard Jungle*. Dir. Richard Brooks. Perf. Glenn Ford, Anne Francis, Louis Calhern. MGM, 1955.



*The Brothers Karamazov*. Dir. Richard Brooks. Perf. Yul Brynner, Maria Schell, Claire Bloom. MGM, 1958

*The Cars that Ate Paris*. Dir. Peter Weir. Perf. Terry Camilleri, John Meillon, Kevin Miles. British Empire Films Australia, 1974.

*The Crazies*. Dir. George Romero. Perf. Lane Carroll, Will MacMillan, Harold Wayne Jones. Cambist Films, 1973.

*Cruising*. Dir. William Friedkin. Perf. Al Pacino, Paul Sorvino, Karen Allen. United Artists, 1980.

*Death Wish*. Dir. Michael Winner. Perf. Charles Bronson, Hope Lange, Vincent Gardenia. Paramount, 1974.

*Deliverance*. Dir. John Boorman. Perf. Jon Voight, Burt Reynolds, Ned Beatty. Warner Bros., 1972.

*Destination Moon*. Dir. Irving Pichel. Perf. John Archer, Warner Anderson, Tom Powers. Eagle-Lion Films, 1950.

*Dirty Harry*. Dir. Don Siegal. Perf. Clint Eastwood, Andrew Robinson, Harry Guardino. Warner Bros., 1971.

*Dirty Mary Crazy Larry*. Dir. John Hough. Perf. Peter Fonda, Susan George, Adam Roarke. Twentieth Century Fox, 1974.

*Duel*. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Perf. Dennis Weaver, Jacqueline Scott, Eddie Firestone. CBS, 1971.

*El Cid*. Dir. Anthony Mann. Perf. Charlton Heston, Sophia Loren, Raf Vallone. Allied Artists, 1961.

*Falling Down*. Dir. Joel Schumacher. Perf. Michael Douglass, Robert Duvall, Barbara Hershey. Warner Bros., 1993.

*Five Easy Pieces*. Dir. Bob Rafelson. Perf. Jack Nicholson, Karen Black, Billy Green Bush. Columbia, 1970.

*The Garment Jungle*. Dir. Vincent Sherman, Robert Aldrich (uncredited). Perf. Lee J. Cobb, Kerwin Mathews, Gia Scala. Columbia, 1957.

*The Greatest Story Ever Told*. Dir. George Stevens, David Lean (uncredited). Perf. Max von Sydow, Dorothy McGuire, Charlton Heston. United Artists, 1965.

*Happy Days.* ABC, 1974-1984. Television.

*Indestructible Man.* Dir. Jack Pollexfen. Perf. Lon Caney Jr., Max Showalter, Marian Carr. Allied Artists, 1956.

*Invasion of the Body Snatchers.* Dir. Don Siegel. Perf. Kevin McCarthy, Dana Wynter, Larry Gates. Allied Artists, 1956.

*Julius Caesar.* Dir. David Bradley. Perf. Harold Tasker, Charlton Heston, David Bradley. Brandon Films, 1950.

*Julius Caesar.* Dir. Stuart Burge. Perf. Charlton Heston, Jason Robards, John Gielgud. AIP, 1971.

*The King and I.* Dir. Walter Lang. Perf. Yul Brynner, Deborah Kerr, Rita Moreno. Twentieth Century Fox, 1956.

*Looking for Mr. Goodbar.* Dir. Richard Brooks. Perf. Diane Keaton, Richard Gere, Tuesday Weld. Paramount, 1977.

*Lord of the Flies.* Dir. Peter Brook. Perf. James Aubrey, Tom Chapin, Hugh Edwards. Continental, 1963.

*The Magnificent Seven.* Dir. John Sturges. Perf. Yul Brynner, Steve McQueen, Charles Bronson. United Artists, 1960.

*The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit.* Dir. Nunnally Johnson. Perf. Gregory Peck, Jennifer Jones, Frederic March. Twentieth Century Fox, 1956.

*Picnic.* Dir. Joshua Logan. Perf. William Holden, Kim Novak, Betty Field. Columbia, 1956. Film.

*Pony Express.* Dir. Jerry Hopper. Perf. Charlton Heston, Rhonda Fleming, Jan Sterling. Paramount. 1953.

*Saturday Night Fever.* Dir. John Badham. Perf. John Travolta, Karen Lynn Gorney, Barry Miller. Paramount, 1977.

*The Searchers.* Dir. John Ford. Perf. John Wayne, Jeffrey Hunter, Vera Miles. Warner Bros., 1956.

*Shane.* Dir. George Stevens. Perf. Alan Ladd, Jean Arthur, Van Heflin. Paramount, 1953.

*Smokey and the Bandit*. Dir. Hal Needham. Perf. Burt Reynolds, Sally Field, Jerry Reed. Universal, 1977.

*The Ten Commandments*. Dir. Cecil B. DeMille. Perf. Charlton Heston, Yul Brynner, Anne Baxter. Paramount, 1956.

*Touch of Evil*. Dir. Orson Welles. Perf. Charlton Heston, Orson Welles, Janet Leigh. Universal, 1958.

*Villa Rides*. Dir. Buzz Kulik. Perf. Yul Brynner, Robert Mitchum, Maria Grazia Buccella. Paramount, 1968.

*Walking Tall*. Dir. Phil Karlson. Perf. Joe Don Baker, Elizabeth Hartman, Leif Garrett. Cinerama, 1973.

*Westworld*. Dir. Michael Crichton. Perf. Yul Brynner, Richard Benjamin, James Brolin. MGM, 1973.

*When Worlds Collide*. Dir. Rudolph Maté. Perf. Richard Derr, Barbara Rush, Peter Hansen. Paramount, 1951.

*The Wild One*. Dir. Laslo Benedek. Perf. Marlon Brando, Mary Murphy, Robert Keith. Columbia, 1953.

### **A Partial List of Post-Apocalyptic Video Games**

*Fallout*. Bethesda Game Studios, 1997.

*Fallout 2*. Bethesda Game Studios, 1998.

*Fallout 3*. Bethesda Game Studios, 2008.

*Fallout 4*. Bethesda Game Studios, 2015.

*Fallout: New Vegas*. Bethesda Game Studios, 2010.

*Horizon Zero Dawn*. Sony, 2017.

*The Last of Us*. Sony, 2013.

*Mad Max*. Mindscape, 1990.

*Mad Max*. WBIE, 2014.

*Metro 2033*. 4A Games, 2010.

*Resident Evil* series. Capcom, 1996-2019.

*Wasteland*. Interplay Entertainment, 1989.

*Wasteland 2*. InXile Entertainment, 2014.