

# **THE POST-APOCALYPTIC FILM GENRE IN AMERICAN CULTURE**

**1968 - 2013**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines post-apocalyptic films in American cinema in the period 1968-2013. These films will be analysed in relation to their status as a genre, their underpinning narrative structures, the influence of religious myths, and their relationship to American national identity. Three representative films will be analysed as case studies: *The Ultimate Warrior* (1975), *Steel Dawn* (1987), and *I Am Legend* (2007).

A combined methodological approach will be used to study the post-apocalyptic genre. This approach utilises a 'bottom-up' thematic content analysis followed by close textual analysis of the case study films. This analysis is interpreted through a structuralist critical framework within a historical context.

The analysis chapters in this thesis will focus on three main stages within the overall time period: 1968-1976, 1982-1989, and 2007-2013. In each of these stages elements in the post-apocalyptic genre shifted because of cultural and social developments. However, this thesis also examines the patterns and themes that have remained consistent and stable in the genre across time. One of the main aims of the thesis is to analyse how the post-apocalyptic genre overlaps, repeats, and is disrupted over time.

This thesis demonstrates that the post-apocalyptic genre functions as a unified group of films. The chapters explore how the genre blends with others (e.g. the western), but also retains a coherent narrative. Additionally, the project establishes how the post-apocalyptic genre articulates aspects of American national identity. Primarily, this is through expressing a discomfort with modernity and depicting a pastoral utopia. The values that are conveyed in post-apocalyptic films are connected with conservatism and Evangelical religious doctrines in American popular culture. These broader themes are intertwined in the development of the genre with dominant historical influences, such as the Women's Rights Movement, Reagan's Presidency and nuclear anxiety, and the legacy of 9/11.

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“Next time I have an idea like that, punch me in the face” (Tyrion Lannister).

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# CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	3
CONTENTS.....	4
LIST OF TABLES .....	7
LIST OF FIGURES/ILLUSTRATIONS .....	8
1. INTRODUCTION .....	11
Perfection and the Post-apocalypse.....	11
Aims of the Thesis.....	12
Post-apocalyptic Narratives in Popular Culture .....	14
The Religious and Historical Context of Eschatology .....	17
Time Period .....	22
Thesis Structure.....	23
2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	26
Introduction.....	26
Definitions .....	27
Science Fiction.....	31
Horror .....	34
Genre and Culture.....	37
Semantic/Syntactic.....	52
An Operational Definition of Post-apocalyptic Fiction.....	53
National Mythscape.....	56
Promised Land and Utopia .....	60
Post-apocalypse and Politics.....	63
Eschatology and Popular Culture .....	68
Conclusion.....	72
3. METHODOLOGY .....	74
Research Questions .....	74
Thematic Content Analysis .....	76
Corpus of Films.....	77
Time Period .....	83
Coding Schedule .....	84

Summary.....	94
Sampling.....	95
Case Studies.....	95
Critical Theory.....	100
Structuralism .....	100
Challenges to Structuralism.....	102
Sample Approach.....	105
Previous Critical Work .....	106
Summary of Methodology .....	110
4. 1968-1976: PESSIMISM TO OPTIMISM.....	112
Introduction.....	112
Overview .....	112
CASE STUDY: <i>The Ultimate Warrior</i> (Dir. Clouse, 1975, 20 <sup>th</sup> Century Fox) .....	123
Synopsis .....	123
Genre Context.....	123
Comparison of Final Scenes.....	126
Representations of Landscapes.....	133
The Urban and the Pastoral.....	140
Conservative Values and Traditional Lifestyles.....	147
The Role of the Woman and Religious Symbolism.....	150
Conclusion.....	159
5. 1982-1989: THE FINAL FRONTIER .....	162
Introduction.....	162
Overview .....	162
CASE STUDY: <i>Steel Dawn</i> (Dir. Hool, 1987, Vestron, Inc).....	165
Synopsis .....	165
Genre Context and Hybridity .....	166
Return-to-primitivism Trope .....	179
Frontier and Eschatological Myths.....	188
The Structuring Theme of Violence .....	197
Female Heroes .....	205
Conclusion.....	213
6. 2007-2013: FEARS AND EXPECTATIONS.....	216
Introduction.....	216

Overview .....	216
CASE STUDY: <i>I Am Legend</i> (Dir. Francis Lawrence, 2007, Village Roadshow Pictures/Warner Bros.) .....	221
Synopsis .....	221
Representations of the Enemy .....	222
The Iconography of the Opening Shots .....	230
Wilderness in the City .....	238
Theatrical and Alternate Endings.....	242
The Legacy of <i>I Am Legend</i> – A Breakdown of Structures.....	250
Conclusion.....	256
7. CONCLUSION.....	259
Overview .....	259
Findings.....	261
Possible Future Work.....	270
Summary and Contribution .....	270
APPENDICES.....	273
FILMS CONSULTED: .....	279
WORKS CONSULTED:.....	284

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table 1:</b> Initial Corpus of 71 Post-apocalyptic Films	81
<b>Table 2:</b> Corpus of Post-apocalyptic Films by Setting	86
<b>Table 3:</b> Corpus of Post-apocalyptic Films by Trope	88
<b>Table 4:</b> Corpus of Post-apocalyptic Films by Narrative Ending	92

## LIST OF FIGURES/ILLUSTRATIONS

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<b><u>Fig Number</u></b>	<b><u>Page</u></b>
<b>Methodology</b>	
<b>Fig 1:</b> Graph of Occurrence of Settings	88
<b>Pessimism to Optimism: 1968-76 Chapter</b>	
<b>Fig 1:</b> Carson (Brynner) waiting to be hired for his fighting skills in <i>The Ultimate Warrior</i> .	124
<b>Fig 2:</b> Taylor approaches the Statue of Liberty in <i>Planet of the Apes</i> .	127
<b>Fig 3:</b> The final shot of <i>Planet of the Apes</i> .	128
<b>Fig 4:</b> Carson and Melinda and her baby escape the subway tunnels in <i>The Ultimate Warrior</i> .	128
<b>Fig 5:</b> Carson and Melinda and her baby look towards the safe haven of the island in <i>The Ultimate Warrior</i> .	129
<b>Fig 6:</b> One of the still shots depicting an escape for the city in <i>The Ultimate Warrior</i> .	130
<b>Fig 7:</b> The opening shot of <i>The Ultimate Warrior</i> .	133
<b>Fig 8:</b> An opening still shot of <i>The Ultimate Warrior</i> .	134
<b>Fig 9:</b> Thomas Cole's <i>Desolation</i> from <i>Course of an Empire</i> (1836) series.	136
<b>Fig 10:</b> A ruined Washington D.C. in <i>Logan's Run</i> .	136
<b>Fig 11:</b> The roof garden in <i>The Ultimate Warrior</i> .	138
<b>Fig 12:</b> The Baron's study in <i>The Ultimate Warrior</i> .	144
<b>Fig 13:</b> The mob invades The Baron's study in <i>The Ultimate Warrior</i> .	145

<b>Fig 14:</b> The Baron's body lies among his possessions in <i>The Ultimate Warrior</i> .	145
<b>Fig 15:</b> Melinda after giving birth in <i>The Ultimate Warrior</i> .	151
<b>Fig 16:</b> A stain glass image of the Virgin Mary.	152
<b>The Final Frontier: 1982-1987 Chapter</b>	
<b>Fig 1:</b> The Nomad and Sand-Dweller in <i>Steel Dawn</i> .	167
<b>Fig 2:</b> Cord prepares to fight in <i>Steel Dawn</i> .	169
<b>Fig 3:</b> Dojo scene in <i>Fists of Fury</i> .	169
<b>Fig 4:</b> Cord's letter in <i>Steel Dawn</i> .	171
<b>Fig 5:</b> A ruined ship is marooned in the desert in <i>Steel Dawn</i> .	173
<b>Fig 6:</b> Jux, the Nomad, and Tark arrive in the shanty town by horse and cart in <i>Steel Dawn</i> .	175
<b>Fig 7:</b> The Nomad opens the saloon doors in <i>Steel Dawn</i> .	175
<b>Fig 8:</b> The Nomad and Sho face each other before their duel in <i>Steel Dawn</i> .	176
<b>Fig 9:</b> The opponents face each other in <i>Once Upon a Time in the West</i> .	177
<b>Fig 10:</b> The stand-off before the duel in <i>Silverado</i> .	177
<b>Fig 11:</b> The wind powered farm equipment at Kasha's homestead in <i>Steel Dawn</i> .	183
<b>Fig 12:</b> Damnil sits on his metal 'throne' in <i>Steel Dawn</i> .	193
<b>Fig 13:</b> The Nomad emerges from being 'entombed' in <i>Steel Dawn</i> .	202
<b>Fig 14:</b> Neville in a crucifixion pose in <i>The Omega Man</i> .	203
<b>Fig 15:</b> Neville in his own sacrificial blood, the cure in the front of the frame, again in a crucifixion pose in <i>The Omega Man</i> .	203
<b>Fig 16:</b> Rebecca and Jet Girl in <i>Tank Girl</i> .	208
<b>Fig 17:</b> E Johnson and Sam in <i>Cherry 2000</i> .	208

## **Fears and Expectations: 2007-2013 Chapter**

<b>Fig 1:</b> The Family in <i>The Omega Man</i>	224
<b>Fig 2:</b> The mutants (or Dark Seekers or 'infected') invade Neville's laboratory in <i>I Am Legend</i> .	225
<b>Fig 3:</b> Neville prepares dinner in <i>I Am Legend</i> .	226
<b>Fig 4:</b> The first shot of a post-apocalyptic New York since 9/11 in <i>I Am Legend</i> .	232
<b>Fig 5:</b> The construction site a Ground Zero, © Reuters/Gary Hershorn.	233
<b>Fig 6:</b> The empty streets of New York in the opening shots of <i>I Am Legend</i> .	234
<b>Fig 7:</b> Another empty street shot from <i>I Am Legend</i> .	234
<b>Fig 8:</b> <i>Lafayette Street - Empty Except For Smoke</i> , September 11, 2001, Photography © NY ArtWorld 2001.	236
<b>Fig 9:</b> The rubble and broken Brooklyn Bridge in New York in the opening shot of <i>Cyborg</i> .	236
<b>Fig 10:</b> The impressionistic shot of deer leap in front of the Bank of New York in <i>I Am Legend</i> .	239
<b>Fig 11:</b> Neville continues his hunt through the long grass underneath posters for Broadway musicals in <i>I Am Legend</i> .	240
<b>Fig 12:</b> Neville stalks the deer in <i>I Am Legend</i> ; the camera work resembles a police raid.	240
<b>Fig 13:</b> Anna and Ethan enter the colony in Vermont in <i>I Am Legend</i> .	243
<b>Fig 14:</b> The leader or Alpha of the mutants greets his mate in <i>I Am Legend</i> .	244
<b>Fig 15:</b> The Alpha leaves with her without hurting Neville in <i>I Am Legend</i> .	245
<b>Fig 16:</b> The final shot of the alternate ending of in <i>I Am Legend</i> : they drive the jeep out of New York.	245
<b>Fig 17:</b> Kitai is attacked by an 'evolved' version of a tiger in <i>After Earth</i> .	251

# 1. INTRODUCTION

“How do you think people responded to the prospect of imminent doom? They gobbled it up like a chocolate éclair! They didn't fear their demise, they re-packaged it. It could be enjoyed as video-games, as TV shows, books, movies, the entire world wholeheartedly embraced the apocalypse and sprinted towards it with gleeful abandon.” – Nix, *Tomorrowland: A World Beyond* (Dir. Bird, 2015).

“There is nothing wrong with America that cannot be cured by what is right with America” – Bill Clinton

## **Perfection and the Post-apocalypse**

The post-apocalyptic narrative scenario is an answer to the crisis of failure. Not only does the post-apocalypse mean that catastrophe is not final, it also allows for the disappointments of the present to be erased and an alternative world to emerge. Post-apocalyptic narratives share some fundamental concepts with elements of American national identity. ‘Just as they or their ancestors began their lives anew when they came to this country, Americans are willing to do it again and again to get it right’ (Jasper 2000: 4). I would argue that repeatedly trying to escape the idea of failure in order to get America “right” also drives the repeated imaginings of a post-apocalyptic America.

The myth of America as a personal and national utopia is very deep-rooted, ‘the American myth of new beginnings in an idyllic, enchanted garden excited fanciful Utopian schemes’ (Caldwell 2006: 32). However, such beliefs in America as capable of perfection inevitably provoke inverse beliefs in imminent failure and destruction. These beliefs are either motivated by fear of losing what has already been gained, or anger that reality has not equalled utopian dreams. ‘Visions of failure and impending apocalypse, real or metaphorical, have coexisted with more positive American Dream narratives in various forms throughout American culture’ (Arnold 2013: 7).

The post-apocalyptic narrative offers a combination of these contrasting beliefs. It is premised on the concept of apocalyptic destruction but it is also structured

around the idea of beginning again in a new world. The post-apocalyptic narrative is, in some ways, the perfect story for America.

It is this relationship between post-apocalyptic narratives and American national identity which I will analyse in this thesis. While post-apocalyptic stories have been told in a range of fictional formats, it is the post-apocalyptic film genre in American cinema which will be the focus of this study.

One of the reasons for this emphasis on films is that, despite its intriguing cultural status, a full-length examination of the American post-apocalyptic film genre has yet to be conducted. The absence of such a study creates two main gaps in the disciplinary knowledge.

Firstly, the way in which the post-apocalyptic genre has developed and interconnected with other genres enhances our understanding of film history generally. Secondly, the above relationship between American national identity and post-apocalyptic narratives serves as my underlying hypothesis. Therefore, by studying the connections and interrelationships between periods of American history and stages in the development of the post-apocalyptic genre a greater insight and comprehension into how America expresses itself through popular culture will be gained.

To be represented history must first be rendered representable [...] in terms of the repertoire of narrative schemas and generic formulas, conceptual oppositions, myths and stereotypes that, together, constitute the ideological horizon of a given historical movement. (Durham 2014: 234)

It is this connection between the components of the post-apocalyptic genre and the way in which these elements reflect, represent, or challenge cultural and historical movements which forms the basis of my approach in this thesis.

### **Aims of the Thesis**

This thesis aims to demonstrate the relationship between the way in which post-apocalyptic films have developed as a genre and American national identity in the period 1968-2013. This relationship will be analysed through close textual analysis of three representative films in this period: *The Ultimate*

*Warrior* (Dir. Clouse, 1975), *Steel Dawn* (Dir. Hool, 1987), and *I Am Legend* (Dir. Lawrence, 2007). This analysis will be interpreted through the critical framework of structuralism in a historical context. The definition of 'post-apocalyptic films' will be explored in the literature review.

I will argue that post-apocalyptic films are a site of tension between 'eschatological myths'<sup>1</sup> and political and social shifts. This thesis will seek to demonstrate that post-apocalyptic films are articulating symbols and narratives of both religious and national myths. In addition, these films are also responding to and reflecting dominant historical developments and events.

To put these ideas in context, I will investigate what elements and structures in the post-apocalyptic genre have remained consistent and which have shifted over time. This thesis adopts combined methodological approach in order to map the post-apocalyptic genre quantitatively and qualitatively. Thematic content analysis, structuralism, historical analysis, and close textual analysis will all be used to investigate the development of the post-apocalyptic genre.

The examination of post-apocalyptic films will include an analysis of how the post-apocalyptic genre has blended with other genres, such as the horror film or the western, and the significance of this hybridity to expressing collective cultural influences. In undertaking this element of the analysis, this thesis will engage with related films and genres in order to build a stronger understanding of the development of the post-apocalyptic genre.

This analysis of associated films and genres will primarily consider the significance of shared imagery, structures, and tropes rather than the motivations of studios or individual directors. This thesis is not intended as an industry study, as such industrial/production factors will be referred to and analysed when they enrich the textual and cultural examination of the genre.

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<sup>1</sup> It is necessary to differentiate religious narratives relating to the apocalypse and post-apocalypse from stories in popular culture. In America the vast majority of these religious narratives relate to Judeo-Christian traditions. I will, therefore, term these religious narratives 'eschatological myths'. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary's second definition of eschatological is 'a belief concerning death, the end of the world, or the ultimate destiny of humankind; specifically: any of various Christian doctrines concerning the Second Coming, the resurrection of the dead, or the Last Judgment'.

My argument will also be that certain themes such as anti-urbanism and conservative ideals recur over the period under discussion. The way in which these themes are connected to influences, for example evangelicalism, the utopian imagination, and discomfort with modern identity politics, in American national identity will be explored.

The 'continuance of apocalyptic fears and expectations and how they are understood within the realms of contemporary politics' (Kinane, Ryan 2009: xvi) is another area of study for this project. In particular, the way in which culturally dominant political and social shifts, such as the protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s, Reagan's Presidency and nuclear anxiety, and 9/11 and its aftermath, are intertwined with post-apocalyptic films.

This thesis will proceed from the idea that the post-apocalyptic genre occupies a special place in American culture. These films envision failure and destruction, but also survival and even rebirth and renewal. The apocalyptic catastrophe often destroys the technology and infrastructures of the modern world. Contemporary society (the time in which the film was made) is represented as being history in the narrative of the film. To the characters in the post-apocalyptic films our present is their past. These narratives are in one sense science fiction, visions of a future world, but in another they are recreations of a mythologised American past.

In discussing the post-apocalyptic genre in these terms, I seek to build on critical work that has identified connections between these film narratives and American culture, such as Broderick (1993), Page (2008), Sobchack (1999), and King (2011). This thesis aims to create a more comprehensive study of the post-apocalyptic genre and its significance to American cinema and culture over time than has previously been undertaken.

### **Post-apocalyptic Narratives in Popular Culture**

The etymology of 'apocalypse' has been extensively covered by critics of the subject, but to reiterate briefly; apocalypse does not simply mean destruction or annihilation in the way it is more commonly used. Rather the word means 'to reveal', to discover a new state, or new knowledge.

Thus, a continuation, even a new beginning, is implied in the very word – apocalypse has, therefore, always suggested a post-apocalypse. This desire for a ‘clearing of the decks in the anticipation of a new beginning’ (Lisboa 2011: 8), has meant that humans have imagined apocalyptic scenarios both hopefully and fearfully.

Frank Kermode observed that every age is an apocalyptic age (2000: 95). Aside from religious myths, beliefs, and prophecies (which are discussed below), post-apocalyptic narratives have existed in popular culture in a wide variety of forms across time.

Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* (1826) is often credited with being the first post-apocalyptic fiction in Western literature. However, Lord Byron actually incorporated many of the themes of post-apocalyptic fiction in his poem *Darkness* written in 1812. In it he vividly describes the other side of post-apocalyptic fiction; the violence and the barbarism. Byron even hints at cannibalism, now a common trope in post-apocalyptic fiction:

‘And War, which for a moment was no more,  
Did glut himself again: a meal was bought  
With blood, and each sate sullenly apart  
Gorging himself in gloom: no love was left;  
All earth was but one thought—and that was death  
Immediate and inglorious; and the pang  
Of famine fed upon all entrails—men  
Died, and their bones were tombless as their flesh;  
The meagre by the meagre were devour'd’

In America, the religious myths and the doomsday prophecies merged with concepts of the New World being a Second Eden. ‘[The Puritans] explained, the newness of their New World was prophetic: it signalled the long-awaited new heaven and new earth of the millennium’ (Bercovitch 1993: 32).

These ideas were then reflected in a range of artistic media. Thomas Cole’s series of five paintings *The Course of Empire* (1833-36) depicted a new paradise being conquered and civilised only for *Destruction* (an apocalyptic

scene) to be followed by *Desolation* (a post-apocalyptic scene). Walter Harrison Cady later produced work of a similar theme in 1916, with the painting *A Grave of Liberty*, which depicted The Statue of Liberty and the New York City skyline in ruins.

In literature, London's *The Scarlet Plague* (1912) and England's *Darkness and Dawn* trilogy (1912-14) offer examples of the post-apocalyptic narrative in the American novel. The first documented post-apocalyptic film appeared in 1916, a Danish film entitled *Verdens Undergang* or *The End of the World* (Dir. August Blom). The first American post-apocalyptic films followed just over a decade and a half later with *Deluge* (Dir. Felix E Feist) and *It's Great to be Alive* (Dir. Werker) both in 1933.

The next 20 years saw a dearth of post-apocalyptic narratives in American cinema. However, the 1950s and early 1960s saw an upsurge in post-apocalyptic stories both in film and literature. In cinema films such as *Five* (Dir. Oboler, 1951) and *The World, The Flesh and The Devil* (Dir. McDougall, 1959) had themes of negotiating gender and sexual relationships in a world without social boundaries.

In literature some of what were to become seminal science fiction novels were published. Books such as Brackett's *The Long Tomorrow* (1955) and Roshwald's *Level 7* (1955) imagined the social and cultural challenges and limitations of a world after nuclear war. Some writers went further and represented humanity as fundamentally doomed to violence and extinction. Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend* (1954) and Walter M Miller Jr's *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960) both culminated their post-apocalyptic novels with humanity's final days on Earth.

There has been a large amount of critical work devoted to the science fiction texts of the 1950s and early 1960s and their cultural relationship with the Cold War and fears of nuclear war. Critics such as Sobchack (1987), Booker (2001), Geraghty (2009), and Shapiro (2013) – to name only a few – have contributed to our understanding of this historical period and the role science fiction had in the culture of the time.

Post-apocalyptic narratives and images have been a crucial aspect of American popular culture, expressed in art, literature, and films across nearly two centuries. American post-apocalyptic films can be understood as a particular strand of post-apocalyptic fiction, rather like a specific branch of an evolutionary tree. While there are post-apocalyptic narratives in numerous other cultures, it is the particular relationship between American culture and post-apocalyptic films that will be explored in this thesis.

### **The Religious and Historical Context of Eschatology**

In order to understand how deep-rooted the relationship between post-apocalyptic narratives and American culture is, it is necessary to understand some of the religious and historical background that has created it. One of the areas that this thesis examines is the link between the post-apocalyptic genre in popular culture and religious myths of the apocalypse, or eschatological myths.

To provide a critical background for understanding these connections and for several of the critical ideas discussed in the literature review, it is important to outline eschatology in the Judeo-Christian tradition. It is also necessary to provide a historic context for the relationship between eschatology and the development of American national identity. The focus of this summary is on the Judeo-Christian and Evangelical Christian traditions of eschatological belief because these are the religions which dominate in American culture.

In the Old Testament the major eschatological narrative is Noah's Ark in the Book of Genesis. The Flood myth is the earliest example that we still have written evidence for, it features in the Epic of Gilgamesh, Babylonian, and Hindu mythology. However, this story is more commonly known in Western culture as Noah's Ark.

The plot tells of a great flood that was sent by God to wipe out the evil of mankind. However, a small pocket of humanity and animals were spared. God forewarns Noah, and instructs him to build an ark which will act as a microcosm of creation. After the flood Noah and his family must rebuild life on Earth, but it must be better than before. The point of the flood is to reverse creation so that humanity may get a second chance to live in perfection. After the waters recede Earth is a blank slate, upon which a new paradise must be created. The

transition to a new beginning has continued in other apocalyptic religious myths.

Lisboa argues that the story of The Garden of Eden can also be considered an apocalyptic and/or post-apocalyptic narrative:

When Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden in the opening chapters of Genesis, that particular world, albeit at that point admittedly restricted to a population of two, came to an abrupt end. But there was of course a follow up. (2011: 19-20)

However, it is in the New Testament, specifically in the Book of Revelation that the narratives most closely associated with apocalyptic beliefs and prophecies are found. The Book of Revelation, contrary to the general impression many people have, does not describe the apocalypse, or more accurately, it does not *just* describe the apocalypse. The Book of Revelation is, in fact, a post-apocalyptic text, which depicts in immense detail the world that emerges after the apocalypse; including the holy city of New Jerusalem, where there is no sun and no moon, but simply God's light (Revelation 21: 10 – 22: 6)

The Book of Revelation is written as a series of apocalyptic visions and prophecies experienced by the author John. It is, like many apocalyptic myths, expressed in highly symbolic language, which is not particularly easy to read or understand. There is a great deal of focus on the significance of numbers (e.g. the lamb with seven horns and seven eyes).<sup>2</sup> However, despite these complexities several key images have become embedded in wider Western culture.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are probably the most famous aspect of the Book of Revelation.<sup>3</sup> There are a great range of other destructive forces, including dragons and beasts of the earth and the sea. There are also a large number of misogynistic descriptions of 'sinful' women being punished (e.g. the Whore of Babylon).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> According to theology these numbers all signify various concepts, 'four signifies the world, six imperfection, seven totality or perfection, twelve Israel's tribes or the apostles, one thousand immensity' (USCCB, 2016)

<sup>3</sup> Described in Revelation 6:1-8.

<sup>4</sup> This issue of misogyny in the Book of Revelation is discussed by Heather Hicks (2016: 30).

There is, therefore, considerable violence and retribution in The Book of Revelation. However, the culmination of these horrors is a utopia for those who have been judged as worthy. The key message of the Book of Revelation, repeated a number of times at the end, is that the faithful will inherit a beautiful 'new earth' and the sinful will 'have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone' (21:1-8). The idea of those who are obedient to God's will being rewarded with a new world is central to the eschatological beliefs encompassed by the Book of Revelation.

Many of the ideas and concepts contained in the Book of Revelation were part of the beliefs of the Puritan settlers in America. They fled the old world of Europe and came to what they believed to be a new one. In this new world, frequently considered to be given to them by God, the Puritans could be a shining example of an ideal community. This would seem to relate more to ideas of a religious utopian society than post-apocalyptic chaos, and in detail it does. However, one of the most fundamental beliefs of Puritanism was that by creating a society built on pure faith they could bring about Christ's Second Coming (Stannard 1979: 123).

The Puritans saw America as a place where they could build a perfect and unique society, which eventually would bring about the apocalypse. Therefore, the foundations of American society were built on the idea of apocalyptic prophecy. This expectation of finality has lingered and is the longest and most deeply lodged legacy of Puritanism in the American popular consciousness (Huntington 1981: 154).

It is, perhaps, predictable that a society founded on religious principles would have some concept of an apocalyptic ending. However, these eschatological concepts have remained potent in American culture. There are a range of complex reasons for this, and to investigate them satisfactorily would require a separate project. Nevertheless, some of these reasons are explored later in this thesis and there are also two major issues that are worth outlining here.

Firstly, it has been previously commented on that while the UK has no official separation of Church and State it is predominantly a secular country. However, America does have such a separation built into its constitution and yet religious

organisations and beliefs have a huge influence on politics and society (Dawkins 2006: 61). For instance, it would be almost unthinkable to have an atheist American president. Consequently, religious ideas about the Second Coming and Revelation still remain potent in American culture.

The second reason is that there is a link between later ideas of America as a great republic and the earlier Puritan desire to create a perfect religious society. A 'City upon a Hill' (Winthrop 1630: URL) became an 'empire of liberty' (Jefferson 1780: 233):

Trusted with the destinies of this solitary republic of the world, the only monument of human rights, and the sole depository of the sacred fire of freedom and self-government, from hence it is to be lighted up in other regions of the earth, if other regions of the earth shall ever become susceptible of its benign influence. (Jefferson 1809, quoted in Tucker and Hendrickson 1992: 7)

There is continuation in Jefferson's ideals for America to be a perfect society of initial Puritan aspirations. A model community of religious purity has become a model nation of freedom and human rights. The ideas of the Puritans and Jefferson's vision of empire both rely on building a new society in a new world.

However, America was not a new world at all and belonged to the Native American Indians for many thousands of years. In fact, the nation of white America (later the U.S.) was founded on a post-apocalyptic land. The arrival of Europeans on the American continent brought about the 'virgin soil epidemics', diseases that the Native Americans had no immunity for.

The scale of the depopulation is scarcely realised, even in recent times. Millions upon millions of Native Americans died. 90% of the population was simply wiped out in some areas (Callicot 2008: 572). By the time the Mayflower arrived America had gone from a land so densely populated you could see the fires of the Natives Americans burning far out to sea (Mann 2006: 48), to a relatively empty land where small communities struggled to survive.

This vast, beautiful, and predominantly uninhabited 'New World' was seen by the Pilgrims, and their descendants, as a paradise provided by God. In reality, it was a decimated post-apocalyptic disaster zone and modern American culture

evolved out of its symbolic ashes. However, this terrible loss of human life did not stop the colonial advancement, the westward expansion, or the continued genocide of Native Americans.

The combination of these aspects of American culture and history – the continuation of religious influences, the desire to build a perfect republic, and the legacy of destruction and death upon which America was founded – served to entrench eschatological beliefs and ideas deeper into American national identity.

The evidence of how deep and enduring these eschatological beliefs are in modern times can be found in their widespread acceptance in American culture. A number of studies have found that approximately 60% of Americans still believe in the apocalypse prophecies described in the Book of Revelation (Kyle 2012: 81).<sup>5</sup>

These views are partly an ideological legacy stretching back to The Promised Land, the ‘City upon a Hill’ that John Winthrop proposed and the ‘empire of liberty’ that Thomas Jefferson wanted. These various beliefs that America has an exceptional position in the world are deeply connected to underlying apocalyptic myths:

the two ends of the American ideological composition: a persistent embrace of progress and modernism, utopia and ascent, but also a suspicion of failure, and the harsh truth of the jeremiad. (2008: 8)

These ideas can also be found in modern American politics. Abraham Lincoln created a phrase that has been since taken and used out of context, but effectively expresses a complex idea. In a speech Lincoln made he referred to freeing slaves as ‘the last, best hope of earth’ (quoted in White 2002: 205). However, this was later quoted by Ronald Reagan (1964) and Barack Obama

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<sup>5</sup> 1983 Gallup poll found 62% of Americans had ‘no doubt’ Jesus would return, a 1994 U.S. News and World report found 60% believed the world would end and Christ would return, and a 2002 Time/CNN survey found 59% say they believe the events in Revelation are going to come true (Kyle 2012: 81).

(2008) in reference to America itself, rather than its particular actions.<sup>6</sup> Reagan and Obama both use this phrase in general, somewhat hopeful, terms.

Nevertheless, it is an odd expression when considered more closely; in fact, it is rather apocalyptic in tone. 'The best' indicates a belief in American exceptionalism and patriotism generally, but 'the last' reveals the American belief in and preoccupation with themes of the apocalypse.

The Book of Revelation conveys concepts of apocalyptic destruction and a new world. Through the religious beliefs of the Puritans and the democratic ideals of the Founding Fathers these ideas became embedded in American national identity. Eschatology has become not simply a belief of certain religions, but a major component in the overall national psyche in America.

### **Time Period**

It is necessary to limit the scope of any study, but there are also some specific reasons for the exclusion of American post-apocalyptic films made before 1968. There are three main cultural shifts that will be explored in relation to the post-apocalyptic genre. They are: the pessimistic national mood in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, Reagan's Presidency and the nuclear anxiety of the 1980s, and 9/11 and the fears which that created in American culture.

1968 has been chosen as a start date because of its tumultuous significance in American history (For example, the My Lai massacre, the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr and Robert Kennedy, Second Wave Feminism leading to increased protests).

In addition, as outlined above, there has been considerable critical work devoted to the cultural significance of the science fiction, including post-apocalyptic narratives, of the 1950s and early 1960s. Therefore, I wish to concentrate my analysis on a time periods in which the post-apocalyptic genre has not received such close critical attention. This will create a more original and useful contribution to the existing discipline knowledge.

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<sup>6</sup> Reagan's full speech can found here: <https://reaganlibrary.archives.gov/archives/reference/timechoosing.html> and Obama's here: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/12/09/remarks-president-commemoration-150th-anniversary-13th-amendment>

The time period of 1968-2013 allows for specific shifts, such as the development of utopian endings in the mid-1970s, the genre hybridity of post-apocalyptic films with the western in the 1980s, and the impact of 9/11 on the genre, to be explored in detail.<sup>7</sup>

The 45 years the project covers is also a long enough time period to enable the analysis to be put in a wider context across time so that recurring patterns and themes can be connected to each other. The relationship between the historical changes and the way in which the post-apocalyptic genre has both shifted and re-articulated similar elements can be clearly mapped across time.

The period under consideration ends in 2013 because I have identified a further shift in the post-apocalyptic genre towards postmodern themes such as relativism and fragmentation of the self. Since this shift has not yet coalesced into either a new set of structures or a new stage in the genre, a full exploration of this change requires greater critical distance. Therefore, this thesis concludes at significant point in the development of the post-apocalyptic genre, while also allowing for further critical exploration of the topic in the future.

The time period also sets this study of post-apocalyptic films apart from previous critical work. This thesis is the first full-length investigation of the post-apocalyptic film genre in American cinema over this wide a time-span. Previous critics, such as Broderick, Sobchack, and Page, have each contributed to the subject knowledge but they have each focused their analysis on a particular time or area (the 1980s, urban science fiction, and the destruction of New York respectively). However, this thesis aims to demonstrate how the deeper structures of the post-apocalyptic film genre evolve across time in response to direct and immediate cultural contexts.

### **Thesis Structure**

This thesis is divided into five major chapters (excluding the introduction and conclusion): the literature review, the methodology, and the three analysis chapters. The three chapters investigate the three time periods that represent important generic and historical shifts. The reasons for the specific dates

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<sup>7</sup> These shifts and how the films in the case studies will explore them are discussed in more detail in the methodology.

chosen are given in the methodology. They also cover the close textual analysis of the three case study films.

The literature review begins by exploring the different ways in which the post-apocalyptic genre can be defined and understood. The post-apocalyptic genre relates to a number of other genres, such as the horror film and the western, and can also be considered as a sub-genre of science fiction. The way in which critics such as Broderick, Curtis, Sobchack, and Page have previously approached aspects of the post-apocalyptic genre and gaps that still exist in the field are discussed next.

The second section of the literature review focuses on eschatological myths and American national identity. The relationships between religious beliefs in the apocalypse, the way in which it offers renewal, and how these relate to the post-apocalyptic narratives in popular culture are discussed.

The methodology begins with the thematic content analysis which narrows down the focus of the project to three representative examples from the corpus that has been identified. These films demonstrate examples of changes in the genre, as well as consistencies. The structuralist critical theory underpinning this thesis is also discussed, particularly in terms of how it has been challenged and how this thesis will incorporate these challenges.

The first analysis chapter is 1968-1976: Pessimism to Optimism (*The Ultimate Warrior*). It considers the way in which the tone of the post-apocalyptic genre changed in this period. The case study will focus on the film's utopian ending, the representations of urban and pastoral environments, and themes of conservative and traditional social values will be analysed.

The second chapter is 1982-1989: The Final Frontier (*Steel Dawn*). The way in which post-apocalyptic films of the 1980s blended genres and the reasons for that merging of generic conventions will be analysed. The chapter also focuses on the frontier mythology, Reagan's Presidency, and the anti-technology themes in the film, and the way that connects to nuclear anxiety.

The third chapter is 2007-2013: Fears and Expectations (*I Am Legend*). This chapter investigates the effect of 9/11 on the post-apocalyptic genre. In particular, the way in which enemies are dehumanised in the film and the

alternative ending which deviated from the generic structure that had been previously established. The way in which the structures of the genre were deconstructed in later films is also discussed.

The thesis concludes by examining the findings of the thesis and what they reveal about the development of the post-apocalyptic genre in American culture. The emerging postmodern themes in the genre are also discussed as the foundation for possible future work.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

The starting point for this thesis is an analysis of a related group of films made in American cinema across different decades. This chapter of the thesis will discuss how critics have conceptualised post-apocalyptic fiction as genre and myths of national identity. In order to provide an underlying theoretical perspective for this investigation, this chapter will begin by considering some of the critical literature on genre. This will be followed by a section on the ways in which critics have understood the relationship between eschatological and post-apocalyptic myths and American national identity. Specifically, it will explore the concept of 'national mythscape' proposed by Duncan Bell (2003) as it relates to eschatological myths.

The first section of this literature review will explore how critics have examined post-apocalyptic films as a genre. It begins with a discussion of how the post-apocalyptic can be defined, either as a sub-genre of science fiction or as a separate genre. The issues involved in creating genre definitions will also be explored through the work of Neale, Sobchack, Suvin, Altman, and others. The section on genre continues by examining the work of those who have studied the cultural role of the post-apocalyptic genre, such as Broderick, Curtis, Page, and Sobchack.

The purpose of this section is to inform the methodology and to ground the analysis through establishing a theoretical foundation for examining the concept of post-apocalyptic films as a genre. Any project which is focused on such contested concepts as genre films and national mythology needs to establish some terms of reference for how they will be understood. The intention of this section is not to find definitive or closed definitions, but rather critical frameworks for examining the topics.

The second section of this chapter will relate to the critical work on eschatological myths in American culture. Critics such as Lisboa, DiTommaso, Berkovitch, and others have characterised eschatological myths as having particular themes and cultural meanings. These ideas will be related to the

significance of these myths to American culture using Bell's concept of 'mythscape'.

The second section serves to establish the ways in which the link between eschatological myths and American culture has been understood critically. This is important in order to identify any gaps in the existing disciplinary knowledge and to build on it through the analysis of post-apocalyptic film narratives.

## **Definitions**

One way to begin is by finding an operational definition of post-apocalyptic fiction as a genre.<sup>8</sup> Defining genre is in and of itself a problematic, possibly inherently flawed, endeavour. Genres do not fit into simplistic categories, and there are always exceptions and revisions. Nevertheless, the aim of this section is not to find a closed and restrictive set of rules, but rather to examine how critical work has approached and understood post-apocalyptic films and fiction in the context of genre.

Defining post-apocalyptic fiction is a task which appears at first to be a straightforward one - post-apocalyptic fiction can be understood as narratives that are set after a catastrophe of epic proportions. Critics have delineated between these narratives, and apocalyptic stories, which take place during a disaster. 'Apocalyptic fiction, whether it is secular or religious, tends to focus on the event itself. This trend is clear in films where the primary focus is surviving the event, not surviving the aftermath' (Curtis 2010: 6).

Post-apocalyptic fiction can also be considered different from dystopian fiction, which takes place in functioning society, however malign:

Post-apocalyptic narratives are often confused with dystopian narratives but are distinctly different. Post-apocalyptic stories focus on the rebuilding or dealing with the destruction of organized civilisation, whereas dystopian narratives deal with problematic on-going societies that are often highly structured. (Eaton 2010: 477)

Similarly, James Comb suggests that the divergence lies in the difference between control and chaos (1993: 27). Control futures are dystopias, such as in

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<sup>8</sup> While this is a widely used term good research practice dictates I acknowledge that my understanding of it came from Mariano Paz's use of it in his study (2010).

Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) or *Brazil* (Dir. Gilliam, 1985), chaos futures are usually post-apocalyptic, for instance *The Road* (Dir. Hillcoat, 2009); there is no unified society or government.

However, despite the clear cut separations that are suggested by these critics, there is a degree of crossover between these three types of narratives. A prime example being *Logan's Run* (Dir. Anderson, 1976), which begins in a dystopian society, but shifts to a post-apocalyptic wilderness and the ruined remains of Washington D.C for the second half of the film.

There are also films which feature stories set in the fairly immediate aftermath of an apocalyptic event, such as *Pacific Rim* (Dir. Del Toro, 2013). In regard to these, one could argue the apocalyptic event is still on-going and therefore the film is a disaster movie. Alternatively, it can be argued that since the narrative is about survival it is post-apocalyptic. However, it can be noted that in this particular example there is still a working government in *Pacific Rim*, it therefore lacks the 'destruction of organized society' that Eaton identifies. Nevertheless, these examples clearly demonstrate some of the issues with trying to uniformly impose genre boundaries on all texts.

Even so, it is possible to draw some conclusions, with the important proviso that these concepts will not apply to every film. While there are exceptions, existing critical analysis suggests that in most of the films in these three categories the narrative unfolds in accordance with the overarching emphasis on either averting disaster, or control and resistance, or chaos and rebuilding. In addition, the above quotes suggest that there is an underlying premise to post-apocalyptic narratives, one related to survival and renewal in the fallout of a massive disaster.

However, this definition can quickly fall into the trap of tautology (post-apocalyptic is after-apocalypse), and of purely describing narrative components (an absence of society, survival in a chaotic world, rebuilding). While these are useful in identifying elements of the post-apocalyptic genre, there is a lack of fluidity to this definition, as has already become clear in trying to differentiate between post-apocalyptic, apocalyptic, and dystopian. The danger here is that

any analysis based on this definition relies on a circular logic, and an inclusive checklist approach (Altman 1984: 7).

When we begin to look outside this initial genre definition and consider post-apocalyptic films and other fiction in a wider context, a number of issues immediately become apparent. One of the most obvious being: is post-apocalyptic fiction a separate genre at all, or is it a sub-genre of science fiction? A sub-genre is a term used 'generally to refer to specific traditions or groupings within these genres (as in 'romantic comedy', 'slapstick comedy', 'the gothic horror film' and so on)' (Neale 2005: 7).

Post-apocalyptic fiction is quite commonly described in academic writing and in reviews and other trade press as a sub-genre of science fiction. The validity of applying such a definition depends on two factors – the size of the role trade press plays in classifying genre, and which of the varying definitions of science fiction one accepts.

The use of trade press to understand the history of a genre can be very effective. One example is Altman's approach to discussing the origins of the western. This is part of his wider examination of how genres change from adjective to nouns, e.g. 'western adventure films' becomes 'a western' (1999: 52).

His research looks closely at film marketing material and reviews to identify when genres began being described in the terms we now assign to them. For instance, the first western is often said to be *The Great Train Robbery* (Dir. Porter, 1903), but Altman maintains that it was not perceived as such at the time, but instead was labelled a railway or crime film (34).

Neale correspondingly argues that to understand genre it is necessary to consider the 'inter-textual relay' which 'refers to the discourses of publicity, promotion and reception that surround Hollywood's films, and includes both trade and press reviews' (2005: 3).

The danger with an over-reliance on trade press and marketing material is that the critic simply catalogues archival material and plays no analytical role. Altman himself has earlier argued that 'the industrial/journalistic term thus founds a hypothesis about the presence of meaningful activity, but does not

necessarily contribute a definition or delimitation of the genre in question' (1987: 13). It is worth noting that Neale counters this argument with the assertion that 'a genre's history is as much the history of a term as it is of the films to which the term has been applied' (2005: 39).

These arguments are part of a wider debate regarding who defines genre: the academic critic or institutional writing (trade press, reviews, marketing). Clearly, a balance is required between overlooking institutional factors in the examination of a genre, and focusing on them to a degree which eclipses analytical interpretation.

In order to effectively consider how post-apocalyptic fiction might be defined as a genre, it is worth considering how the term post-apocalyptic has been used. One of the first references to the term 'post-apocalyptic' is as a sub-genre of science fiction in a 1970 issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (Edward Ferman). It came into more popular usage in reviews and general film criticism during the 1970s (for instance, in the magazine *Filmfacts* in 1975).

In more recent reviews of post-apocalyptic films the term has been used in isolation, with no reference to it being a sub-genre. For example, *Variety* describes *The Book of Eli* (Dir. Hughes Brothers, 2010) as an 'intriguing mix of previous post-apocalyptic pics' (McCarthy 2010: URL). Similarly, the *Washington Post* (O'Sullivan 2010: URL) and the *New York Times* (Dargis 2010: URL) refer to the film as post-apocalyptic.

However, a reviewer from *Entertainment Weekly* labels it 'dystopian' (Gleiberman 2010: URL), which is a, not uncommon, blurring of terms. Indeed, one thing that Altman's research demonstrates is that the Hollywood film industry and journalists are far less concerned with exact labels than academic critics are. In particular, the studios marketing films prefer to use varied or multiple labels (emphasising a film's hybrid or multi-generic status) in order to garner as wide an audience as possible (1999: 38).

Taking Altman's compromise as a model, the use of the term 'post-apocalyptic' in non-academic writing can be used to inform a hypothesis regarding how post-apocalyptic fiction has been defined in cultural discourse. Accordingly, post-apocalyptic fiction can be described as emerging as a sub-genre of

science fiction, and then, possibly, becoming a more defined genre which nevertheless overlaps with other 'bleak future' narratives such as dystopian and apocalyptic.

Therefore, in order to examine how critics have delineated post-apocalyptic fiction in generic terms, it is important to also consider how science fiction has been classified, and how post-apocalyptic fiction relates to that classification.

### **Science Fiction**

Trying to define science fiction is undoubtedly a difficult challenge; it is, even more than most genres, unwieldy and sprawling in its scope and history. Due to this complexity there have been numerous attempts to provide an accurate and comprehensive definition. In truth, none of these can ever be conclusive. Nevertheless in examining a select few it is possible to perceive the complexity of generic categorisation, and how post-apocalyptic film and other fiction specifically fits into that.

One broad definition is by Richard Hodgens, who proposes that:

Science fiction involves extrapolated or fictitious science, or fictitious use of scientific possibilities, or it may be simply fiction that takes place in the future or introduces some radical assumption about the present or the past. (1959: 30)

According to this classification post-apocalyptic fiction is certainly part of the science fiction genre. However, there are problems with Hodgens' definition; one of these being that 'radical assumption' is somewhat vague in its meaning. It could be argued that most fiction outside strict attempts at realism makes radical assumptions about the world. For instance, does not fantasy and horror fiction make the radical assumption that vampires are real?

Hodgens was antagonistic towards much of science fiction cinema,<sup>9</sup> and understood in this context the second part of his definition (radical assumptions) could be interpreted as dismissive – a lesser element in the genre. In the same article that this definition appears in he openly favours consistent scientific logic within narratives, and 'future tense stories' (31). It is not uncommon for

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<sup>9</sup> Hodgens' argued that 1950s science fiction film was 'unoriginal and limited', citing only three films he finds acceptable out of the entire decade (1959: 30-1).

definitions of science fiction to make overt or implicit value judgements about what is and is not 'proper' science fiction. However, these are rarely, if ever, helpful and, as the example of Hodgens demonstrates, can lead to generalisations which lack critical clarity. Nonetheless, by establishing such an open definition of science fiction it is possible to begin examining where greater precision is required.

One of the most famous and debated definitions comes from by Darko Suvin, and here the complexities of these issues expand further. Suvin's definition of science fiction is 'a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of *estrangement* and *cognition*, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment', a framework which Suvin terms '*novum*' (1979: 7-8).

Suvin's definition is based on his understanding of science fiction on its underlying structural interactions, rather than describing its narrative components. Nevertheless, his definition has also been criticised for tautology. Adam Roberts argues that 'cognitive' is almost a synonym for scientific, and 'estrangement' is another word for fiction (2006: 8). Thus, Suvin is merely restating what the genre name already implies: fictional stories about science (*ibid*). However, Mariano Paz counters Roberts' argument by proposing that he has overlooked the way in which Suvin is using these two words:

Contrary to what Roberts believes, estrangement alone would produce works of fantasy, such as fairy tales, myth or horror, in which the presence of supernatural creatures or strange worlds cannot be accounted for scientifically. Conversely, cognition alone would not produce scientific theories or documentaries but works of realism – devoid of the fantastic and the supernatural (since it is always clear that Suvin is speaking of fictional literary texts and not any type of written document). (2010: 38)

Suvin is, therefore, advancing a definition which represents the competing structures that form the foundations of the science fiction genre. It also offers an answer to the question raised by Hodgens' classification – how does radical assumption differentiate science fiction from fantasy? Using Suvin's ideas the

answer is that the radical assumption is an imaginative leap, but one based on cognition or scientific ideas, rather than magical or supernatural ones. It is, according to Suvin, the particular relationship between estrangement and cognition that differentiates science fiction from other genres.

In line with Suvin's definition, post-apocalyptic fiction can be considered part of science fiction, but it is a problematic fit. For instance, in the film *Waterworld* (Dir. Reynolds, 1995) there is clearly estrangement (a world on the water, a man with gills, a tattooed map leading to paradise), cognition (rising sea levels are not only possible, but actually happening due to climate change), and it is certainly a *novum* since the film's writers and director do not live in a flooded world. In this example, I would argue that post-apocalyptic fiction is clearly the progeny of science fiction.

However, a film like *The Road* (Dir. Hillcoat, 2009) complicates this relationship. *The Road* is certainly a *novum*, depicting a grey, burnt, and empty America. Nevertheless, the interaction between cognition and estrangement is not as clear. I would contend that there is nothing in the film that does not exist now; there is nothing impossible or even radically different – no new technology, no aliens, and no super powers. In other words – there is no estrangement as it can usually be applied to science fiction. *The Road* is not realism though, since it is based on imagining a possible future.<sup>10</sup> Other films, such as, *Ravagers* (Dir. Compton, 1979) or *The Divide* (Dir. Gens, 2012), are similarly problematic in terms of the Suvin definition of science fiction.

Obviously, this is not a problem which is confined to post-apocalyptic fiction (a broader example would be *Gravity* (Dir. Cuarón, 2013)). It is an issue which can be applied to a number of definitions of science fiction which rely on the idea that narratives must contain some element of the fantastic.

One resolution to this is offered by Vivian Sobchack who proposes that 'the major visual impulse of all SF films is to pictorialize the unfamiliar, the nonexistent, the strange and totally alien— and to do so with a verisimilitude

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<sup>10</sup> Realism is a problematic and oft-debated term, one that relies to some extent on there being a fixed concept of reality to begin with. However, for the benefit of this discussion I use it simply to mean art which 'undertakes to present a simulacrum' of reality (Becker 1963: 36). Further discussion of the concept can be found in Darío Villanueva's *Theories of Literary Realism* (1997) and Julia Hallam's *Realism and Popular Cinema* (2000).

which is, at times, documentary in flavor and style' (1999: 88). Thus, while science fiction stories and post-apocalyptic fiction will depict a world that does not exist (a future aftermath), it may do so in an extremely believable manner which is grounded in the real world.

At the opposite end of the spectrum the Suvin definition becomes somewhat unsatisfactory again. Some post-apocalyptic fiction offers very limited cognition, and has a strong fantasy or supernatural element. Two good examples of this would be the vampires that feature in *Stake Land* (Dir. Mickle, 2010) and *Priest* (Dir. Stewart, 2011). Here the estrangement element is dominant. In these films, post-apocalyptic fiction can be more clearly defined as being part of the horror genre than science fiction.

### **Horror**

Horror and science fiction are two genres which frequently overlap, 'as has often been noted, it is sometimes very difficult to distinguish between horror and science fiction' (Neale 1999: 85). In relation to post-apocalyptic fiction this boundary is even more blurred. There are a number of reasons for this, and Neale's concept of 'regimes of verisimilitude' (28) provides a useful framework for understanding them.

'Regimes of verisimilitude' could also be called rules of plausibility; they are systems within a genre that govern what the audience finds acceptable and believable. For instance, the whole cast bursting into song and dance in a musical is expected and credible, where it is almost never in a war film (28).

The rule in post-apocalyptic fiction is that the world after is without social rules or laws, 'people are stripped of humanity' (Curtis 2010: 7), thus savagery and brutality abounds. Mick Broderick notes some examples of this tendency within post-apocalyptic fiction:

the punk villain of *World Gone Wild* (1988) reads the "Wit and Wisdom of Charles Manson" to his followers at prayer meetings, and the opening sequence of *Texas Gladiators* features a brutal scene where an evil posse violate nuns and crucify a priest. (1993: 377)

In concurrence with Broderick, my argument is that the norm in post-apocalyptic fiction is for there to be monstrous characters and acts. Significantly these acts

commonly include cannibalism, even in the narratives which are nearer the cognition end of the spectrum, such as *The Road*. I argue, then, that the merging of science fiction with horror in post-apocalyptic fiction is still 'intelligible' in the genre, as it can fit into the accepted rule of brutal savagery. A monstrous vampire feeding off blood is very similar to a savage cannibal feeding off flesh, both in terms of the act itself and the narrative function it fulfils. Returning briefly to the journalistic use of genre terms, the blending of post-apocalyptic and horror genres goes largely unremarked upon. For example, *Stake Land* is simply labelled a 'postapocalyptic horror film' by the *New Yorker* (Diones 2011: URL). There is an overall impression that a merging of horror tropes with a post-apocalyptic narrative is well within the expected variations of the genre.

Sobchack's discussion of the difference between horror and science fiction presents an interesting perceptive:

The horror film is primarily concerned with the individual in conflict with society or with some extension of himself, the SF film with society and its institutions in conflict with each other or with some alien other [...] If one genre is as large as the human soul, the other is as large as the cosmos. Both genres deal with chaos, with the disruption of order, but the horror film deals with moral chaos, the disruption of natural order (assumed to be God's order), and the threat to harmony of hearth and home; the SF film, on the other hand, is concerned with social chaos, the disruption of social order (man-made), and the threat to harmony of civilized society going about its business. (Sobchack, 1999: 29-30)

Films which more overtly merge horror and science fiction, such as the aforementioned examples featuring vampires, provide stimulating sites of discourse for this concept. As has been established in the simpler definitions, post-apocalyptic fiction is about social collapse. Curtis has written about the various ways post-apocalyptic fiction, specifically literature, breaks and rebuilds 'the social contract' (2010). In terms of Sobchack's definition, this seems to firmly locate it as science fiction.

However, as the supernatural elements demonstrate, post-apocalyptic fiction also focuses on the disruption of the natural order, and moral chaos (hence the cannibalism theme), and indeed the destruction of the very concept of home. As Neale's 'regimes of verisimilitude' shows, post-apocalyptic fiction contains aspects of both genres.

Postapocalyptic [sic] fiction describes our fears (of science and technology, of power and incompetence, of the random and uncontrollable, of extinction and, of course, death) and like the horror genre, the catharsis of seeing total destruction either relieves that fear or awakens a need to act to prevent it. (Curtis 2010: 5)

Critical work on the zombie film develops these issues of genre and sub-genre, science fiction and horror still further. The zombie film is closely related to post-apocalyptic fiction; the narrative can take place after the initial apocalyptic 'outbreak', thus shifting the focus to surviving the aftermath. The zombie film also occupies an uneasy place between horror and science fiction.

Zombies are sometimes supernatural occult monsters (estrangement), and so more closely related to the horror genre. However, zombies are frequently explained within the narrative of the film through pseudo-science (cognition), thus placing them in the science fiction genre.<sup>11</sup> The generic identity of zombie films a particularly 'slippery' one (Rogers 2008: 123).

In addition, according to Sobchack's parameters zombie films fit in both genres. They feature narratives that depict the disruption of both social order (destruction of property, mobs, the breakdown of institutions) and natural order (human beings as mindless creatures, cannibalism, killing with moral impunity): 'Zombie plagues erupt as chaos both social and personal' (Rogers 2008: 122). Further comparisons between the post-apocalyptic fiction genre/sub-genre and the zombie film will be discussed below in the section on genre and culture.

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<sup>11</sup> Films such as *Dawn of the Dead* (Dir. Romero, 1978) and *Dead Snow* (Dir. Wirkola, 2009) are examples of zombie films more clearly in the horror genre; these generally indicate a supernatural explanation, such as the 'When there's no more room in Hell, the Dead will walk the Earth' tagline used for *Dawn*. Films such as *28 Days Later* (Dir. Boyle, 2002) and *World War Z* (Dir. Forster, 2013), focus on a pseudo-scientific premise, such as a virus or gene mutation; narratives often concentrate on searching for a cure. However, there is considerable crossover.

These difficulties in defining and classifying a group of films in a certain genre, or indeed defining a genre at all, are a crucial aspect of genre theory. Definition has long been a preoccupation in the study of genre, perhaps particularly in film criticism. As Gledhill argues 'genre is first and foremost a boundary phenomenon. Like cartographers, early genre critics sought to define fictional territories and the borders which divided [them]' (2000: 221-22).

Similarly, Altman writes at length in his 1999 book *Film/Genre* about the reasons for this fixation with definitive classification, such as the Aristotelian tradition of categorisation. The search for fundamental characteristics of a genre is a tempting quest, but it is at best 'ill-conceived' and at worst simply 'impossible' (Jancovich 2002: 469). The above issues regarding definition offer an insight into why this is so.

However, these overlaps are only problematic if the need to insist that genre boundaries remain fixed and 'pure' is maintained. Much of recent genre theory is based on understanding genres as a process which develops and interconnects exactly because of the type of thematic merging and hybridity described above. 'We need to recognize that not all genre films relate to their genre in the same way or to the same extent' (Altman 1984: 8), and indeed the genres themselves are fluid. Genres are not static, but rather subject to change and innovation both because of the influence of cultural, ideological and historical forces, and because of hybridization and new cycles of films.

Post-apocalyptic fiction can be defined as both science fiction and horror, or as a hybrid of both, or a sub-genre which shifts back-and-forth at different times. Nonetheless, these are not the only ways in which critics have understood post-apocalyptic fiction in the context of genre. In order to consider critical work on post-apocalyptic fiction fully, the next section of this chapter will shift from how critics have defined what post-apocalyptic fiction *is* in terms of genre, to what it *does* as a genre.

### **Genre and Culture**

What purpose does genre serve? One oft-cited way in which the functions of genre can be understood is Altman's four concepts underlying the notion of genre itself:

- genre as a *blueprint*, a formula that precedes, programs, and patterns industrial production;
- genre as *structure*, as the formal framework on which individual films are founded;
- genre as *label*, as the name of a category central to the decisions and communications of distributors and exhibitors;
- genre as *contract*, as the viewing position required by each genre film of its audience. (1999: 17)

The breadth of the significance and use that genre and genre film has is immediately apparent from this overview. It is also clear that genre is not a single entity, but rather a system which interrelates with many aspects of films in culture. However, one commonality that can be observed in Altman's definition(s) is that genre is a way of linking people with films as texts. This can either be prescriptive, how a film should be made or marketed, or interpretive, how a film can be understood by critics and audiences.

The relationship between a cultural community (such as a nation) and films offers one way in which to examine a genre. Analysing a film genre in terms of its social function is often based on a ritualist or structuralist approach to genre. The ritual approach argues that genre films are stories told and retold, and the fact that audiences keep choosing to see particular types of films is a demonstration of their beliefs and desires. Genres are 'a form of collective cultural expression' (Schatz 1981:13). The ritual approach largely follows on from the structuralist study of myth, found in the work of Lévi-Strauss and others.

According to Lévi-Strauss 'the purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming contradiction' (1968: 45). Ritual and structuralist approaches analyse genres as myths which overcome conflicting beliefs or desires within society. Their aim is to identify the underlying structures of a genre, and examine how those structures relate to 'ideas, ideals, cultural values and ideological dilemmas central to [...] society' (Neale 1999: 208).

There have been a number of studies which define post-apocalyptic fiction in terms of its social function. These include Claire Curtis' examination of post-

apocalyptic novels as a 21<sup>st</sup> Century exploration of the state of nature; a genre which functions to provide fantasies of starting over and warnings of preventable catastrophe (2010: 3-6). Peter Dendle makes a similar argument regarding the appeal of zombie films, 'post-apocalyptic zombie worlds are fantasies of liberation: the intrepid pioneers of a new world trek through the shattered remnants of the old, trudging through the shells of building and the husks of people' (2007: 54).

The post-apocalyptic setting, whether it be occupied by zombies or not, is one which provides escapism from the modern world, and a fantasy of survival. However, the presence of zombies in this setting does alter some of the underlying structures and themes in the texts.

A number of critics have argued that the zombie film is primarily concerned with the body, and through that, wider social themes. 'Zombification is the logical conclusion of human reductionism: it is to reduce a person to body' (Dendle 2007: 53). The zombie is linked to the concept of the self and to personal identity in various ways.

Connected to this issue of identity is Boon's argument that, '[t]he increased appeal of the zombie in the later twentieth century is linked to the mythology's ability to stir existential anxieties about our own mortality within the larger context of cultural attitudes about the nature of self' (2011: 50). One example that Boon gives of this connection between cultural attitudes and the representation of zombies as manifestations of the self, are fears regarding nuclear war. He argues that the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima (and Nagasaki) caused disillusionment and a loss of faith in the relative certainties of modernity:

Because self was all that remained after the bomb, the loss of self became the greatest fear. If self is lost, all that remains is an abyss of nothingness — precisely what the post-nuclear zombie came to signify.  
(55)

In her article on zombie films and remakes, Meghan Sutherland makes a somewhat similar connection, stating that the reason why zombie films serve as such an effective 'figure of political allegory' is because:

[c]onsumerism, conformity, organized religion, and militarism are only powerful as *institutions of willing bodies*. Accordingly, it is hardly surprising that the convergence of these institutional assemblages haunt the movements of the living and dead alike throughout all of these films. (2007: 66-69)

These critical arguments propose that the zombie film can be understood in relation to underlying structures, namely the relationship between the physical body and the perception of identity. The zombie form is the primary focus of the zombie film sub-genre, this physical form is linked to various broader social and cultural concepts but it remains the core of the narrative.

This link between body and selfhood, and between self and identity both social and individual, is one of the major structures in the zombie film, whereas critical work has not identified these structures in the post-apocalyptic fiction. In post-apocalyptic fiction the theme of survival is frequently recognized but the focus on the self, in the ways outlined above, is absent. Critics have primarily connected post-apocalyptic fiction with structures relating to social and national identity, rather than physical, individual identity. I would, therefore, argue that the zombie and post-apocalyptic film share a number of similarities but have different deep structures and thematic concerns.

The emphasis on social identity in post-apocalyptic fiction has led Curtis to focus her analysis on how post-apocalyptic fiction 'provides flesh to hypothetical' theories about the social contract (e.g. Hobbes). In her study she explores how various post-apocalyptic narratives in literature represent different ideas about the way in which society can function. Curtis explains that the 'state of nature' is the default setting humans will adopt in the absence of a social contract i.e. governance. The aftermath of apocalyptic events create a state of nature, from which various social contracts can emerge. She explores 'the kind of [social] contract that emerges from that state [of collapse]: what do we fear, what do we desire, how do we plan to allay those fears and realize those desires, how can human community help us to accomplish these ends' (Curtis 2010: 4-7).

She examines narratives which imagine a future in which returning to a state of nature does not lead to any further possibilities, others which re-establish existing social arrangements and norms, and also Octavia Butler's novels which offer a radical alternative, partly because it is told from a rare black, female perspective (7).

What Curtis identifies is that post-apocalyptic fiction offers a site for exploring cultural and social issues; how would we relate to each other if the edifices of the modern world were destroyed? 'This new beginning provides a space for exploration and examination of all that we have previously taken for granted: political arrangements, gender norms and social practices' (7). So, whereas the zombie film imagines the body in its 'default' setting, devoid of identity, post-apocalyptic fiction envisions human connections in a state of nature, devoid of a society.

In terms of genre and social function, Curtis' work provides an insight into the appeal of post-apocalyptic narratives (imagining survival in a world without social constraints, imagining an alternative form of civilisation) for audiences. In addition, she suggests some of the underlying structures of the genre are based on this relationship between the fallout of destruction and the opportunity for a new world it provides.

However, while Curtis enhances our understanding of post-apocalyptic fiction, her work is limited to literature. There are differences between post-apocalyptic literature and film. One issue that will become clear in Mick Broderick's analysis of post-apocalyptic *films* is that despite the range of possibilities offered by post-apocalyptic scenarios there are few if any radical alternatives depicted in them. Examining why there is this absence of imagined alternative societies is one of the aims of this thesis.

The fact Curtis concentrates her analysis on literature also raises a recurring issue – many of the full length studies on post-apocalyptic fiction are focused on literature, as opposed to film and other media. Although this is changing as the field of criticism emerges, there is still a gap in current critical literature. In addition, her main emphasis is on how these narratives reflect political and social theories, rather than a fuller analysis of genre structures.

In his 1993 essay 'Surviving Armageddon: Beyond the Imagination of Disaster' Mick Broderick examines the various themes and structures of some post-apocalyptic films, primarily those made in the 1970s and 1980s. His observations regarding the structures of these films, 'generic motifs and tropes' (368), and their social function are helpful in defining these narratives. For Broderick these films are a 'sub-genre of SF cinema which has entertained visions of nuclear Armageddon' (362).

He takes as his starting point the argument that these post-nuclear films are not fuelled by what Susan Sontag termed the 'imagination of disaster', but instead they focus on survival as their 'dominant discursive mode' (362). Broderick identifies four overarching structures relating to nuclear films:

- (1) Preparation for Nuclear War and its Survival,
- (2) Encounters with Extra-terrestrial Post-Holocaust Societies,
- (3) Experiencing Nuclear War and its Immediate Effects, and
- (4) Survival Long After Nuclear War. (365)

His understanding of the post-apocalyptic (post-nuclear) sub-genre is, therefore, one which does not delineate between event and aftermath as distinct narratives. It is worth noting here that Broderick is specifically concerned with nuclear and post-nuclear films, but much of the analysis of his fourth category can be applied to post-apocalyptic films generally.

His inclusion of films before as well as after an apocalyptic event is due to this focus on the nuclear. Broderick conceptualises this sub-genre as a group of films focusing on nuclear war. Thus, Broderick is concerned with nuclear war as the defining element and the generic shifts which reveal how various narratives respond to it (such as emphasising survival as opposed to disaster).

However, when post-apocalyptic films are considered without the analytical focus on the nuclear, it is possible to observe differences in apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives in relation to how they represent and alleviate cultural anxieties. In apocalyptic films, those set before a cataclysmic event, the emphasis is on preventing a final disaster from happening, while enjoying the drama of smaller scale destruction (the most recent *Godzilla* (Dir. Edwards, 2014) film is an excellent example of this formula).

Apocalyptic films offer an immediate, fairly short-lived threat. Humanity and various social institutions must be ingenious, brave, and united to overcome this. The threat is external; it originates from something outside human control although humans collectively may have originally caused it.

The result of these threats is appalling destruction and loss of life, but not the breakdown of civilisation in the long term. It is a crisis. However, the apocalypse is averted. The anxiety is, therefore, alleviated by depicting a group or nation overcoming a threat (Sontag 1976: 131). The apocalyptic film shows humanity (usually represented by America) finally uniting as one in the face of an outside force.

In contrast, the majority of post-apocalyptic fiction portrays a world in which the cataclysmic event was not averted. The anxiety is now generated by whether efforts to rebuild will be successful (Evans 1998: 175). The lawless and barren world, rather than the crisis, must be conquered.

Therefore, Broderick's overarching concept of survival rather than disaster being the major mode of post-apocalyptic films is still very much applicable. However, in a wider consideration of structures and social function it is possible to identify some differences between fictions based on the event and on the aftermath. Broderick does not consider these because he is looking at nuclear as the major genre structure.

Broderick's focus on the nuclear is not unique. There is a distinction in the critical literature on post-apocalyptic fiction between those which focus representations of nuclear war and apocalypse,<sup>12</sup> and those which consider the post-apocalyptic narratives more generally. While both have insights and analysis which can provide frameworks for examining post-apocalyptic fiction, it is also important to recognise that the issues with those that use nuclear as a defining characteristic.

The analysis in these studies is preoccupied with how representations of nuclear disaster relate to social and historical events, and as such do not specifically examine the relationship between the post-apocalyptic genre, or

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<sup>12</sup> For example: Paul Williams' *Race, Ethnicity and Nuclear War* (2011), Joyce A Evans' *Celluloid Mushroom Clouds: Hollywood and the Atomic Bomb* (1998), Jerome F Shapiro's *Atomic Bomb Cinema: The Apocalyptic Imagination on Film* (2002).

sub-genre, and culture. The focus on the nuclear in these studies naturally means that particular elements of films and history relating to the atomic bomb are stressed, while other aspects are receive less critical attention.

In other words, I argue that the analysis is conducted through a certain critical prism, and as such offers restricted interpretations in regard to a wider examination of post-apocalyptic fiction. There may be other historical or textual factors in the composition of the genre than just those relating to nuclear issues. There is, therefore, a need for further study which centres specifically on post-apocalyptic fiction, particularly film, as a genre.

However, in the particular instance of Broderick's essay, the bulk of his analysis focuses on 'Survival Long After Nuclear War' (365), in which he does not differentiate greatly from survival long after any other disaster. Therefore, in terms of understanding the underlying structures of post-apocalyptic fiction it is still very useful.

In a similar vein to Curtis, Broderick argues that two underlying themes in post-apocalyptic films are renewal and catharsis (368-9). These themes are further echoed by Lichtenfeld who agrees that post-apocalyptic films articulate themes of renewal and of restoring order to chaos as a way to reconcile with historical traumas (2007: 132).

Broderick's essay continues on from this identification of key themes to classifying several 'generic motifs and tropes' (368) that define the genre, these include: the mythical hero, the savage villains, conservatism, cults, and temporal shifts (371-77).

Broderick argues post-apocalyptic films feature a messianic action hero who offers a fantasy of redemption. He succinctly labels the hero as an 'exterminating angel' (373). This hero is a 'morally ambiguous character' with a 'predestined role to confront the evil regime' (378). Broderick describes the post-apocalyptic hero as a 'recasting of the Judeo-Christian myth of a messianic hero annihilating oppressive tyranny' (375). The hero and those he defends are structured in opposition to the 'evil' forces; frequently a 'neo-feudal aristocracy' who 'have adopted postures antithetical to that of the good survivors' (377).

This opposition leads a reassertion of 'an earlier, superseded morality and social ethos' which usually involves an idealisation of 'agrarian toil and simplistic lifestyle' (376). Broderick contends that post-apocalyptic films advance 'conservative social regimes and patriarchal law (and lore)' (362) through these structures and tropes.

It is clear that Broderick's findings differ considerably from Curtis'. While she found some, albeit limited, examples of radical new societies in literature, Broderick's analysis of films reveals not only a reassertion of current social norms, but a return to even less progressive values.

His overall argument is that we can define post-apocalyptic films as a myth which articulates cultural concerns and desires regarding a future ruled by survival. The savage villains are a cathartic extremis against which the hero is opposed. The main appeal of the myth is that it offers a ritual. This is not a ritual of imagining new types of civilisation as Curtis argues, but of returning to a simpler time, one ruled by a traditional morality. In tandem with these arguments, Broderick proposes that these films are based on 'an archaic mythology steeped in heroic acts, inspired and propelled by some inscrutable and predetermined divine cosmic plan' (363).

There are a number of criticisms of the ritual approach to genre that Broderick adopts. Neale argues, in reference to genre criticism in a Hollywood context, that:

ritual theory is heavily dependent on the assumption that audiences are or were American, that American audiences are representative of the American population, and that the American population as a whole is always preoccupied in the same way with the same cultural issues and dilemmas. (1999: 213)

Undoubtedly, this is an accurate criticism. Broderick does make this type of generalisation; and he does not confine it to American audiences, but rather refers to a generation loving a post-holocaust future (1993: 363). His example films are taken from world cinema, suggesting that he is arguing that the impact this post-nuclear sub-genre had was global. To assume the feelings and anxieties of an entire worldwide generation seems somewhat ambitious.

In addition, while he charts examples and 'modes' from various eras, starting with 'pre-existing generic field' and loosely covering the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, he gives very little specific historical context. His references are mainly confined to pre-and post-Hiroshima. Additionally, he does not specify who the audience of these films might be, or as that is not his focus of study, he does not specify that he will not be exploring the issue of audience. In Broderick's defence he is limited in space, and the majority of his analysis is centred on the recurring tropes within these films, rather than their effect on or relationship with audiences.

However, it is possible to be more specific than Broderick regarding the relationships between the narratives and the cultural in which they exist. For instance, in his essay on apocalyptic myths and post-colonialism in America, Jon Stratton states that:

The myths with which I will be concerned are *characteristically utilized* by the American white, Anglo-Irish, male middle-class, for this group has dominated the nation's power structure. Nevertheless, other groups within the United States can and do use the same myths for their own purposes. (my italics, 2000: 22)

Stratton is, therefore, not making the assumption that everyone uses the myths he is analysing, or that those who do use it are representative of the American people as a whole.

I would argue that this is a step removed from the Lévi-Straussian concept of myth as dominating a whole culture, but it fits well into modern genre theory which emphasises various audience communities interpreting and using genre.<sup>13</sup> As Moine argues, 'genres are only living for a community to the exact extent that its members find themselves in them, and see their relationships with others and the world mediated through them' (2008: 208).

The second response to the criticism of homogenisation is that while making claims based on the idea that an entire population has the same concerns is clearly on shaky ground, nations do not operate as a collection of totally unconnected individuals. It is not a radical assumption that certain

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<sup>13</sup> For example, Altman 1999, Neale 1999, Staiger 1992.

communities, either large or small, have some shared beliefs and anxieties. These will not be uniform, but mixed and interrelated.

For instance, while Broderick may be overstating the effect of post-apocalyptic films, in the period he examines (1970s and 1980s) it is accurate to suggest there was a great deal of anxiety in America relating both to nuclear warfare and other upheavals in American society. That cycles of post-apocalyptic films connect to that anxiety in various ways is also a solid, if broad, assertion.

Broderick is specifically arguing that these films respond to nuclear anxiety by imagining life 'beyond disaster into survival' (1993: 370) set in a distant future. Thus, Broderick argues, the films are allowing the audience to dismiss the terrifying problems associated with the events of nuclear war (362). Broderick claims that these films, in order to create a narrative based on a post-nuclear world, 'have returned to familiar mythological and iconographic terrain' (371). He, therefore, considers post-nuclear films in terms of responding to social concerns, and adopting not just the ritual of genre, but older mythological narratives.

However, while he provides some insightful analysis of how the forces of good and evil are represented in this context, his examination is mainly concerned with comparing films to each other. Further analysis which examines the role of mythological structures in modern post-apocalyptic films in greater detail and depth is required.

When examining such structures in relation to the ritual approach problems can occur when two parallel suppositions are made – that these structures apply to all films in a genre equally, and that these structures represent specific and unchanging cultural concerns. Broderick's analysis does suffer from both to a certain extent. Although he gives multiple examples of films which contain the structures he identifies, he does not reference any films that do not fit his genre definition. His analysis also lacks a fuller historical context in terms of how these films might have developed, or how the concerns they relate to might have influenced that development.

Nevertheless, I would argue that these negatives do not negate Broderick's analysis of the post-apocalyptic genre. His concepts of post-apocalyptic fiction

being defined by survival, and his concept of returning to structures from earlier narratives are largely supported by Curtis (2010: 5-7), and others critics (such as Maria Manuel Lisboa 2011, Lorenzo DiTommaso, 2009). Indeed, his ideas are extremely useful in understanding how post-apocalyptic fiction functions as a genre. However, his conception of the genre is limited because it rests on narratives concerned with nuclear disaster, and on assumptions that are not fully explored. In addition, more work is needed in regard to the way in which post-apocalyptic fiction relates to other genres or sub-genres.

Genres should be recognised as relational concepts which are subject to film cycles and interbreeding, and which are influenced and changed by historical events and industry practices (Moine 2002: 207). This is not to suggest genres do not have underlying structures, and these structures do not relate to cultural concerns, but rather that these structures and concerns are flexible and open-ended.

If we accept that genres are connected to underlying cultural themes, then there needs to be a broader context. Neither genres nor their themes 'spring full-blown from the head of Zeus' (Altman 1984: 8). A historical study which maps the changes in a genre against those in society can avoid this lack of context.

Max Page's study of post-apocalyptic fiction is a chronological exploration of New York's destruction in fiction. His book aims to examine at 'every generation[s...] reasons for destroying New York' (2008: 7). The analysis begins in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century with paintings, photographs, and written fiction, and ends with a discussion of post-9/11 New York in fiction. It is worth noting Page does not confine himself to post-apocalyptic fiction, but any fictional destructive event.

One striking insight that this study offers is the way that the imagery recurs. For instance Walter Harrison Cady's paintings of a damaged and destroyed Statue of Liberty used to sell war bonds in 1917, are visually very similar to images in films such as *Planet of the Apes* (Dir. Schaffner, 1968), or *The Day After Tomorrow* (Dir. Emmerich, 2004). Page notes that 'the recurrence of similar modes of death across time stands out' (2008: 4).

Page pays particular attention, then, to the ways in which imagery can define genre. The visual elements of films can be used as a way of classifying genre films, 'the major defining characteristics of a genre will be visual: guns, cars, clothes in the gangster film; clothing and dancing in musical (apart from the music, of course!); castles, coffins and teeth in horror movies' (Buscombe 1970: 41). Although as Neale cautions, many films lack a specific iconography (1999: 14).

There is limited critical work on the iconography of post-apocalyptic films, largely because of the dearth of work on films in general that was noted earlier. An exception would be Page's study, as well as Sobchack's analysis of urban science fiction which is discussed below. Indeed, the work that is on the imagery of post-apocalyptic films is largely focused on urban settings.<sup>14</sup> There are some notable exceptions to this issue, work which references a frontier-like setting<sup>15</sup> or ruins.<sup>16</sup> However, even among these examinations the focus is often on the thematic rather than the iconographic.

This is somewhat surprising because I would argue that the post-apocalyptic film genre or sub-genre can be defined, at least in part, by its iconography. Additionally, as discussed in the introduction chapter, in American culture post-apocalyptic themes were expressed in images in art before they were communicated in literature. The visual representation of the post-apocalyptic is therefore very dominant in American popular culture.

Page's analysis suggests there are images of post-apocalyptic ruin which recur various texts. In addition, there are some dominant settings which can be identified by critical examinations of post-apocalyptic films, such as the frontier or future west, the ruins, and the urban. However, these settings have been analysed in isolation rather than compared and contrasted in one study. Other images spring to mind such as ragged mismatched clothing, the lone hero in

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<sup>14</sup>, For example: 'Under Darkened Skies: The city in science fiction film' (John R Gold), or 'The Matrix Franchise' (Henry Jenkins).

<sup>15</sup> For example: *Future West: Utopia and Apocalypse in Frontier Science Fiction* (William H Katerberg)

<sup>16</sup> For example: "'Road of Giants': Nostalgia and the Ruins of the Superhighway in Kim Stanley Robinson's 'Three Californias Trilogy'" (Helen Burgess) – although this essay is also about literature.

the wasteland, the leftovers of civilisation (e.g. burnt out or abandoned cars), and shanty town communities.

Page argues that, in relation to New York, the appeal of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic imagery is its visually appealing and impactful quality, 'no place looks better destroyed than New York' (2008: 16). In this he echoes Sontag's wider argument that 'the aesthetics of destruction' are about 'the peculiar beauties to be found in wreaking havoc, making a mess' (Sontag 1976: 128). Thus, the fantasy of starting over, survival and rebuilding, which Curtis and Broderick identify are underlined by a thrill of seeing the world in ruins, laid bare, and emptied of almost all its inhabitants.

A consequence of Page's overview of the recurring appeal of images of New York's destruction is that it allows a new insight into the important relationship between 9/11 and American culture. One key point that Page makes clear is that while 9/11 had a profound effect – 'a powerful sense of unease that pervaded American culture immediately after 9/11' (2008: 202) – images of New York's destruction had been prevalent since the 1800s. 'Popular culture has been a dress rehearsal for the city's destruction for decades' (199). While 9/11 was a watershed moment, it was also part of a continuum of narratives and imagery that are interwoven with America's history. These ideas will be explored in more depth in a later chapter on post-apocalyptic films and 9/11.

This overview of post-apocalyptic fiction from a historical perspective reveals the way in which it is intertwined with American culture and society. While this is largely the same conclusion Broderick draws, it is contextualised and evidenced by the analysis of fiction and events across time.

The breadth of the overview that Page undertakes does mean that in places he is cataloguing history and fiction side-by-side. The details of the texts are certainly not examined in a great deal of depth. However, Page is not attempting a history of the post-apocalyptic fiction genre; rather he is investigating how New York's death fits into American culture (2008: 9).

One analysis that includes the imagery of post-apocalyptic films, and which offers both an historical overview and a consideration of underlying structures is Vivian Sobchack's essay 'Cities on the Edge of Time: The Urban Science

Fiction Film' (1999). In order to achieve both these approaches she narrows her examination to tracing some of the iconography of urban science fiction.

She argues there are two images of destruction in the films of the 1950s: there is the destruction of monuments that civilization is proud of, and there is the city filled with a deadly still and emptiness. She goes on to refer to the city as a body in pieces in the 1970s, and the post-modern city of the 1990s as boundless and insecure (1999: 130-140). Her emphasis is not on the historical moments, but she suggests that these urban images are part of 'a larger historical narrative' (125).

Overall Sobchack clearly links urban images in science fiction film to cultural concerns and beliefs, 'these historically shifting urban images express lived structures of meanings' (1999: 124). She identifies films in the 1930s as focusing on vertical imagery and thus expressing an aspirational theme: 'equating "height" with the active reach of human aspiration, the "loftiness" of the city stands concretely as its most aesthetically significant social value' (128). The imagery of later films becomes more pessimistic and focuses on the horizontal to greater extent. In fact, Sobchack argues that this urban iconography reflects death with skyscrapers and cities symbolising graveyards (132).

Sobchack's analysis further underlines Page's study in that it reveals how imagery can reflect underlying structures, and presents a compelling case for the way in which post-apocalyptic fiction is interwoven with American culture. The thematic structures of aspiration and pessimism, of vertical and horizontal, and of past and future are not entirely disconnected from the structures and themes Broderick identifies, such as redemption and barbarity, traditional and modern. In both examinations post-apocalyptic fiction is deeply connected to cultural anxieties about the future and about reconciling aspiration with pessimism.

These various critical approaches offer a wide range of frameworks for understanding the post-apocalyptic fiction genre. Nonetheless, there are gaps. Broderick, for instance, suggests a number of structural and thematic concepts, but takes as his starting point nuclear war and its aftermath, thus shifting his

interpretation away from examining the specifics of post-apocalyptic films. Curtis offers insight into the appeal of the genre, but her study is limited to literature. There is an absence of a clear conception of what the post-apocalyptic film genre might be understood as in its entirety.

In addition, these definitions focus on various aspects of generic classification. Some concentrate on what the genre is, for example, a narrative set in the aftermath of catastrophe that can contain elements of horror or science fiction. Others emphasise what the genre does, for instance, a series of thematic structures which articulate cultural anxieties throughout modern history, or a ritual fantasy of survival. It is difficult to articulate a framework for examining post-apocalyptic film, or indeed any genre, without excluding some aspect of these definitions.

### **Semantic/Syntactic**

One solution adopted in different ways by a number of critics is Altman's Semantic/Syntactic approach.<sup>17</sup> Influenced by sociolinguistics, Altman's focus is on components that form a genre: the semantic element (the ingredients of the genre), the syntax (the patterns or structures that organise genres). It is clear how this can be applied to the critical definitions outlined above to create a workable definition for the post-apocalyptic genre.

In his 1999 book *Film/Genre*, Altman adds a third element to this framework: pragmatics. These are the uses to which genres are put. By this Altman means studying a 'constellated community'; that is groups who share and use a genre in multiple ways (161).

The cornerstone of his approach is that the components within films, the patterns and connections across films, and the interpretation of these by different audiences can be analysed.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, genre is a cross-section of shifting elements which can coalesce into a stable structure.

One advantage of this approach is that, as Moine states:

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<sup>17</sup> For example: Tim Kane's *The Changing Vampire of Film and Television: A Critical Study of the Growth of a Genre* (2006), David Alan Black's *Law in Film: Resonance and Representation* (1999), or Robert T. Eberwein's *The War Film* (2004).

<sup>18</sup> This thesis will not focus on reception studies in the way Altman suggests, however, it is useful to incorporate the idea of how genres are utilised into the wider analysis.

Films do not always become attached to a genre for the same reason: some actively contribute to the development of syntax for the genre, others pick up in a less systematic way the traditional elements associated with a genre. The double approach, semantic and syntactic, emphasizes the imbrication of these different traits, thus providing the possibility of defining, for a given genre, different levels of genericity. (2008: 58)

However, as a number of critics, including Altman himself, identify there is an issue with using this approach in that it may be unclear which are semantic and which are the syntactic elements within a particular genre (Neale 1999: 204). However, this is more problematic in terms of writing a genre history. For the purposes of creating a critical definition which enables further textual analysis it can, and has, been used effectively (as the examples in Footnote 17 demonstrate).

For this project, it provides a way of bringing together the various definitions of post-apocalyptic fiction in an effective critical framework which can then be applied to the parameters of this thesis. The details of this will be discussed in the methodology. Altman's semantic/syntactic approach is examined in both this chapter and the methodology due to the fact that it is important to establish the theoretical implications and significance of his work before applying it as a mode of analysis.

### **An Operational Definition of Post-apocalyptic Fiction**

The operational definition of post-apocalyptic fiction that will be used in this thesis is based on the above exploration. This definition will mainly be applied to post-apocalyptic film, as this is the primary subject of this thesis. However, some elements of it are applicable to post-apocalyptic narratives in other media.

I argue that post-apocalyptic fiction does not sit altogether easily as part of science fiction or horror. It contains too many examples of estrangement for the former, and too many examples of cognition for the latter. It is based on social chaos by its very premise, but this leads to the disruption or destruction of the

natural order as well. In addition, there are other influences on post-apocalyptic fiction, such as the fantasy genre and religious narratives.

The hypothesis suggested by the terms used in trade press is that post-apocalyptic fiction developed as a sub-genre of both science fiction and horror, but can also be regarded as a separate hybrid genre. I shall proceed on the basis of this proposition, and regard post-apocalyptic fiction as a separate hybrid genre, which by its very nature interrelates to a number of generic patterns and tropes.

However, defining post-apocalyptic fiction as a hybrid genre does not reveal any greater insight into how it actually functions. While the structuralist/ritualist approach has its limitations, I argue that examining the post-apocalyptic genre in these terms reveals a considerable amount of structural and thematic consistency.

Curtis and Broderick both identify its generic appeal as being a cathartic fantasy of survival. However, both critics establish that while survival is an important theme, it is the way in which society is destroyed and rebuilt with new ideologies that is a major underlying structure (though these ideologies are much more conservative in cinematic narratives).

Equally, Page and Sobchack demonstrate how the imagery of post-apocalyptic fiction can reinforce the generic appeal of exploring an empty destroyed world. Sobchack in particular shows how the iconography can represent structures and oppositions, such as aspiration and pessimism. All these critics, but particularly the latter two, reveal how the structures of the post-apocalyptic genre are interwoven with American history and culture.

To incorporate these concepts of structures and ritual with the initial definition of post-apocalyptic film as a hybrid genre set in the aftermath of an immense catastrophe which mixes science fiction, horror, pioneer tales, utopian stories, religious narratives, we can apply Altman's semantic/syntactic approach.

The post-apocalyptic film genre can be defined as having semantic elements, such as the iconography discussed above. While individual elements may occur in other genres, their particular combination can contribute to a definition. These elements can include: a post-catastrophe setting (wasteland/empty

city/ruins), an absence of social institutions, the leftovers of civilisation (e.g. burnt out or abandoned cars), a violent messianic hero, barbaric forces of evil (cannibals/vampires), ragged mismatched clothing, small struggling communities in shanty towns, pastoral paradise.

In addition, there is the syntax: imagined aftermaths, past and future but more specifically past as future, fantasies of survival, social chaos and devastation being overcome by conservative values and the establishment or discovery of a utopian community. There also structures such as the remnants of the modern and urban relating to a privileging of the traditional and rural, conservatism and religion, heroic redemption versus cannibalistic barbarity, carnal desires and monstrous acts, technology as powerful but dangerous.

It is, of course, the relationship between semantic elements and syntax which allows an in-depth study of any genre. The alterations in this relationship offer a great deal of insight into how the genre has been influenced by historic events, and how it connects with culture. There will be a greater discussion of how this analysis will be applied in the methodology. I will examine these alterations in relation to national identity myths, which will be investigated next.

## **National Mythscape**

In this section the way in which critics have explored the relationship between post-apocalyptic mythology (such as religious narratives) and American national identity will be examined. The foundation for considering these ideas is Duncan Bell's concept of 'national mythscape' (2003). While these subjects could easily be analysed as a project in their own right; the section below contains some key critics relevant to this particular thesis.

Before proceeding with any discussion of American national mythscape, it is necessary to discuss what is meant by 'America', and 'American national identity'. Since this thesis sometimes refers to a historical period before the United States were established as such, I use the term 'America' and not 'the U.S.' to avoid confusion.

While this simplification is not uncommon, it is also not without its issues. Janice Radway's article 'What's in a Name?' (1999) challenges the use of the term 'America' to describe the U.S., several critics have concurred and highlighted it as an 'imperial gesture' (Pease 2001: 80). Their argument is that in using America to refer only to the U.S. the other nations on the continent are eclipsed, ignored or subsumed by American culture. This debate regarding the very use of the term America, and American Studies, is part of a wider reassessment of how to approach American national and cultural identity.

Work on American culture has been challenged for the way in which it ignores regional, ethnic, and gender differences in the experience and understanding of America. In particular, several of the studies on myth (Henry Nash Smith's *Virgin Land*, Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden*, Richard Slotkin's *Regeneration through Violence*) have been criticised for ignoring the diverse reality of America and promoting American exceptionalism (Fisher 1991: xiv). Nevertheless, even critics who examine the subject of the U.S. or North America from a more relational view that tries to consider a wider context still recognize the powerful 'New World' foundational narratives (Siemerling 2005: 2), and the role of myths in forming national identity (Pease 2009: 5).

While the idea of a shared, unified myth which explains the experiences of all Americans is no longer viable, the concept of myths as elements which form

part of a wider context, especially in popular culture, is still useful in understanding America. Benedict Anderson argues that mass communication assists in the process of creating such communities, including nations.

He explores the difficulties of defining any nation in a concrete and factual manner, quoting Hugh Seton-Watson 'I am driven to the conclusion that no "scientific definition" of nation can be devised: yet the phenomenon existed and exists' (1977: 5). Instead, Anderson argues that nations can be understood 'by the style in which they are imagined' (2006: 6). Analysing the shared cultural creations of a nation must surely be an important aspect of understanding them.

All nations are created from a series of narratives, myths, and shared ideologies and symbols. As such the collective conception of the American nation is partly constructed from cultural texts, including films. However, rather than try and categorically define American national identity, this section will discuss the role of the American mythscape in relation to post-apocalyptic and eschatological narratives.

The term 'national mythscape' is taken from Duncan Bell's essay 'Mythscape: memory, mythology, and national identity' (2003). Bell uses the term as a new approach to understanding how national identity is formed. Rather than focusing on how individuals define a nation, he concentrates on how memory and myth are used to forge and reproduce national identity (64-5).

Bell defines national mythscape as a 'discursive realm, constituted by and through temporal and spatial dimensions, in which the myths of the nation are forged, transmitted, reconstructed and negotiated constantly' (75). There are obvious links between Bell's ideas and Anderson's concept of a nation as an 'imagined community', which 'is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion' (2006: 6).

It is fair to deduce that one of the ways in which this imagined communion is achieved is through a sense of shared history, both real and mythologised. Bell states that these myths form 'a story of the origins of the nation and of

subsequent momentous events and heroic figures' (2003: 75). A significant component of the mythscape is, therefore, mythologised history.

In America this would include the arrival of the Pilgrims, the battles with 'Indians', the frontier, the American Revolution, the Civil War, the Roaring Twenties, the Great Depression, World War II, the Swinging Sixties, Vietnam, 9/11. All of these events and movements did happen, but the way in which they are collectively remembered is embellished, simplified, and sentimentalised over time.

However, there is another type of myth that contributes to the mythscape. National identity is created both by 'real events (slavery, the First World War, the Holocaust) or narratives of ancient origins or of prelapsarian "golden ages" (the epic Finnish Kalevala, or King Arthur and the Round Table)' (Bell 2003: 70-1). It is these latter narratives which are of primary concern in this thesis, although they are interwoven with mythologised history.

Curtis observes post-apocalyptic narratives are deeply connected to origin stories (2010: 6). I would argue that they also allow a return to an age of innocence or purity. Indeed, because of this connection they have been a crucial part of the identity of many nations and peoples. This is particularly true for those that are newly formed, invaded, or in crisis; for example the Jews under Roman rule. At these times nations use the supposedly imminent Judgement Day to either define the ideals that will ensure the community is spared God's wrath, or justify the nation's suffering as the first phase of the apocalyptic cycle. As well as appealing to the sin of all nations, hubris or vanity, these myths have endured because they contain a powerful combination of fear and longing.

Sontag argues that modern apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic films serve a similar function because they 'project a Utopian fantasy' (1976: 126-7), which reflects and allays widely held anxieties (131). Thus, these films continue to connect the fear of external threats with a desire for a new world or new social order.

Both as myths and as modern films these stories create a sense of group identity and reinforce the idea of a combined destiny. These narratives

contribute to the national mythscape because they are part of a process in which a sense of national identity is:

constantly reaffirmed and reproduced through resonant rituals and symbols. This memory acts as a powerful cohesive force, binding the disparate members of a nation together: it demarcates the boundary between Them and Us, delineating the national self from the foreign, alien Other. (Bell 2003: 71)

Bell's focus is on the way in which myth and memory forge national identity. One aspect that is different from most national myths is that in apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic narratives it is the future, rather than the past, that is used to give a sense of national identity. This focus on the future links to the idea of new nations.

This is an aspect that has an obvious appeal in America where, it has often been observed, the present and future are of more importance than the past: '[t]o some degree, surely, the lack of usable past must have encouraged American writers to look to the future for their myths' (Ketterer 1976: 153).

To properly discuss how and why post-apocalyptic films might be considered as myths in American culture, we must first establish what is meant by the term 'myth'. There are a variety of definitions; however, the simplest explanation of myth in modern culture is that it is:

a story told and retold that conveys a sense of identity, who a group is in relation to other groups, explains how and why they came into being as a group, and defines and codifies their way of life. (Ferrell 2000: 10)

However, this explanation only tells us what a myth is, it does not tell us how myths actually function in culture. The best way to understand that is to examine the work of a critic who has analysed myths in American culture.

Richard Slotkin begins his study of the mythology of the American frontier, *Regeneration through Violence*, with his own definition:

A mythology is a complex of narratives that dramatizes the world vision and historical sense of a people and culture, reducing centuries of experience into a constellation of compelling metaphors. The narrative

action of the myth-tale recapitulates that people's experience in their land, rehearses their visions of that experience in its relation to their gods and the cosmos, and reduces both experience and vision to a paradigm [...] It draws on the content of individual and collective memory, structures it, and develops from it imperatives for belief and action. (1973: 6-7)

Slotkin's initial definition expands upon Ferrell's and introduces the idea of metaphor as a way in which myths express ideas, as well as the idea of structuring beliefs and experience. His definition is useful in understanding the concept of myth in general. When we begin to breakdown that definition, it is clear that there are a number of key concepts about myths within it. Slotkin depicts myth as a process in three phases.

The first phase is dramatizing the experience and history of a culture. The second phase is creating metaphors for these experiences that add up to a structured whole, a paradigm. The third phase is that this myth then feeds back into the culture that produced it, dictating belief and reaffirming the ideas that originally influenced it. And so on in a cyclical pattern, until the myth becomes a fixed part of the culture.

### **Promised Land and Utopia**

One way in which the relationship between eschatological myths and the wider mythscape of American national identity can be understood is through the concept of the Promised Land narratives. Part of the mythologised history of the Pilgrims and later Puritan settlers is that they believed America to be a second Eden. Indeed, the Puritans did view the country of America in religious, and apocalyptic, terms, believing it to be 'the product of divine providence' (Cassara 1982: 64). However, this was partly because they, like so many other settlers and immigrants, projected their own ideas onto America (64).

The reality was that far from Eden or Paradise, the Puritan's new society was established in a hostile environment (64). Similarly, Roderick Nash argues that rather than seeing the wilderness as a paradise, they saw it as a dangerous place which must be overcome in order to build perfection (2001: 35).

Nevertheless, what has predominantly survived in American culture is the myth of discovering a paradise and building a utopia.

This concept of America as a Promised Land has remained a highly tenacious one, and it has fed into a whole host of other stories and symbols which occupy the national mythscape. Some examples can be found in political rhetoric, such as America being 'the sole depository of the sacred fire of freedom and self-government, from hence it is to be lighted up in other regions of the earth' (Jefferson 1809, quoted in Tucker and Hendrickson 1992: 7), a sentiment popularised as 'the land of the free'. Other examples can be found in the numerous real-life attempts to build a utopian community in America, the Oneida community being the most famous of these (Firchow 2008: 3).

The most overt effect of this notion of America as a special place, a potential utopia, is the concept of American Exceptionalism. A general definition of American Exceptionalism is 'that the United States differs qualitatively from other developed nations, because of its unique origins, national credo, historical evolution, and distinctive political and religious institutions' (Koh 2005: 225).

However, when that belief in America as utopian or exceptional is not supported by reality, then eschatological myths can and do manifest themselves as prophecy. If America has become corrupted by modern life then it will be cleansed by the Second Coming or Judgement Day. This is not a fanciful notion for many Americans, but a genuinely held belief. A 2014 report on attitudes to climate change by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), based on random sampling from all 50 states, found the number of Americans who believe natural disasters are evidence of the apocalypse has increased since 2011, from 44% to 49% (Jones, et al 2014: 4).

This connection with the apocalypse as retribution for sin is the other side of the Promised Land myths, but it is very much part of the same national mythscape. It is what Maria Manuel Lisboa refers to as the desire for 'the big Spring clean' (2011: 155), in her study on end of the world myths. The eschatological myths primarily rest on promising the achievement of perfection through a purge of undesirable elements (ibid). While there are a number of variations to

Armageddon narrative, many include the world being wiped clean so that a chosen few can rebuild it as paradise (159).

Lisboa further argues that utopias are fundamentally based on eradicating something, 'utopia is only achievable at the price of exclusion or elimination (of difference, of dissent [...] the elimination of individual autonomy)' (2011: 149). Everyone can only all be happy if they are all the same.

The well-known etymology of utopia is that it is a pun by Thomas More: utopia can be understood as 'ou-topos' meaning no-place, or 'eu-topos' meaning good place (Ferns 1999: 2). Thus, a utopia is a good place that does not, perhaps cannot, exist. This ambiguity in the very definition of the word utopia has not prevented a huge range of utopian fiction and criticism being written since More's *Utopia*.<sup>19</sup>

Utopian concepts can be related to social, philosophical, and political ideologies and theories; while this is not overtly connected to the research of this project it is important to consider that a utopia can represent cultural and social ideas. Of greater relevance is utopia as a form of science or fantasy fiction.

The most basic definition of positive utopia in relation to fiction is a:

non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived. (Sargent 1994: 9).

Sargent's definition is specifically about utopian writing in literature, but the definition can be extended to cover film and other media. It is helpful to consider how utopia interrelates with eschatological myths and narratives.

Utopia is part of the apocalypse, 'the original Apocalypse includes both catastrophe and fulfilment [...] Utopia and the extinction of the human race all at once' (Jameson (2005: 199). Jameson goes on to comment that this is often imagined in films and other fiction as 'the protagonist and a small band of other

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<sup>19</sup> A fuller examination of utopian fiction is not possible, or particularly helpful, within the parameters of this project, although this is explored to a certain extent in the case study chapters. Peter Fitting's article 'A Short History of Utopian Studies' (2009) is an excellent overview which provides exactly the information his title suggests. He covers major critical contributions such as Joyce Hertzler's 1923 book *The History of Utopian Thought*, the work of Darko Suvin and Lyman Tower Sargent, and more recently Fredric Jameson.

survivors of the catastrophe go on to found some smaller and more liveable collectivity after the end of modernity and capitalism' (ibid). As with some of the elements discussed above the theme of renewal and utopia in post-apocalyptic films is partly derived and adapted from the eschatological prophecies which saw paradise emerge after the destruction and war.

Bringing these different concepts of utopia together it can be understood as an impossible place that is perfect, or at least superior to modern society, and has a symbiotic relationship with the apocalypse and post-apocalypse. The definition of utopia in the context of this project is then: a place or community that is free from failures and tyranny and provides a safe, happy environment to live in.

Ketterer describes the 'American imagination' as 'obsessed with dreams of a utopia' (1974: 23). However, Kitch argues that attempts to make this utopian dream a reality all eventually proved unsatisfactory (2000: 24). Therefore, the idea of achieving paradise is woven into the fabric of American culture, but it is only in fiction that this has been truly possible.

### **Post-apocalypse and Politics**

The influence of eschatological myths on American national identity has been observed and examined in various ways by a number of critics,<sup>20</sup> and as John Wiley Nelson colloquially remarks 'apocalyptic is as American as the hot dog' (1982: 179). However, any study of myth is in danger of suffering from the same issues which can be attributed to some structuralist-ritualist genre approaches. Namely, that in discussing national mythscapes, or myths that forge national identity, there is an assumption of a homogenised population, and/or a tendency to flatten out the historical complexities of the ways these myths are used.

Bell warns that national identity should not be considered as a 'unified, coherent memory shared amongst *all* of the people concerning their national past', rather he points out 'its fragile nature', which is in 'constant need of sustenance'

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Zamora (1982), Kitch (2000), Bercovitch (1993), Woodward (2001), and Barter (1986).

(2003: 70). Indeed, he argues that individual or minority memories may 'directly contradict such mythology(s), whether governing or subaltern. Memories may fall instead into the private, silenced tideways of time, or they could be employed as a site of opposition to myth' (77).

He gives the example of African-American homosexuals who 'likely have a storehouse of memories that run counter to both the governing mythology of the USA and also the predominant subaltern mythology of Black male oppression and resistance, with its explicitly heterosexual connotations' (2003: 77).

As with the example of Jon Stratton given in the previous section on genre, it is necessary to acknowledge that even pervasive and long-lasting myths will not represent an entire nation. Indeed, a large part of their significance may be that they are favoured by the dominant power group in that culture. In the instance of eschatological myths, it is predominantly 'American white, Anglo-Irish, male middle-class' (Stratton 2000: 22) sections of the population who identify them with their sense of nationhood. The PRRI study presents similar ideas since it found that 'White evangelical Protestants are much more likely to attribute the severity of recent natural disasters to the biblical "end times" (77%)' (Jones et al 2014: 4).

The sense in which national myths are being treated in this thesis is, therefore, different from that used by structuralists taking a Lévi-Strassian approach. Rather than claiming that all myths within a culture have single underlying structure (Yalman 2013: 72), it is more accurate to view the national mythscape as 'akin to a cluster of stories' (Tyrell 2013: 52). As the term implies, a mythscape can be understood in the same way as a landscape: composed of different elements, subject to changes, but with recurring patterns and similarities which make it identifiable.

In addition to scrutinising the national mythscape in terms of competing narratives which are not universally or uniformly accepted, I will be principally concentrating on examining one aspect of American national identity: eschatological myths. The relationship in the national mythscape between eschatological myths and post-apocalyptic fiction in the context of history is the focus of this thesis.

Lisboa's book *The End of the World: Apocalypse and Its Aftermath in Western Culture* (2011) gives some insight into the ways in which modern post-apocalyptic fiction interconnects with eschatological myths. In particular, the way in which Biblical stories influence the narratives found in novels and films, 'in Western consciousness, narratives of the apocalypse began with the Flood in Genesis, or arguably as early as the Fall' (2011: 18).

There is a thought-provoking chapter in Lisboa's study on the ideological implications of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction, as well as to what extent they are can be linked to social developments. Lisboa observes that part of the political instability that caused the nuclear anxiety which Broderick references was President Reagan's openly stated belief in, and happy expectation of, Armageddon (2011: 159-160).

This links to a point which Lisboa makes repeatedly which is that both eschatological myths and popular post-apocalyptic fiction are fantasies. They are fantasies not just of destruction and survival, but also of a new world, 'belief in a second chance underpins most apocalyptic thinking' (2011: 53). Thus, there is a parallel between the wider notion of America as a potential utopia in the national mythscape, and the specific themes of renewal in eschatological myths.

This connection has led some critics to contend that, as Stratton puts it, 'the apocalypse has informed a fundamental myth in the American experience' (2000: 22). It can be argued that what might be termed 'an apocalyptic worldview' is a legacy from the Puritan era which has continued to inform American national identity, 'the symbolic meaning the jeremiads infused into the term America' (Bercovitch 2012: 176). Bercovitch has consistently established in his work the influence of an apocalyptically infused Puritan ideology on American national identity.<sup>21</sup> The key point is that a fixation on eschatological myths is not simply a side-effect of American national identity, but a major causal factor in its creation.

An edited collection entitled *End of Days: Essays on the Apocalypse from Antiquity to Modernity* aims to explore the 'transfer and endurance of

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<sup>21</sup> Bercovitch (1974, 1975, 2004) makes the case for this.

apocalyptic ideas within cultures of pre-modern and modern societies' (2009: 3). A number of the essays consider the way in which the influence of eschatological myths has affected American society.

One remarkable connection is between the belief Evangelical Protestant Christians hold that they are 'assisting in the fulfilment of God's eternal plans, starting with the Rapture' (Mohammad 2009: 199) and their influence on American foreign policy towards Israel. Due to the fact that these Christians believe that Israel has a crucial role to play in the expected apocalypse they use their not insubstantial influence to pressurise those in power into a pro-Israeli approach (214). This has been a successful strategy since 'Republican presidents [...] have continually based their support for Israel on evangelical literalist and puritan interpretations of religious texts' (215).

Mohammad acknowledges that the influence of these ideological beliefs is only one element among other economic and political factors (2009: 188). However, the fact that it is a contributing factor at all indicates how closely beliefs in apocalyptic narratives and American national identity are intertwined. This is a clear example of the way in which the eschatological myths relate to a larger national mythscape – how America sees itself impacts how it connects to the rest of the world.

The issues Mohammad writes about are also linked to the earlier point about who uses these eschatological myths. While they do not represent American culture as a whole, they are utilised by the power groups who do dominate mainstream culture. Those groups (white, Evangelical, affluent) either use these myths to justify their vision of American national identity, or have formed that vision because of their genuine belief in those myths.

In a similar vein Johann Pautz (in his essay in the same collection) examines the way in which the American far-right uses eschatological myths and a branch of post-apocalyptic literature as a way of realising their extreme vision of America. Pautz analyses a number of novels, such as the Pierce's *Turner Diaries* (1978) and the LaHaye's and Jenkins' *Left Behind* series (1995-2007).

These novels reveal the fears and hopes of the far right (2009: 265), including the religious purity they believe America should have, being 'sullied by

encroaching secularisation and loosening morals' (269). This problem of damaged morality is solved by the arrival of their version of utopia (265). Current American society is a 'counterfeit' which is 'substituted for the imagined nation. This America is variously imagined as white, Christian, patriarchal, invincible, privileged' (240).

While these are extremist texts in many ways, the relationship between the modern realities of American society and the mythologised concept of the Promised Land is clearly apparent. It is significant that the utopian vision of America in these texts correlates to the power groups which believe most fervently in Armageddon. The reason for why that group – white, male, evangelical Christian, affluent – would most strongly identify with that aspect of the national mythscape is no mystery. I would argue that modern values and political rights increasingly give freedoms and a voice to groups other than the dominant ones described above. The diversity and tolerance found in modern America (in contrast to earlier periods in its history) threatens existing power structures. It is clear why these groups wish for the world to be reset so they can regain control over society.

The work of Mohammed and Pautz also suggest that race is an issue that connects post-apocalyptic fiction with American culture. This is one area where there is already considerable critical work. There are a number of book-length studies on race and 'bleak future' narratives, such as, *Reckoning Day: Race, Place, and the Atom Bomb in Postwar America* (Foerstch, 2013), *Black Space: Imagining Race in Science Fiction Film* (Nama, 2008), and *Race, ethnicity and nuclear war: representations of nuclear weapons and post-apocalyptic worlds* (Williams, 2011). There is also an excellent discussion of race in relation to *The Omega Man* (Dir. Sagal, 1971) and *I Am Legend* (Dir. Lawrence, 2007) in *Washed in Blood: Male Sacrifice, Trauma, and the Cinema* (King, 2011).

These various studies analyse the way in which race has been treated in post-apocalyptic fiction. All the above critics identify the issue of non-white peoples being eradicated from visions of the American future. This absence is particularly apparent if there is any suggestion of miscegenation. For example Williams comments, 'where white Americans are the sole survivors (more

importantly, the sole survivors to reproduce), non-white Americans are written out of the country's future' (2007: 110).

King offers an analysis of a rare example of black characters in post-apocalyptic fiction in the two films referred to above. In relation to the presence of the black hero, Neville in *I Am Legend*, she argues that he functions as an attempt to evidence the image of America as a post-race culture, 'the film's conspicuous attention to race might also be understood as, at best, a national apologia for America's histories of racialized violence and xenophobia or, at worst, a disavowal of them' (2011: 158).

King goes on to suggest that this disavowal comes in the form of positioning racism as a problem of the past that no longer requires attention while maintaining the practice of Othering, which is 'a reinscription of racist logics' (159) through Neville's dehumanising experiments on mutants.

There is clearly a strong relationship between the desire to envision a future America as a new world and the wish to erase racial tensions or indeed entire racial groups from that future. However, given the extensive work that has already been done on the topic of race in post-apocalyptic fiction and on race representations in Hollywood cinema more generally there is little I wish to add to this area of study. There are many aspects of the post-apocalyptic genre in American culture that have yet to be investigated, as such this thesis will concentrate on examining these instead.

The underlying theme of the apocalypse cleansing society so that a new society or world order can emerge is one that has been consistently identified in post-apocalyptic fiction by critics. As outlined in the first section, Broderick and Curtis argue that post-apocalyptic fiction offer ways to explore and establish an alternative social structure. I argue that there is, then, a connection between the American desire to reassert a utopian vision of nationhood, and the fictional outlet that the post-apocalyptic genre provides.

### **Eschatology and Popular Culture**

Critics such as Lisboa, Mohammad and Pautz establish that apocalyptic beliefs do have a definitive impact on the American national mythscape, and these are frequently expressed in the post-apocalyptic genre. However, in his essay, and

in 'At the Edge of Tomorrow: Apocalypticism and Science Fiction' (2009) Lorenzo DiTommaso argues that the relationship between eschatology and science fiction does reveal some significant differences.

He begins by considering whether science fiction uses 'apocalypse' as a metaphor or background setting, or whether some of the same underlying ideology remains (2009: 196). The conclusions he draws throughout the essay are that while apocalyptic eschatology is present in science fiction this is 'identified by the presence of eschatological motifs, and not by their function' (2009: 198). By this he means that science fiction often incorporates the idea of the world ending, but translates it into secular terms which alter the fundamental meaning of such ideas. He quotes Andrew Greeley's argument that 'Science fiction was born from an apocalyptic vision, and currently flourishes on another apocalyptic vision, but does not seem to understand what apocalypse really is' (1979: 279).

One of the key differences DiTommaso highlights are that eschatological narratives do not contain the concept of post-apocalypse, in 'the classic apocalypses' the end of history was literal, time stopped forever. This was because they referred to a creator who had a plan for humanity. However, science fiction focuses on the secular which eliminates this in favour of a scenario where history does not terminate but extends, along with the remains of humanity, into a post-apocalyptic age (2009: 197-199).

Another difference is that eschatological accounts were not written as fiction, they were intended to transmit historical information (albeit future history). In contrast, science fiction stories are created to entertain, and to a greater or lesser extent make money (2009: 205). There is a crossover point in what Tom Doyle labels 'Christian apocalyptic fiction', such as the *Left Behind* series. Although these are works of fiction, certain denominations of Christianity (e.g. Evangelicals) also believe in a coming Apocalypse in a literal sense (2009: 206).

However, aside from this exception, this difference highlights an important point regarding eschatological myths and the post-apocalyptic genre – the first must be understood as a genuinely held belief, the latter is largely enjoyed as

entertainment. Eschatological myths form part of the belief system of specific religious groups, but post-apocalyptic fiction has a much wider appeal. I argue that this is why it is important to look at the underlying structures which both narratives share, and examine the relationship between the two, and how both inform and express aspects of the American national mythscape.

DiTommaso also states that there are similarities in structures. The main likenesses being that both eschatological and modern science fiction often base their narratives on a dualism. Eschatological narratives are based on 'ontological dualism', such as the forces of light and dark, and angels and demons (199). Nevertheless, there are examples of secular adaptations of a similar dualism.

One of the examples DiTommaso gives are from the novel of McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) in which the Boy and the Man define themselves as the 'good guys' who are 'carrying the fire': 'The fire serves as a yardstick by which good and evil are measured, framing the ancient apocalyptic dualism which, while never expressed is felt palpably throughout the novel' (201-2).

It is also visualised in the film version, for instance in one sequence the mise-en-scène has the Man (Viggo Mortenson) and the Boy (Codi Smit-McPhee) silhouetted against fire, while the surrounding space is blackness. It is their goodness and resistance of evil temptation which figuratively produces the fire (the light) which holds off the darkness. *The Road* is far from the only film which contains such elements of ancient eschatology, as will be discussed in the case studies.

DiTommaso's essay raises a number of issues in regard to the relationship between eschatology and the modern post-apocalyptic genre. In particular, the way in which science fiction has created the possibility of post-apocalyptic worlds through secularising the concept of 'the End'.

However, other critics have observed that continuation has often been an aspect of ancient apocalypse narratives. For instance, Lisboa argues that from 'Biblical renditions to modern sci-fi, what structures these narratives is the logic of the close-escape: near universal annihilation but with just enough life left

intact to guarantee a reasonable chance of a new beginning' (2011: 53). She points to the story of Noah's Ark as an example of such second chances.

In light of the argument made by a number of critics discussed above that it is this theme of renewal, of creating a new world, which is deeply connected to American national identity. It is important, then, to consider how DiTommaso's concept of 'the End', as a final moment, fits into these arguments.

One answer is that rather like historical events become mythologised, so did these 'historical accounts' of the apocalypse. Indeed, DiTommaso identifies this tradition as 'millennialism', a type of apocalypticism which emerged and flourished during medieval times. Concepts such as of a last judgement and the on-going existence of the Earth (or indeed time itself) past the point of apocalypse stem from these medieval beliefs (2009: 199). I argue it is this version of eschatological myths, rather than the older apocalyptic accounts in which reality itself is altered, which feed most directly into the American national mythscape.

As the critical work discussed in this section has shown post-apocalyptic fiction and eschatological myths function in a similar manner, representing anxieties and desires related to the failure of reality to support belief. In eschatological myths this stems from the belief that humanity is failing God's plan and will either be punished through apocalyptic events with only the faithful surviving, or must change their current behaviour in order to trigger the apocalypse, and thus redemption. In both the cases there is a fixation on returning to a prelapsarian state. These themes of punishment and utopia are also found in modern post-apocalyptic fiction.

Berkovitch has argued apocalyptic thinking has influenced white American culture from the time of the Puritans onwards. This on-going influence has been studied from a number of perspectives, as the work on America's foreign policy towards Israel and the use of apocalyptic fiction by the far-right demonstrates.

There is, therefore, a triad of elements which interconnect: eschatological myths, American national identity, and post-apocalyptic film genres. Bell's concept of 'national mythscape' provides a framework for understanding how these elements relate.

The national mythscape is a discursive realm; as such its various components are contested by different groups who identify their sense of national identity with different memories and myths. I argue that eschatological myths have been adopted by powerful groups as a reaction to modern values; these groups use the underlying structures of punishment, 'cleansing', and a new world to mediate between their vision of America and reality. This can come in the form of justifying political actions, or indeed explaining natural disasters. It also allows these some of these groups to maintain a shared identity, as in the example of the far-right in Pautz's essay.

However, these myths are not confined to specific groups but have permeated the mythscape more broadly, influencing more widely held aspects of American national identity, such as exceptionalism. In addition, these underlying eschatological myths in American culture have found expression in a secularised form in science fiction and horror films, specifically in the post-apocalyptic genre.

There is not a linear trail which leads from eschatological myths, to American national identity, to post-apocalyptic films. Instead, my argument is that these three elements interrelate in a number of ways.

## **Conclusion**

Modern post-apocalyptic films have been defined and examined as a genre in various ways. Like the zombie film, post-apocalyptic films have a 'slippery' genre identity. In part this is because they are related to both the horror and science fiction genres, sometimes almost entirely part of one, then the other. The work of critics such as Suvin, Sobchack, and Neale helps clarify the ways in which post-apocalyptic films and other fiction successfully traverse this generic territory.

More revealing still is the critical examinations of the structures and themes which exist in post-apocalyptic fiction. Curtis identifies that the post-apocalyptic scenario offers a way to explore current social norms, fears and desires, and create an alternative communal arrangement. Lisboa places a similar emphasis on the opportunities the post-apocalyptic world provides for starting over, as discussed in this section.

However, Curtis' work is focused on literature and as such reveals a mismatch in what types of post-apocalyptic narratives have been analysed critically. Broderick's contribution does examine films, and the structures and themes within those films. His conclusions are that the post-apocalyptic film genre is based on archaic mythology, something critics such as DiTommosa have examined from a different perspective. Broderick also reveals that these films do not imagine radical new civilisations, but reassert traditional ones.

When put into the context of Berkovitch's arguments about the legacy of jeremiad thinking in American culture this issue of conservative values becomes an even more compelling area of study. More modern historical contexts are provided by critics such as Page and Sobchack who consider how images of post-apocalyptic destruction relate to cultural shifts and attitudes in American culture.

I posit that one way these various conceptions of post-apocalyptic films can be understood is through Altman's semantic/syntactic model. This allows both the narrative components, and the generic structures to contribute to an overall definition. However, this operational definition does not include critical work on the wider social and historical context of post-apocalyptic narratives, ancient and modern.

The work of Duncan Bell on the national mythscape has been discussed in this section as a way of understanding these relationships. His idea of national identity as a discursive realm provides a context for work on the influence of eschatological myths, and their relationship with American national identity. Critics have emphasised the significance of eschatological myths and modern post-apocalyptic films and other fiction on American culture. However, this is not as a totalising or universal system of belief, but as part of the many ways in which mythologised history, religion, memory, and stories interrelate.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### Research Questions

As discussed in the literature review, the critical literature on post-apocalyptic fiction (including films) has examined the relationship between the narratives of these films and wider social issues. Curtis argues that post-apocalyptic fiction is a modern realisation of various theories about the social contract. As such, she understands post-apocalyptic narratives as fantasies of cathartic destruction and rebuilding; an opportunity to reshape society (Curtis 2010: 4-7). However, her study is limited to literature; this leaves unanswered the question of how post-apocalyptic *films* imagine the scenarios of society's destruction and renewal.

A partial answer is provided by Broderick's essay on post-nuclear films in the 1970s and 1980s. He argues that there are recurring themes and archetypal characters in these films. Yet, rather than providing a new or progressive alternative to current social systems, Broderick contends that these films imagine a return to 'conservative social regimes' (1993: 362). According to Broderick, this narrative trope of traditional morality stems from the archaic mythology that these films are based on; a mythology in which a messianic hero saves a community from neo-feudal aristocracy and savage barbarians. Nevertheless, there are a number of issues which Broderick's essay does not resolve.

His study is based on films which are part of what he terms the 'post-nuclear sub-genre of SF' (382). Whilst there is considerable cross-over in some sections of his analysis with post-apocalyptic films more generally, this is not his main focus and so the post-apocalyptic genre requires specific examination. Furthermore, he does not place his analysis of the post-nuclear genre in a comprehensive historical context; the relationship between these films and wider cultural shifts needs further study. In addition, he posits that post-apocalyptic films rely on a mythic structure. However, how and why post-apocalyptic films articulate this structure is not comprehensively explored. Finally, the tropes and motifs he identifies are confined in his study to post-

nuclear films in the 1970s and 1980s; the extent to which these form part of the post-apocalyptic film genre in later decades is undetermined.

Page (2008) and Sobchack (1999) both give a clearer historical context to the development of post-apocalyptic films, in particular their imagery. In their respective work they chart how shifts in American culture were reflected in images of urban destruction. Page's study does not specifically focus on the post-apocalyptic genre, but rather considers the various ways in which New York has (fictitiously) been destroyed. Further work is needed on the iconography of post-apocalyptic films, and how that has developed over time. Similarly, Sobchack's analysis is of urban science fiction and, therefore, does not explore other settings found in post-apocalyptic films, such as the frontier or ruins.

Work on how eschatological myths relate to modern popular culture has revealed that they are deeply connected to American national identity. Berkovitch (1974-1980) has devoted several full-length studies to investigating how Puritan apocalyptic culture has influenced and shaped modern American thinking. Mohammed and Pautz (2009) have examined how apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic beliefs form part of political ideologies and decisions. However, none of these critics have considered the role post-apocalyptic films play in the American national mythscape.

The mythscape is a term that Duncan Bell applies to the way in which memory and myth are used to forge and reproduce national identity (2003: 64-5). Whilst the concept of national mythscape overlaps with the beliefs and principles of political ideology, it is primarily connected to the stories and myths through which a nation imagines itself.

It is clear that post-apocalyptic literature has received a range of critical attention. However, post-apocalyptic films have not as yet been considered in a full length study. Therefore, this thesis aims to build on existing critical studies of post-apocalyptic films by specifically focussing on advancing the current understanding of the post-apocalyptic film genre in American culture. A number of critics have argued that modern post-apocalyptic films are connected to earlier myths, including eschatological myth. But I argue that how post-

apocalyptic films articulate these underlying mythic structures across time requires further analysis. Finally, critics have identified a number of recurring elements in post-apocalyptic films both in relation to narrative and iconography. However, these patterns have not been analysed across the genre in a systematic manner.

To fill these knowledge gaps this thesis will be based on answering three major research questions. These are:

- What themes, tropes, characters, iconography and narrative structures recur in post-apocalyptic films?
- To what extent are these patterns influenced by eschatological myths and American history?
- What role do these post-apocalyptic films play in the American national mythscape?

The first question regarding elements which recur in post-apocalyptic films will form the basis of the thematic content analysis outlined below.

### **Thematic Content Analysis**

The methodology of this thesis is informed by the contention that a multiplicity of approaches strengthens the study of a film. This is the rationale for this project employing content analysis in combination with structuralist theory within a historical context. Far from being incompatible, content analysis is 'enriched by the theoretical framework[s] [...] while bringing to these a methodological rigour' (Hansen et al, 1998: 91).

Content analyses describe the 'occurrences of specified dimensions and they analyse the relationships between these dimensions' (1998: 98). Content analysis is, therefore, not an objective form of analysis because subjective choices are required regarding what 'dimensions' or characteristics to identify and count. Additionally, the results of content analysis must be interpreted, and this interpretation is usually informed by a theoretical framework. However, it is useful as a 'bottom-up' method of, firstly, systematically refining the texts to be investigated and secondly, identifying structures and patterns within texts which require close analysis and theoretical interpretation.

In adopting this combination of approaches (content analysis, structuralist theory and historical context), I aim to map the post-apocalyptic genre both quantitatively and qualitatively. In order to communicate this use of research techniques clearly, this methodology has been structured with the content analysis first and the discussion of the critical theory second. Thus, the formal, 'bottom-up' aspects of the analysis will inform the interpretative theoretical framework. I make no claim that this project is an exhaustive analysis, but rather an original study of the post-apocalyptic film genre and its development based on a robust and flexible critical framework.

In order to ascertain what elements recur in the post-apocalyptic film genre a thematic content analysis of the films will be undertaken. Primarily, this will be used to identify which case study films will be used, as well as to examine a number of the questions raised by the existing critical literature.

Firstly, do the generic tropes identified by Broderick in post-nuclear films of the 1970s and 1980s continue to exist in later decades and in post-apocalyptic films more widely? Secondly, what patterns in the iconography connect the films as a genre, and how do these manifest themselves? Thirdly, what are the narrative structures and are they consistent across time?

The information of this thematic content analysis will be displayed in a series of four tables. The purpose of these tables is to succinctly communicate my findings in a simple visual format. The films are listed chronologically so that patterns across the time period can be observed.

The other benefit of displaying the information in this manner is that it can easily be cross-referenced from the analysis chapters to clarify my argument. An overview process map of the process of thematic content analysis applied can be found in Appendix 1.

### **Corpus of Films**

Before proceeding to examine these questions, it is necessary to establish a corpus of films. An initial overview of cinematic releases from 1900-2013 reveals a large number of films which depict the world after an end, cataclysm, or mass disaster. Potentially suitable texts were identified using existing studies

including references and filmographies (e.g. Lisboa, 2011, Broderick, 1993), and publicly available online synopses and databases (e.g. IMDb). To produce a more focused selection of films I applied a set of criteria to these texts. The criteria are that for a film to be included it has to:

- i. be produced and distributed by an American studio
- ii. be made for cinema distribution (however limited), not for television
- iii. be feature length, no short films
- iv. have a significant amount of the running time set in a post-apocalyptic world
- v. feature a plot that was set after the apocalypse, not during it
- vi. feature a narrative world where there is no functioning society (as in dystopian films)
- vii. not include zombies

The choice of criteria relates to the areas this thesis will investigate.

The **first condition** is to ensure that the films have a clear relationship with American culture. There is considerable debate about national cinema and what factors define that, as well as the global nature of Hollywood.<sup>22</sup> The term 'American studio' refers to the fact that the films this thesis analyses incorporate Hollywood cinema, but also includes films that can be defined as American independent cinema. A list of the production and distribution details for the corpus can be found in Appendix 2.

Nevertheless, if a film has been both produced and distributed by an American studio then it is reasonable to suggest that it emerged as a part of American popular culture. However, this is not a straightforward issue. For example, *Reign of Fire* (Dir. Bowman, 2002) qualifies as an American film with this criterion, but a case could be made that given its setting in England and its British lead actor that it is actually a British film. The decision to include *Reign*

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<sup>22</sup> The issue of the relationship between Hollywood and American national cinema, and whether the two are synonymous or not, is summarised in the introduction to *Hollywood Abroad: Audiences and Cultural Exchange*, Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby (eds.), 2007. While some argue that Hollywood contributes to 'Americanisation' and 'cultural imperialism', others posit that Hollywood cinema is in fact absent of 'clearly identifiable American national culture' (4-5). The analysis chapters will investigate how the post-apocalyptic genre relates to American culture and, therefore, contributes somewhat to our understanding of this issue.

*of Fire* is actually based on the very fact that it is not set in America. It is of significant importance to the genre as it was made immediately after the events of 9/11.

Therefore, I applied this criterion in combination with a judgement as to whether there were any other factors which excluded the film, such as being in a language other than English, or being funded by a national cinema council. Additionally, when viewing the films it became apparent that a large number had clear indications in the imagery or the dialogue that the story was set in the aftermath of a decimated America.

The **second criterion** is that the film must have been distributed in the cinema, even if only on a limited release. This is primarily to ensure the texts do in fact qualify as films, since this thesis is not examining post-apocalyptic narratives in television. However, there is no restriction on the films in terms of box office gross. While box office success has been used very effectively by some critics to analyse large groups of films and determine their significance, there are flaws with this methodology. The most obvious issue is that culturally and artistically influential films may not have had significant box office success.

One example of this is Terry Gilliam's strange dystopian film *Brazil* (1985) which did poorly at the box office, largely due to significant studio interference with its release and with the final cut of the film. However, it has since received a great deal of critical attention and now has a decidedly influential cult status.<sup>23</sup> More extreme examples of this issue include *Salt of the Earth* (Dir. Biberman, 1954) the DVD of which now carries the tagline 'The Only Blacklisted American Film' since it was denied almost all theatrical release, or *Touch of Evil* (Dir. Welles, 1958) which was released as a double feature B movie by Universal. Both these films are now well-known, influential, and critically admired. Therefore, I argue that there is a limit to the conclusions that can be drawn from the correlation between box office success and lasting cultural influence.

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<sup>23</sup> *The Battle of Brazil: Terry Gilliam v. Universal Pictures in the Fight to the Final Cut* (Jack Matthews, 2000) provides a fascinating account of the issues surrounding the film.

The **third specification** is that the films must be feature length. Short films are not part of the corpus, since the study of such works would belong to a different type of project.

In addition, the **fourth criterion** is that the world of the film is in a post-apocalyptic state a significant part of the running time. This condition is subject to a certain amount of interpretation on my part. As such, *Logan's Run* (Dir. Anderson, 1976) has been included despite the first half of the film being set in a dystopian city. This is because the post-apocalyptic setting is crucial to the experience of the character and the development of the narrative, and occupies a substantial amount of the running time.

It is due to the application of the fourth criterion that *A.I.* (Dir. Spielberg, 2001) and *Terminator* (Dir. Cameron, 1984) have been excluded from the corpus despite both having interesting and visually impressive post-apocalyptic scenes. The post-apocalyptic (post-human) scenes in *A.I.* depict a truly empty world, but they form the very last part of the narrative, an epilogue even, and as such do not, in my opinion, constitute an addition to the genre. Similarly, while the flash-forwards to the future that Kyle Reese has come from in *Terminator* are important to the plot, they function to primarily provide context for the main narrative which is set in 1980s America. The running time for these scenes in both films is very limited overall. Therefore, I excluded these films from the corpus.

The **last three criteria** relate to narrowing down the films based on the operational definition of post-apocalyptic film discussed in the literature review. Although these are imperfect in terms of understanding genre in a wider critical sense, they do function as a useful way of generating a corpus of films for analysis.

Following Curtis's distinction, films which are set during an apocalyptic event(s) are excluded because they are disaster films, and as such occupy a different cultural position. Eaton's separation between dystopian and post-apocalyptic will also be applied – the film must be set in a world where there is no functioning society, there must be an absence of infrastructure and institutions (e.g. education, finance, medical care). However, as has been established

genre boundaries are fluid and somewhat temporary. Therefore, there are films which require an assessment as to whether they should be included.

Again, *Logan's Run* provides a good example of this decision-making. I ultimately included it because the dystopian society is an isolated anomaly; it exists in a post-apocalyptic wasteland and is not connected to a wider national infrastructure. In addition, the film's narrative has the characters leave the domed city and explore the ruins of Washington D.C.

The specification that the narrative should not include zombies is partly a practical decision to reduce the amount of films being examined. However, it is also based on arguments in critical literature. Several critics, such as Meghan Sutherland (2007), Peter Dendle (2007), Alexander Boon (2001), make the argument that zombie films function as a metaphor for personal and physical identity, rather than themes which relate to social structures and values. Consequently, while zombie films will be discussed as a point of comparison in later chapters, they will not be included in the following content analysis.

Applying these criteria produced a corpus of seventy-one films:

**Table 1: Initial Corpus of Seventy-one Post-apocalyptic Films**

<b>Film</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Director</b>
<i>Deluge</i>	1933	Felix E Feist
<i>It's Great to be Alive</i>	1933	Alfred L Werker
<i>Five</i>	1951	Arch Oboler
<i>Captive Women</i>	1952	Stuart Gilmore
<i>Day the World Ended</i>	1955	Roger Corman
<i>World without End</i>	1956	Edward Bernds
<i>Teenage Caveman</i>	1958	Roger Corman
<i>The World, The Flesh and The Devil</i>	1959	Ranald McDougall
<i>On the Beach</i>	1959	Stanley Kramer
<i>Last Woman on Earth</i>	1960	Roger Carman
<i>Panic in the Year Zero!</i>	1962	Ray Millars
<i>The Last Man On Earth</i>	1964	Sidney Salkow
<i>Planet Of the Apes</i>	1968	Franklin S Schaffner
<i>Beneath Planet Of the Apes</i>	1970	Ted Post

<i>Glen and Randa</i>	1971	Jim McBride
<i>The Omega Man</i>	1971	Boris Sagal
<i>Battle for the Planet of the Apes</i>	1973	J Lee Thompson
<i>A Boy and his Dog</i>	1975	L Q Jones
<i>The Ultimate Warrior</i>	1975	Robert Clouse
<i>Logan's Run</i>	1976	Michael Anderson
<i>Damnation Alley</i>	1977	Jack Smight
<i>Wizards (Animation)</i>	1977	Ralph Bakshi
<i>Deathsport</i>	1978	Roger Corman
<i>Quintet</i>	1979	Robert Altman
<i>Ravagers</i>	1979	Richard Compton
<i>The Aftermath</i>	1982	Steve Barkett
<i>Warlords of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century</i>	1982	Harley Cobeliss
<i>Radioactive Dreams</i>	1985	Albert Pyun
<i>Def-Con 4</i>	1985	Paul Donovan
<i>Warriors of the Apocalypse</i>	1985	Bobby A Suarez
<i>City Limits</i>	1985	Aaron Lipstadt
<i>America 3000</i>	1986	David Engelbach
<i>Land of Doom</i>	1986	Peter Harris
<i>Cherry 2000</i>	1987	Steve Jarnatt
<i>Creepozoids</i>	1987	David Deloteau
<i>Steel Dawn</i>	1987	Lance Hool
<i>Warlords</i>	1988	Fred Olen Ray
<i>Hell Comes to Frogtown</i>	1988	Donald G Jackson
<i>World Gone Wild</i>	1988	Lee H Ratzin
<i>Cyborg</i>	1989	Albert Pyun
<i>Escape from Safehaven</i>	1989	Brian Thomas Jones
<i>Deadly Reactor</i>	1989	David Heavener
<i>Omega Cop</i>	1990	Paul Kyriazi
<i>Mindwarp</i>	1992	Steve Barnett
<i>Tank Girl</i>	1995	Rachel Talda
<i>Steel Frontier</i>	1995	Paul G Volk
<i>Waterworld</i>	1995	Kevin Reynolds
<i>Barb Wire</i>	1996	David Hogan
<i>The Postman</i>	1997	Kevin Costner

<i>Six String Samurai</i>	1998	Lance Mungai
<i>Planet of the Apes</i>	2001	Tim Burton
<i>The Last Man</i>	2002	Harry Raltson
<i>The Time Machine</i>	2002	Simon Wells
<i>Reign of Fire</i>	2002	Rob Bowman
<i>I Am Legend</i>	2007	Francis Lawrence
<i>Tooth and Nail</i>	2007	Mark Young
<i>Wall-E</i> (Animation)	2008	Andrew Stanton
<i>20 Years After</i>	2008	Ron Harris
<i>From Inside</i> (Animation)	2008	John Bergin
<i>9</i> (Animation)	2009	Shane Acker
<i>Carriers</i>	2009	David Pastor
<i>The Road</i>	2009	John Hillcoat
<i>Terminator Salvation</i>	2009	McG
<i>2084</i>	2009	George Blumetti, Maurice Kelly
<i>The Book of Eli</i>	2010	Hughes Brothers
<i>Downstream</i>	2010	Simone Bartesaghi
<i>Stake Land</i>	2010	Jim Mickle
<i>Priest</i>	2011	Scott Stewart
<i>The Divide</i>	2012	Xavier Gens
<i>Oblivion</i>	2013	Joseph Kosinski
<i>After Earth</i>	2013	M. Night Shyamalan

Having identified the corpus of films, an initial survey was conducted. I observed a number of patterns in relation to tropes, iconography, narrative, and the representation of the characters. From this information I selected categories for a coding schedule.

### **Time Period**

As discussed in the introduction chapter, this thesis will concentrate on the period after 1968. If the post-apocalyptic films from before this date are removed there is a corpus of **fifty-nine films**.

## **Coding Schedule**

From the initial survey, which involved viewing the fifty-nine post-apocalyptic films and noting any patterns that became apparent, three categories were selected for the coding schedule. The first category related to the iconography of the post-apocalyptic film genre; in particular the settings and landscape imagery in the films. Since post-apocalyptic films are premised on imagining a world after a major disaster, it is useful to analyse the physical form these worlds take. This is also a response to the gap identified in the current work on post-apocalyptic fiction. While Curtis had studied the way in which post-apocalyptic literature imagined the world after; there was limited work on the topic in film.

The initial survey indicated that there were four main settings:

- The frontier setting, characterised by imagery that is very similar to the western. There are small towns, farmsteads, open barren spaces, horses, cowboy hats, showdowns, sinister men in long coats.
- The wasteland setting can also be barren, but it lacked the shared iconography of the western genre. It is a landscape mainly devoid of humanity and functioning human structures, with the exception of rudimentary shanty towns or forts built out of the rubble and the remnants of civilisation.
- The empty city setting, which features a city mainly intact, but that is largely devoid of life and movement. The iconography here is focused on the massively depopulated streets and buildings. This is interspersed with imagery of urban decay such as burnt out cars, plants breaking through tarmac, and broken windows.
- The ruins setting is one in which ruined landmarks, monuments, or buildings feature heavily in the iconography.

Although there were a number of additional settings, those noted here occurred most frequently.

The second category links to the absence of civilisation noted in the iconography. It is a trope I have termed: return-to-primitivism. This is a type of projection into the future that has long existed in the science fiction genre. It is

based on the idea that if there was a nuclear attack, or indeed apocalyptic global warming or a meteor hit, then advanced technological civilisation would fall and humanity would revert to a pre-technological or early technology age, characterised by savagery. It is a reversion to an earlier, more brutal society, or lack thereof. Examples would be the Stone Age or the 'Wild West'.

Maria Lisboa describes it as throwbacks to an early stage, either of human or historic development, with 'the added dimension of primitivism and viscerality' (2011: xix). It is defined as imagery and narratives which reflect either a total absence, or a consistent lack of knowledge, of modern technology and social infrastructure.

The third and final category is connected with the narrative of these films. A pattern that I identified is that the narrative very often ends in the formation or discovery of a utopian community. This utopia is often represented through paradisiacal imagery, usually of a pastoral landscape such as an island or a farming community. In other films this utopia is described in the dialogue, characters would detail a place they wanted to build or a place they knew existed and that they wanted to go to.

To summarise these observations, the identified categories are:

- i. **Iconography** – Setting/imagery (visual motifs that contribute to the world-building of the film).
- ii. **Trope** – Return-to-primitivism (defined as imagery reflecting an earlier time in history, and/or an absence of or lack of knowledge of modern technology and infrastructure).
- iii. **Narrative** – The film ending in a utopia being reached or established (represented either by a paradisiacal image or verbal description).

i. **Iconography**

Films are included based on the predominant setting used in the iconography. Where there is a combination of settings and one is significantly more predominant this is indicated in bold. These settings can be categorised as:

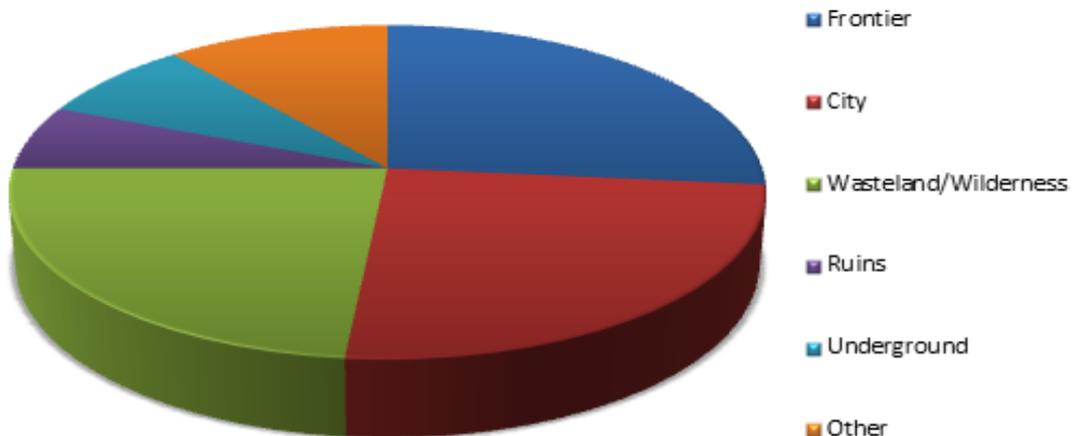
- **Frontier:** Settings which use iconography that is reminiscent of either western film iconography or other imagery connected to the frontier e.g. small towns, cowboy hats, horses.
- **Wasteland:** spaces devoid of landmarks, or expanses of wilderness
- **City:** the empty city, urban landscape that is massively depopulated
- **Ruins:** landmarks or ruined buildings feature heavily in the iconography
- **Underground:** set in some type of underground complex
- **Other:** settings which do not fit in the above such as *Mindwarp* which depicts a narrative set in a garbage dump but which is actually projected into the minds of 'Dreamers' in a computer room.

**Table 2: Corpus of Post-apocalyptic Films by Setting**

Film	Year	Setting
<i>Planet Of the Apes</i>	1968	Ruins/Wasteland/Other
<i>Beneath Planet Of the Apes</i>	1970	Underground/Ruins
<i>Glen and Randa</i>	1971	Wasteland
<i>The Omega Man</i>	1971	City
<i>Battle for Planet of the Apes</i>	1973	Ruins
<i>A Boy and his Dog</i>	1975	Underground/Wasteland
<i>The Ultimate Warrior</i>	1975	City
<i>Logan's Run</i>	1976	Ruins
<i>Damnation Alley</i>	1977	Other/City
<i>Wizards (Animation)</i>	1977	Wasteland
<i>Deathsport</i>	1978	City
<i>Quintet</i>	1979	Wasteland
<i>Ravagers</i>	1979	City/Wasteland
<i>The Aftermath</i>	1982	Wasteland
<i>Battletruck</i>	1982	Frontier
<i>Radioactive Dreams</i>	1985	Other
<i>Def-Con 4</i>	1985	Wasteland
<i>Warriors of the Apocalypse</i>	1985	Wasteland/Frontier
<i>City Limits</i>	1985	City
<i>America 3000</i>	1986	City
<i>Land of Doom</i>	1986	Other

<i>Cherry 2000</i>	1987	<b>Frontier/Wasteland</b>
<i>Creepozoids</i>	1987	City
<i>Steel Dawn</i>	1987	Frontier
<i>Warlords</i>	1988	Frontier
<i>Hell Comes to Frogtown</i>	1988	Frontier
<i>World Gone Wild</i>	1988	Frontier
<i>Cyborg</i>	1989	City
<i>Escape from Safehaven</i>	1989	Wasteland
<i>Deadly Reactor</i>	1989	Frontier
<i>Omega Cop</i>	1990	<b>City/Wasteland</b>
<i>Mindwarp</i>	1992	Other
<i>Tank Girl</i>	1995	Frontier
<i>Steel Frontier</i>	1995	Frontier
<i>Waterworld</i>	1995	<b>Other/Frontier</b>
<i>Barb Wire</i>	1996	<b>Frontier/City</b>
<i>The Postman</i>	1997	Wasteland
<i>Six String Samurai</i>	1998	Frontier
<i>Planet of the Apes</i>	2001	Wasteland
<i>The Last Man</i>	2002	Ruins
<i>The Time Machine</i>	2002	Ruins
<i>Reign of Fire</i>	2002	City
<i>I Am Legend</i>	2007	City
<i>Tooth and Nail</i>	2007	City
<i>Wall-E (Animation)</i>	2008	Ruins
<i>20 Years After</i>	2008	City
<i>From Inside (Animation)</i>	2008	Other
<i>9 (Animation)</i>	2009	City
<i>Carriers</i>	2009	City
<i>The Road</i>	2009	<b>Wasteland/Ruins</b>
<i>Terminator Salvation</i>	2009	<b>Wasteland/Ruins</b>
<i>2084</i>	2009	Underground
<i>The Book of Eli</i>	2010	Frontier
<i>Downstream</i>	2010	Frontier
<i>Stake Land</i>	2010	Wasteland
<i>Priest</i>	2011	<b>Frontier/City</b>

<i>The Divide</i>	2012	Underground
<i>Oblivion</i>	2013	Ruins
<i>After Earth</i>	2013	Wasteland



**Fig 1:** Graph of Occurrence of Settings

The frontier, empty city, and wasteland settings are the most predominant in the post-apocalyptic film genre.

## 2. Trope

The specific way in which the presence of the return-to-primitivism trope is represented in the films of the corpus is outlined in the table.

**Table 3:** Corpus of Post-apocalyptic Films by Trope

Film	Year	Return-to-primitivism Trope Present	Represented by
<i>Planet Of the Apes</i>	1968	Yes	Humans as livestock, without speech
<i>Beneath Planet Of the Apes</i>	1970	Yes	Living in caves, no understanding of technology
<i>Glen and Randa</i>	1971	Yes	No tech, simplistic 'child-like' understanding of the world, plot

			based on finding city
<i>The Omega Man</i>	1971	No	
<i>Battle for Planet of the Apes</i>	1973	No	
<i>A Boy and his Dog</i>	1975	Yes	While there is some technology present, the remnants of society function in a similar manner to 'Old West'
<i>The Ultimate Warrior</i>	1975	No	
<i>Logan's Run</i>	1976	No	
<i>Damnation Alley</i>	1977	No	
<i>Wizards (Animation)</i>	1977	Yes	Technology is explicitly banned, characters live in forest
<i>Deathsport</i>	1978	No	
<i>Quintet</i>	1979	No	
<i>Ravagers</i>	1979	Yes	A community that has no technology or modern institutions features
<i>The Aftermath</i>	1982	No	
<i>Battletruck</i>	1982	No	
<i>Radioactive Dreams</i>	1985	No	
<i>Def-Con 4</i>	1985	No	
<i>Warriors of the Apocalypse</i>	1985	Yes	America is now a tribal civilisation, no understanding of technology
<i>City Limits</i>	1985	No	
<i>America 3000</i>	1986	Yes	Return to Stone Age
<i>Land of Doom</i>	1986	No	
<i>Cherry 2000</i>	1987	No	
<i>Creepozoids</i>	1987	No	
<i>Steel Dawn</i>	1987	Yes	No modern weapons or transport, Old West setting
<i>Warlords</i>	1988	No	
<i>Hell Comes to Frogtown</i>	1988	No	
<i>World Gone Wild</i>	1988	Yes	While there are bikers, the actual community are living in a commune that has no understanding of technology

<i>Cyborg</i>	1989	No	
<i>Escape from Safehaven</i>	1989	Yes	No technology, simplistic knowledge of the world
<i>Deadly Reactor</i>	1989	Yes	While there is leftover technology and weapons, several communities live as if in Puritan times
<i>Omega Cop</i>	1990	No	
<i>Mindwarp</i>	1992	Yes	While the main character can access virtual reality, the vast majority of humans now live in caves devoid of speech
<i>Tank Girl</i>	1995	No	
<i>Steel Frontier</i>	1995	Yes	Villains have technology but society is otherwise at the level of Old West
<i>Waterworld</i>	1995	Yes	While the villains have access to technology, the community live at a very simplistic pre-industrial level and have no understanding how the world came to be flooded
<i>Barb Wire</i>	1996	No	
<i>The Postman</i>	1997	Yes	Limited modern technology, used only by villains at end, return to Old West/Prairie age
<i>Six String Samurai</i>	1998	No	
<i>Planet of the Apes</i>	2001	Yes	See 1968 version
<i>The Last Man</i>	2002	No	
<i>The Time Machine</i>	2002	Yes	Return to Stone Age existence
<i>Reign of Fire</i>	2002	No	
<i>I Am Legend</i>	2007	No	
<i>Tooth and Nail</i>	2007	No	
<i>Wall-E (Animation)</i>	2008	No	
<i>20 Years After</i>	2008	Yes	People are living in caves
<i>From Inside (Animation)</i>	2008	No	
<i>9 (Animation)</i>	2009	No	
<i>Carriers</i>	2009	No	
<i>The Road</i>	2009	No	

<i>Terminator Salvation</i>	2009	No	
<i>2084</i>	2009	No	
<i>The Book of Eli</i>	2010	No	
<i>Downstream</i>	2010	No	
<i>Stake Land</i>	2010	No	
<i>Priest</i>	2011	Yes	The communities in the free towns, live at a level comparable with the 'Old West'
<i>The Divide</i>	2012	No	
<i>Oblivion</i>	2013	No	
<i>After Earth</i>	2013	Yes	While the main characters are from a technologically advanced world, Earth has reverted to a pre-human and devoid of any technology

Out of a possible fifty-nine films, twenty-three feature the return-to-primitivism trope. Therefore, while this trope does not form part of a majority of films it is in nearly 39% of the corpus of films.

However, one significant result in this category is in fact the absence of this trope. It has clearly declined in frequency in the 2000s and 2010s. There may be a number of reasons for this, one of which could be that improved CGI has allowed more technologically nuanced worlds to be imagined. Another possible reason is the impact of 9/11, and the tone of the rhetoric against al-Qaida and other terrorist groups as backward savages.<sup>24</sup> In this context it would be less appealing to depict Americans in the same 'primitive' conditions as its enemies. The way in which the post-apocalyptic film genre has changed in the 2000s and 2010s, particularly in the context of the effect of 9/11 on American culture, will be analysed in chapter six – Fears and Expectations.

<sup>24</sup> For example, George W Bush spoke of 'killers who hide in cities and caves' and 'terrorists continue to plot against America and the *civilized world*' (my italics, State of Union Address, 2004, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/stateoftheunion2004.htm>).

### 3. Narrative

The complexities surrounding the concept of utopia have been discussed briefly in the literature review. However, an operational definition of utopia in the context of this thesis is: a place or community that is free from the failures and tyranny manifested earlier in the narrative (e.g. violent gangs or mutants) and provides a safe environment to live in. The tone of these scenes will be optimistic and positive about the future. This is the most subjective category in the coding schedule, however, the utopian ending featured so significantly in the initial survey that I argue that it could not be overlooked.

The criteria for these films having a utopian ending are that a place is shown on screen or described in detail (i.e. not just fantasised about). The narrative must have an ending which is either set in an existing utopia or with the characters about to arrive at/build a utopia which they are now free to live in because the hero has destroyed the evil which threatens them.

**Table 4: Corpus of Post-apocalyptic Films by Narrative Ending**

<b>Film</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Utopian Ending</b>	<b>Represented through (I=Images, D=description)</b>
<i>Planet Of the Apes</i>	1968	No	
<i>Beneath Planet Of the Apes</i>	1970	No	
<i>Glen and Randa</i>	1971	No	
<i>The Omega Man</i>	1971	Yes	Woodland/ Garden (D)
<i>Battle for the Planet of the Apes</i>	1973	Yes	
<i>A Boy and his Dog</i>	1975	No	
<i>The Ultimate Warrior</i>	1975	Yes	Island (D/I)
<i>Logan's Run</i>	1976	Yes	A Washington D.C. in ruins, reclaimed by nature (I)
<i>Damnation Alley</i>	1977	Yes	Farm (I)
<i>Wizards (Animation)</i>	1977	Yes	Forest (I)
<i>Deathsport</i>	1978	No	
<i>Quintet</i>	1979	No	

<i>Ravagers</i>	1979	Yes	Island/Fertile shore (I)
<i>The Aftermath</i>	1982	Yes	Beach (D)
<i>Battletruck</i>	1982	Yes	Walled small town (I)
<i>Radioactive Dreams</i>	1985	No	
<i>Def-Con 4</i>	1985	Yes	'Safe Haven' (D)
<i>Warriors of the Apocalypse</i>	1985	Yes	Mountain (I)
<i>City Limits</i>	1985	Yes	City (I)
<i>America 3000</i>	1986	Yes	Farmland (I)
<i>Land of Doom</i>	1986	No	
<i>Cherry 2000</i>	1987	Yes	Small Town (D/I)
<i>Creepozoids</i>	1987	No	
<i>Steel Dawn</i>	1987	Yes	Green valley (D)
<i>Warlords</i>	1988	Yes	Small town (D)
<i>Hell Comes to Frogtown</i>	1988	Yes	Small town (D/I)
<i>World Gone Wild</i>	1988	Yes	Village (I)
<i>Cyborg</i>	1989	No	
<i>Escape from Safehaven</i>	1989	Yes	Small Towns (D)
<i>Deadly Reactor</i>	1989	Yes	Small Town/Village (I)
<i>Omega Cop</i>	1990	Yes	Rural (D)
<i>Mindwarp</i>	1992	No	
<i>Tank Girl</i>	1995	Yes	Underground settlement/Nomadic vehicles (I)
<i>Steel Frontier</i>	1995	Yes	Small town (I)
<i>Waterworld</i>	1995	Yes	Tropical island (I)
<i>Barb Wire</i>	1996	Yes	Canada (D)
<i>The Postman</i>	1997	Yes	Pastoral small town/rebuilt America (I)
<i>Six String Samurai</i>	1998	No	
<i>Planet of the Apes</i>	2001	No	
<i>The Last Man</i>	2002	No	
<i>The Time Machine</i>	2002	Yes	Rural landscape (I)
<i>Reign of Fire</i>	2002	Yes	Rural landscape (I)
<i>I Am Legend</i>	2007	Yes	Small town (I)
<i>Tooth and Nail</i>	2007	No	
<i>Wall-E (Animation)</i>	2008	Yes	Rebuilding, rural landscape from

			ruins (I)
<i>20 Years After</i>	2008	Yes	Small community (D)
<i>From Inside</i> (Animation)	2008	No	
<i>9</i> (Animation)	2009	Yes	Makeshift house (I)
<i>Carriers</i>	2009	Yes	Beach (I)
<i>The Road</i>	2009	No	
<i>Terminator Salvation</i>	2009	No	
<i>2084</i>	2009	Yes	Small community (I)
<i>The Book of Eli</i>	2010	Yes	Fortress/Library (I)
<i>Downstream</i>	2010	No	
<i>Stake Land</i>	2010	Yes	Small town (D)
<i>Priest</i>	2011	No	
<i>The Divide</i>	2012	No	
<i>Oblivion</i>	2013	Yes	Green valley (I)
<i>After Earth</i>	2013	Yes	Off world colony (I)

In total thirty-seven out of the fifty-nine films met the criterion of the narrative ending in a utopia, this is 63% of the films. While this is not a universal narrative structure it is present in the majority of post-apocalyptic films and recurs consistently across time.

### **Summary**

The coding schedules established that a significant number of films in the post-apocalyptic film genre created a world after disaster in which modern infrastructures were either absent or not understood by the surviving population. This is expressed both in the iconography, which has the frontier and the wasteland as two major settings, and repeated use of the return-to-primitivism trope.

More than two thirds of the corpus of films ends in a utopia. These vary in terms of how they are manifested; however, there is a strong trend towards the pastoral rather than the urban.

## **Sampling**

From the findings of the above coding schedule I identified a number of themes which needed further analysis and discussion. This thesis will therefore focus on latent content, and thus an interpretation of texts. The research questions are concerned with somewhat intangible concepts such as myth and identity, consequently exploring them in relation to the texts requires a method of analysis which can investigate these ideas. The three main themes are:

*Symbolic landscapes:* Specific settings recur consistently in post-apocalyptic films across time. This recurrence suggests that the iconography of landscape is a significant aspect of the post-apocalyptic genre. Several of these particular landscapes also connect to elements of American culture. For example, the frontier has been frequently considered to be important in forging the American national character.

*A discomfort with/rejection of modernity and technology:* There are a number of findings in the content analysis which indicate that this theme is prevalent in post-apocalyptic films. The use of the return-to-primitivism trope is in itself a depiction of a domain where the modern world is absent. This return to a more primitive time suggests a desire to begin again; to imagine human history developing from scratch, or remaining fixed in an agrarian society. The use of pastoral utopias reinforces this desire to see a world stripped of modernity. These two elements are frequently set in an iconography which recreates the American frontier, or depicts the city as a dead and dangerous place which must be escaped from.

*Utopian wish fulfilment:* 63% of films in the corpus end in with the finding or building of a utopia. This suggests that these films are fulfilling a desire to form a new world, a desire which is not realised by the reality of American society. The utopian imagination is a significant aspect of the American national mythscape; part of the way in which the post-apocalyptic film genre connects to wider American culture is that it draws on this utopian aspiration.

## **Case Studies**

In order to analyse these themes in greater depth I have selected three films as case studies. These will be examined in the context of comparing them to other

relevant post-apocalyptic films. The case study films are *The Ultimate Warrior*, *Steel Dawn*, and *I Am Legend*. These particular films were chosen because they are representative examples of both certain shifts and also recurring patterns in the genre.

There are a limited number of films that could be representative examples of both shifts and consistencies. In one way this limits the range of films from the corpus that can be sampled and analysed. However, the research questions of this thesis are based on investigating how the post-apocalyptic genre relates to eschatological myths and American history, and how it relates to the American national mythscape.

Therefore, I argue that it is necessary to examine the relationship between the texts of the films and the way in which these interact with cultural forces. Consequently, the close textual analysis will focus on films which are sites of particular tension between the recurring elements which the content analysis identified and the changes which relate to wider influences.

However, in order to make the analysis clearer and less of a purely subjective interpretation, a further element will be included in the methodology. In the literature review it was established how Altman's work relates to a wider understanding of genre theory. In addition, Altman's semantic-syntactic approach provides a useful framework for studying genre. In his famous 1984 essay 'A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre' and in his later book *Film/Genre* (1999) Altman discusses genre in the terms of his semantic/syntactic approach.<sup>25</sup>

Influenced by social linguistics, Altman's focus is on components that form a genre: the semantic element (the ingredients of the genre), the syntax (the patterns or structures that organise genres). Semantic elements include 'a list of common traits, attitudes, characters, shot locations, sets', and syntactic elements refers to how these elements interrelate, 'the constitutive relationships' (Altman 1984: 10). 'The semantic approach thus stresses the

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<sup>25</sup> Semantic/Syntactic Approach is first outlined by Altman in his 1984 essay; he discusses his Semantic/Syntactic/Pragmatic Approach in his 1999 book. However, the 'pragmatic' element is a tool or a theory for analysing audiences and is therefore not as relevant to this thesis.

genre's building blocks, while the syntactic view privileges the structures into which they are arranged'(ibid). The cornerstone of his approach is that the connections within films and the patterns across films can be analysed. Therefore, according to this approach, genre is a cross-section of shifting elements which can coalesce into a stable structure.

Altman argues that this method is:

fundamental to a theory of how meaning of one kind contributes to and eventually establishes meaning of another. Just as individual texts establish new meanings for familiar terms only by subjecting well known semantic units to a syntactic redetermination, so generic meaning comes into being only through the repeated deployment of substantially the same syntactic strategies. (16)

I will consequently employ Altman's semantic-syntactic approach more as an analytical tool than a theoretical stance. The semantic and syntactic elements will relate to the elements of the texts discussed above.<sup>26</sup> There are five areas of semantic and syntactic interest in the corpus of films. How these elements appear and change through the films reveals the way in which the post-apocalyptic genre overlaps, repeats, and is disrupted.

The five elements are:

- i. **The Community**, which relates to the groups of surviving humans and the physical texture of the world they live in day-to-day
- ii. **The Return-to-primitivism**, which is the depiction of a world that no longer has knowledge of the modern world or technology
- iii. **The Hero**, which relates to the actions and identity of the main character
- iv. **The Barbaric Savages**, which relates to the antagonists or threats to the community
- v. **The Ending**, which relates to the physical location and/or the ideological status of the last scenes in the films.

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<sup>26</sup> For clarification an overview process map of the process of thematic content analysis applied so far in this chapter can be found in Appendix 2.

In each of the chapters the way in which some or all of these elements change or remain stable will be discussed. For instance, the content analysis survey revealed that there was a semantic shift in the 1980s with the introduction of a new setting, the final frontier; however, whether the syntactic elements, such as the utopian new world, remained stable require further investigation.

This approach is echoed by one adopted in *The Changing Vampire of Film and Television: A Critical Study of the Growth of a Genre* (Tim Kane, 2006). Kane's study concentrates specifically on examining a genre, whereas this thesis is also considers how post-apocalyptic films function from a mythological viewpoint and in the context of American national identity. Kane's approach focuses more closely on detailed formal elements, such as how many crucifixes Van Helsing uses to repel Dracula (6), but he also uses semantic-syntactic areas of interest to chart how the genre has developed over time.

The benefit of applying this analytical framework as part of the close textual analysis is encapsulated by Moine, who argues that:

Genres, because they have an ideological and social function, are subject to redefinition as well as semantic or syntactic shifts that respond to, and perpetuate, historical, social, cultural, and cinematic changes [...] genres hybridize and mingle with one another. This process is the key to the phenomenon of genrification, itself a process that is invisible to its contemporaries, which explains the creation of new cycles that in turn become stabilized and form new genres. (2008: 205-6)

The three case study films have, therefore, been selected because they are examples of semantic or syntactic (or both) shifts. However, they also show the ways in which the underlying structures, tropes, imagery, and themes have recurred in the genre. If we understand the post-apocalyptic film genre as a site of tension between historical developments and eschatological mythology, then it is important to explore texts which demonstrate the ways these conflict and merge, and how this interaction has functioned within the actual films.

There is also a need to represent films from the across the time period this thesis examines. This is in order to gain a clear insight into the relationship

between the films in the genre and their historical context. As a result, of the films that did represent these shifts and patterns; it is logical to select those that corresponded to times of historical significance and genre development.

*The Ultimate Warrior* was chosen from the corpus of post-apocalyptic films made in the 1970s. Films made earlier in the decade tended to have pessimistic endings, *The Ultimate Warrior* has a utopian ending and as such it marks part of the shift away from the negative endings that had preceded it.

In addition, it makes an interesting point of comparison with *A Boy and his Dog*, made in the same year, which fiercely satirised the conservative values that *The Ultimate Warrior* largely embraces. I argue that post-apocalyptic films that came later in the decade were consistent in their structural patterns, and thus the syntax of the genre became more coherent. Therefore, *The Ultimate Warrior* represents one of the biggest shifts in the genre, since it marks the point at which the theme of utopian wish fulfilment began to dominate the narrative structure.

*Steel Dawn* was selected as representative of the major semantic change which saw the post-apocalyptic genre adopt the iconography of the western, and blend it with science fiction and action films. This hybridisation was not uniform; there were quite a number of post-apocalyptic films in the 1980s and early 1990s which featured a range of other settings (such as the empty city). However, my argument is that it was clearly a significant cycle, which was partly linked to the political problems and transformations in this period of history.<sup>27</sup> The connection between the post-apocalyptic narrative and the frontier iconography also allow for an exploration of the way in which eschatological mythology interrelates with frontier mythology.

*Steel Dawn* was made and released about halfway through this cycle, and it is a strong example of these iconographic changes. It also exemplifies the return-to-primitivism trope, and as such it is structured around some of the recurring elements of the genre.

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<sup>27</sup> The significance of this period in American history is summarised in the Introduction.

*I Am Legend* was selected as a case study because of its connection to the events and the political and cultural aftermath of 9/11. It is the first post-apocalyptic film set in New York since 9/11. I argue that it also offers an example of an attempt to alter the genre conventions through the alternate ending. There are clearly a number of syntactic changes, and evidence of the way in which the post-apocalyptic genre relates to American history and identity.

However, these alterations to the genre are set in familiar iconography. *I Am Legend* uses the empty city setting, and in doing so repeats many of the visual patterns from earlier films. The film's utopian ending is also notable in terms of consistent patterns emerging across the genre. The film is a strong example of how a film can contribute to the genre being redefined by textual and cultural changes, but still retain recurring structural elements. This provides an interesting point of comparison to later films in the period which deconstructed these elements through postmodern themes.

These case study films will be analysed in two main ways. They are examined in terms of how the story is shown: iconography. They are also examined in terms of how the story is told: narratology. These will be interpreted through the critical frameworks discussed below.

### **Critical Theory**

This thesis adopts a broadly structuralist methodology for detailed textual analysis, while acknowledging the challenges and influences of post-structuralism. Through close textual analysis of three case study films I will analyse of the latent content and themes which connect post-apocalyptic films to eschatological myths and American national identity.

### **Structuralism**

Structuralism can, very broadly, be defined as the study of the relations between the elements which compose a symbolic form (Thompson 1990: 285). As with Altman's semantic/syntactic approach, structuralism as a critical theory of film developed from social linguistics. In particular structuralism is derived

from the Saussurean concepts of *langue/parole*.<sup>28</sup> Structuralism was later expanded and utilised as an approach to myths and stories by the work of Lévi-Strauss. The structuralist adaptation of Saussure's work continued and fuelled theories of narratology, which aimed to 'disclose the generative matrix of narratives' (Stam 2005:19). Structural methods have been applied to film studies, in particular genre studies, for example, Thomas Schatz's *Hollywood Genres* (1981).

In addition, narrative structures can be examined in terms of rules and relationships. The work of Vladimir Propp is particularly useful for analysing how patterns relating to characters and their actions repeat across groups of texts.

Propp provides a yard-stick against which we can hold up our own objects of analysis and through a sophisticated development of Propp, identify the component parts, their absence or estrangement, and thus the meaning of the text. (Hansen et al 1998: 152)

Structuralism provides a useful framework for examining how meanings relate to each other and to their cultural context. It is a methodology based on the idea of investigating 'those perceptual structures, the means by which a culture organises its experience of the world, [which] appear most compellingly in popular myth' (Ray 1985: 15).

The theoretical basis for examination of the texts will be provided by a combination of structuralism within a historical context, and the semantic-syntactic approach to genre as an analytical tool. The structuralist framework will be employed to examine the way in which eschatological mythology influences recurring themes and motifs within post-apocalyptic films, including the roles and functions of characters. In addition, the historical context provides insight into the way in which these films relate to American national identity. The semantic-syntactic approach will be used to explain how these relationships are manifested through different elements of the films themselves.

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<sup>28</sup> *Langue/parole* refers to the difference between language as an organising system of rules and individual utterances, or between structure and performance. Saussure used the example of a chess game; without the rules there could be no game, but it is only through playing a game that these rules are made apparent (Thibault 2013: 96-7).

At the core of this framework is the concept that:

The mythology produced by mass or commercial media has a particular role and function in a cultural system that remains complex and heterodox. It is the form of cultural expression that addresses most directly the concerns of Americans as citizens of a nation-state. The history of the development of the forms and institutions of commercial or mass popular culture directly related to the development of a political ideology of American nationality. (Slotkin 1992: 9)

My argument is that popular culture texts, such as films, express a sense of national identity in a similar way to traditional myth and folklore, this will be examined in relation to the post-apocalyptic genre specifically. The notion of a recurring cultural myth that provides a sense of nationhood, as outlined by Slotkin, will be applied to the exploration of the modern post-apocalyptic film genre as a development in the American 'national mythscape' (Bell 2003: 64).

### **Challenges to Structuralism**

However, in analysing the thematic content of post-apocalyptic films I recognise that there are limitations to structuralist approaches. There is 'the difficulty which structuralism has in bridging the gap between describing textual terms and relationships, and providing an account of the causal factors which brought those terms and relationships into existence' (Aitken 2001: 105). The tendency that Aitken highlights here is that a structuralist approach emphasises the relationships within the film text(s), while minimising the influence of industrial and historical context and developments.

To overcome this issue, the examination of the post-apocalyptic genre will place the analysis of the structural relationships and thematic content in a wider historical context. The structuralist approach will be used to theorise the underlying causes of the patterns that emerged from the content analysis. In addition, the way in which older eschatological myths interrelate with the content of the modern post-apocalyptic film genre will be framed in terms of a structuralist discourse.

The connections between the films in terms of recurring imagery and narrative tropes will be understood in relation to how they express a sense of shared experience and aspirations for dominant groups in American culture. The focus on these groups and on relevant dominant historical trends will also mitigate the criticism of the ritual approach to genre.

To say that a genre sorts out contemporary problems or cultural conflicts at a symbolic level, and that, in so doing, it responds to an audience expectation which is addressed in the form of a ritualized spectacle, is to postulate a homogeneous audience for this genre that shares the same values, and is aware of the same issues. (Moine 2008: 84)

Due to the fact this is not a study of film consumption, a certain degree of assumption regarding audiences is inevitable. However, because certain groups who do 'share the same values' and favour the underpinning eschatological myths have been identified (as discussed in the second section of literature review) this thesis is not making the claim that all audiences relate to strongly to the post-apocalyptic narrative. In addition, the focus on the dominant cultural and historical movements and events mean that most audiences watching these films would have some awareness of these issues.

However, rather than undertaking this analysis in isolation, I will combine it with a consideration of the influence of historical forces on the genre, thus providing a fuller understanding of how the structural relationships in the texts function. These historical forces are the social and political changes in American culture between 1968-2013. These include internal forces, such as protest movements (e.g. the Women's Rights Movement) and external drivers, such as international conflicts (e.g. the Cold War or the War on Terror).

Consequently, this thesis is focused on examining the post-apocalyptic genre as a site of tension between eschatological mythology and historical developments. In doing so it also seeks to escape another issue that structuralist interpretations can lead to – framing meaning as fixed. This is particularly true when structuralism has been applied to genre studies:

the structuralist attempt to identify the central, fundamental and underlying oppositions of a genre was an attempt to distinguish it from other genres. The aim was to police boundaries [...] according to this model, a film could not have more than one deep structure or central opposition (obviously). (Jancovich 2002: 14)

This fixation with singular meanings is partly derived from the Saussurean tradition of structuralism. Film theorists were inspired by semiotics to look for 'master principles that governed all sign production, language and cinema included' (Kickasola 2008: 43).

However, while this thesis will aim to analyse the underlying structures of the post-apocalyptic genre, the challenges to structuralism from post-structuralism cannot, and should not, be ignored. The boundaries and stability of meanings that inform many structuralist studies,<sup>29</sup> have been reconsidered in post-structuralism in favour of a wider web of meaning, in which there are multiple relationships between signs (Stam 2005: 24).

The combination of structuralist and post-structuralist ideas is a successful approach in other studies of Hollywood cinema, for example Robert Ray's *A Certain Tendency of Hollywood Cinema: 1930-1980* (1985). In *A Certain Tendency* Ray argues that Hollywood narratives function in a similar way to myths, in that they magically reconcile society's irreconcilable contradictions, but that this is only successful because of a production style which emphasises continuity editing and individual subjectivity. Thus, the intent is concealed and a conservative mythology is made to seem natural and true (Naremore 2001: ix). Therefore, Ray argues that the films' meanings are derived from multiple sources – cultural myths and industrial trends.

In a similar manner, this thesis recognises that 'the rules of mythic expression are not fixed constraints, like those that govern games. They are more like the structures that define the forms of expressive art' (Slotkin 1992: 656). In other words, cultural myths are articulated in dynamic and fluid ways.

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<sup>29</sup> Such as: Peter Wollen's *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1969), or Will Wright's *Six Guns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western* (1975).

In addition, as I am examining a genre, it is important that the methodology includes an understanding of genre as part of a process. Altman, for instance, states that 'genre is not a permanent *product* of a singular origin, but the temporary *by-product* of an ongoing *process*' (1999: 54). Therefore, this thesis understands these structures as an evolving and historically-contingent process of interaction between various elements.

As an actual method of analysis this involves identifying structures, anti-structures, and signifiers of genre (either semantic or syntactic). These elements are analysed in terms of how they relate to each other, how they develop or remain consistent over time, and how those relationships and developments connect with wider social and industrial shifts in American culture.

### **Sample Approach**

A sample of this approach can be applied to the difference between the thematic structures found in *Mad Max: The Road Warrior* (Dir. Miller, 1981) and the majority of post-apocalyptic films in American cinema. One key difference is in the binary oppositions that create meaning in narrative.

The work discussed in the literature review and the results of the thematic content analysis indicate that in the American post-apocalyptic genre there are technology/agrarian, urban/pastoral binaries. Through these oppositions rural idylls and pastoral life are coded as superior and more positive in comparison to urban landscapes and technology.

However, I argue that these themes of discomfort with technology are not present in *Road Warrior*. Instead, oil and gasoline, which are powerful symbols of crude, dirty, powerful technology, are decisively framed in the film as good and desirable. In fact, the entire plot of the film centres on a small scale oil war. Max's skill in *Road Warrior* is based on driving and customising various attachments, such as boosters, to give his vehicle the edge. The themes of *Road Warrior* are fundamentally based on masculine and technological might overcoming ugly savagery.

In contrast, American post-apocalyptic films frame technology as predominantly negative. For example, in the world of *Steel Dawn* there are no guns or mechanised weaponry and the only fuelled machinery belongs to the villain. The film ends with the lead female character working to “make the valley green again”. A later example is *The Book of Eli*, in this film it is the villains rather than the hero who own the vehicles and there are images of dead bodies in rusting cars, implying that modern technology has caused humanity’s destruction.

However, *The Book of Eli* also offers a more nuanced representation of technology, in some scenes technology is shown to be helpful. For instance, Eli draws great comfort from listening to a battered mp3 player. It can be argued that these representations indicate that the film can also be understood in terms of post-structuralist relativism as well as structuralist oppositions, as will be discussed in the chapter six.

Therefore, from this very brief example it is clear that structuralist approach can be used to interpret the images and structures of various post-apocalyptic films and how they relate within the text and to other texts. Further, where appropriate, both structuralist and post-structuralist theory can be employed to explore the narrative and iconographic patterns within the post-apocalyptic genre. What this sample lacks is an examination of the connection to wider historical drivers. I will discuss these connections in the three subsequent chapters.

### **Previous Critical Work**

Regarding previous critical work, while Ray’s *A Certain Tendency* offers a clear example of how structuralist ideas can be applied to Hollywood cinema in combination with a historical and industrial context, there is a much more recent study which also does this. In *Spectacular Narratives: Hollywood in the Age of the Blockbuster* (2000) Geoff King examines the way in which ‘contemporary spectacles also continue to manifest the kinds of underlying thematic oppositions and reconciliations associated with a broadly ‘structuralist’ analysis of narrative’ (2). He uses these structuralist ideas as a way of understanding how the formal elements of narrative and spectacle interrelate, and are

'qualified and complicated by consideration of the industrial context of Hollywood cinema' (5).

Similarly, the structuralist analysis in this thesis of the recurring narrative and iconographic elements in post-apocalyptic films in this thesis will be placed in a wider historical context. In particular, I argue that the discovery or establishment of a utopia can be considered as a new articulation of the Promised Land myths in the American national mythscape. The impact of historical forces, such as nuclear anxiety or 9/11, on the overall narrative will also be investigated.

In analysing how post-apocalyptic films express elements of American national identity, such as utopian desire, this thesis will also accept King's understanding of the relationship between ideology and mythology.

A mythology could, in principle, exist without serving an ideological purpose [...] But mythic oppositions are often drawn up in such a way as to short-circuit the real issues to more pointed effect. The opposition between 'the frontier' and 'civilization' or the technocratic state is a false one that can be given imaginary reconciliation – and thus the emotional satisfaction derived from creating the impression of taking on problems and resolving them – without addressing the underlying contradictions (of class, race, gender, and so on) that characterize contemporary American society. (10)

As has been established in the literature review, post-apocalyptic film narratives and eschatological myths are generally linked with a certain part of American society – white, male, middle class, Christian, conservative. This section of society is still the most culturally and politically dominant. As such, the myths and ideologies of this group hold great influence over American culture.

This thesis will not examine the post-apocalyptic genre from the perspective of Marxism or other ideologically led approaches. This is because ideological approaches can lead to an overly prescriptive analysis and interpretation of the text created by the implicit or overt agenda bound up in the underlying theory. Since this thesis uses a bottom-up, evidenced based approach, ideological theories would not be suitable. Nevertheless, my analysis will question what the

relationship is between the conservative values of the post-apocalyptic films and the power structures within American society.

Interestingly, in the above quote King describes a similar thematic opposition between frontier and civilisation as the dichotomy between pastoral and the modern that is apparent in the post-apocalyptic genre, as evidenced in the content analysis. The dichotomy between civilisation and wilderness, or modernity and pastoral, underpins a connection between the frontier mythology that King identifies and thematic oppositions in post-apocalyptic films.

It is, therefore, an aim of the case study analysis to explore where these ideological oppositions are derived from. One explanation is that they are due to the relationship between eschatological mythology and frontier mythology. However, these structures and binaries could also overlap because both mythologies stem from a broader ideology in American culture.

King offers a model of how structuralism can still be usefully applied to the thematic analysis of films or genres. In using it in combination with an examination of formal elements and a wider context King demonstrates that 'much can be deduced, particularly through the combination of different levels of analysis' (8). Rather than insisting on single fixed meanings which are detached from causal factors, King readily accepts that 'myths and ideologies are not timeless entities.' But it is possible to 'situate aspects of this mythic narrative, historically and politically, as it functions in contemporary Hollywood' (11).

Two main consequences follow from adopting such a stance in this thesis. The first is that the corpus of post-apocalyptic films will be understood as having a mythic role in American culture. The content of these films will be analysed as articulations of a narrative that is told and retold in culture, one that offers a sense of shared identity, and resolves anxieties and desires.

One criticism of this approach might be that it eclipses the industrial factors that contribute to the content of films and genres. A structuralist reading situates films as cultural expressions, rather than commercial products. However, the two ways of understanding films are not mutually exclusive, as King states:

The motivations of the Hollywood film industry are structured around the creation of pleasurable, and hence profitable, movies, rather than being directly political or ideological in character. This alone is sufficient to lead it largely towards the representation of dominant myths and ideologies. (11)

In other words, if the Hollywood film industry is trying to make accessible stories with a wide appeal, then the fact that these films are retelling of comforting myths is not surprising. Industrial factors will not be the main focus of analysis in this thesis because it is not a study of the film industry. However, they will be included where it is valuable to the analysis, for example if the star persona of an actor brings particular genre associations to a film.

The second consequence that follows from the methodological stance discussed above is that the meaning of these films will be interpreted through a theoretical framework, though those interpretations will be placed in a historical context. A famous opposition of engagement with films via critical and cultural theory comes from David Bordwell. In his 1996 essay 'Contemporary Film Studies and the Vicissitudes of Grand Theory', Bordwell proposes that 'Grand Theory', such as Marxism, or post-structuralism, should be rejected (3).

His reasoning is that these theories are subjective, based on 'subject-position adherents and culturalists [who] have recruited the findings for their own purposes.' (26), and not on empirical facts. He argues that 'middle-level research', for example 'empirical studies of filmmakers, genres, and national cinemas' (27), should be done instead.

However, several critics have countered this call for a 'post-theoretical' approach to film studies. For instance, Murphy argues that '[t]he reliance on the empirical collection of data seems to rest on the fallacy that it is possible to approach the text alone by carefully bracketing off theoretical considerations of any kind' (2004: 120). In addition, Paz argues that Bordwell's methodological framework:

ignores ground-breaking developments in the humanities, such as Marxist or Freudian thought, [which] is not only a theoretical stance itself

but could also be considered an example of ideology in its Marxist sense. The idea that an inherently social and cultural phenomenon like cinema (or any other art form) can be studied in an "objective" and "scientific" way hides the fact that cinema cannot be separated and isolated from the experience and habitus of the researcher, from the economic and industrial context in which it is produced, and from the ideas, beliefs and values that are conveyed through the texts. (24)

It is Murphy and Paz's arguments which inform my approach in this thesis, although the theoretical interpretation of the films will be balanced by the content analysis and the examination of historical factors.

### **Summary of Methodology**

This chapter has outlined the methodology this thesis adopts. This methodology combines analytical approaches, thematic content analysis, the semantic-syntactic approach, and close textual analysis, with theoretical interpretation, a broadly structuralist framework within a historical context.

This makes it possible to undertake a clear examination of what aspects of the post-apocalyptic genre have changed and which have repeated over time. This can then be related to a structuralist framework which interprets these repeating patterns in terms of expressing underlying cultural myths, and a historical investigation that offers explanations for changes.

I will apply this critical approach to the three analysis chapters: 1968-1976: Pessimism to Optimism (*The Ultimate Warrior*), 1982-1989: The Final Frontier (*Steel Dawn*), and 2007-2013: Fears and Expectations (*I Am Legend*). The reasons for the choosing these films for further close textual analysis has been discussed earlier in this chapter. The focus on these dates relates to the patterns and themes that the content analysis revealed.

As discussed in the introduction, 1968 was a significant date in American history. It is also the year which *Planet of the Apes* was released. Although this was not the first post-apocalyptic film in American cinema, it was one of the most influential. It also exemplifies the pessimistic narratives that reflected the despondency and confusion in American society at this time. The end date of

1976 was chosen because this was when the syntax of the genre coalesced into a stable structure (as Altman's approach frames it) of optimistic, utopian endings.

1982 was the year which the first post-apocalyptic film that used the semantic iconography of the western was released (*Battletruck*, aka *Warlords of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*). Ronald Reagan had also begun his term as President the previous year. I selected the end date of 1989 because the use of western iconography in post-apocalyptic films began to change and fade at this point in time. Additionally, Reagan's presidency ended in this year and a new set of social and political forces emerged in American and global culture, such as the Gulf War and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The final chapter begins the analysis in 2007 because that was the release date of *I Am Legend*, which was the first post-apocalyptic film to be set in America after 9/11. As discussed in the introduction, the end date of 2013 is significant because I have identified a further shift in the post-apocalyptic genre towards postmodernist themes. It also allows the study to be as up-to-date as possible, while still allowing enough time to allow for critical observations of the cultural context the films were made in.

In the following three chapters I will analyse the way in which aspects of the genre interconnect across time, while also examining the wider social, cultural and production context.

## 4. 1968-1976: PESSIMISM TO OPTIMISM

### Introduction

In this chapter I will begin by examining the historical and cultural context in which post-apocalyptic films were being made in. This examination focuses on the dominant trends and historical events rather than a more nuanced examination of the events in this period. This is for two reasons. Firstly, because this thesis is primarily investigating the development of the post-apocalyptic genre, as such the major focus of this chapter is the analysis of the case study film *The Ultimate Warrior*. Secondly, because films tend to represent broader and dominant cultural trends and movements since these can be retold through existing narrative and ideological paradigms. Robert Ray, drawing on Althusser's concept of 'ideological apparatus', argues that 'American Cinema never simply reflected contemporary events [...] external occurrences reached Hollywood through a filter of its own making' (1985: 68). For both these reasons the historical analysis will focus on the prevailing cultural movements.

The chapter will broadly map the development of the post-apocalyptic genre from 1968 to 1975. The focus will be on whether the tone of these films was pessimistic or optimistic. Following this *The Ultimate Warrior* will be analysed as a case study. In the analysis I will examine: the representation of urban and pastoral landscapes, the way in which these are linked to ideological values, and finally the way in which these values can be understood in relation to the cultural influences of the Women's Rights Movement and biblical mythology.

### Overview

There is considerable critical agreement that in the late 1960s and the 1970s there was a 'breakdown of ideological confidence' (Wood 1987: 23) in American culture.<sup>30</sup> This breakdown was caused by a complex range of factors;

two decades of racial confrontations, new social movements, costly military ventures, an end to progressive visions of limitless economic expansion and political progressivism, and the beginnings of Post-Fordism. (Gerlach 2011: 1034)

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<sup>30</sup> For example, Gerlach (2011), Thomson (1993), Elsaesser (1975), and Torry (1993).

Gerlach terms the resultant feeling that America had failed to fulfil its utopian dreams ‘the end of “victory culture”’ (2011: 1034). This general sense of insecurity and defeat was also reflected and expressed in many American film outputs.

Christian Keathley terms the films of the late 1960s and 1970s the ‘post-traumatic cycle’ in reference to the way in which they reflect the damage caused by the turmoil of this era on the American psyche (2004: 298). Keathley argues that the films in this period are an exception to the usual reconciliation and resolution of conflict found in Hollywood cinema (ibid). Instead, these films (e.g., *Chinatown* (Dir. Polanski, 1974) and *Midnight Cowboy* (Dir. Schlesinger, 1969)) are permeated by a sense of demoralisation and disaffection. The protagonists are often depicted as trapped, powerless, rather than victorious, against greater forces (298-300).

As stated above, these representations reflect the broader cultural trends of the time. In literature, we can observe depictions of more nuanced aspects of this period. For example, Gore Vidal’s historical novel *Burr* (1973) challenged the dominant images and narratives surrounding the Founding Fathers. This partly reflected the underlying lack of faith in the American Dream but also disillusionment in the political system that was growing at the time.

Another example is Philip K Dick’s overtly political dystopian novel *Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said* (1974) which explored the theme of a trapped protagonist but also issues of racism, the notion of surveillance society, and the absence of objective certainty. Therefore, in literature the more intricate moods and movements of the time were being represented. However, the post-apocalyptic genre has largely connected with much broader popular themes, including the sense of defeat in this period.

Given the lack of faith in progress, it is unsurprising that that a number of critics, argue that American science fiction films also became more pessimistic in tone and content during the this period. For example, H Bruce Franklin (1983) and James Combs (1993) both argue that futuristic films since 1970 have become more pessimistic.

This pessimism could not even be eradicated by the reality of successful space travel. The first moon landing in 1969 was an exceptional scientific and technological achievement, but it was viewed with ambivalence, if not outright negativity, by portions of the American public. While there was an immediate upsurge of enthusiasm, this was tempered by 'a growing scepticism about the inherent value of scientific and technological advancement' (Tribbe 2014: 182).<sup>31</sup>

Sobchack argues that: the SF films released between 1968 and 1977 represented an unwelcome future worse than the present. This was connected to the 'dystopian despair of a country negatively involved in both domestic and international contestation' (1999: 131). Booker echoes this concept of an absence of utopian 'energy' and imagination in American culture (2002: 3).<sup>32</sup>

I argue that post-apocalyptic films, which are premised on a disaster so huge and terrible that it destroys society as we know it, were well-placed to reflect into these wider themes of pessimism and failure. In the beginning of the period under discussion the films in the post-apocalyptic genre were bleak visions of the future. The narratives ended in the annihilation of humanity's future, or with very ambiguous chances of survival.

*Planet of the Apes* was released in 1968 and clearly condemned the destructive and violent behaviours of human beings. The film's ending is famous and yet still shocking despite its familiarity. *Empire* reviewer Andrew Collins emphasises the significance of the film's 'powerful Statue of Liberty denouement' (2000: URL). Taylor, who is already nihilistic and cynical, sees the ruined Statue of Liberty and realises that he is not on an alien planet where apes rule humans, but Earth in the distant future aftermath of a nuclear war.

The shots of Taylor kneeling at the base of the ruined Statue of Liberty, howling in rage and sorrow at humanity's senseless destruction, encapsulate the

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<sup>31</sup> Matthew Tribbe's book *No Requiem for the Space Age: The Apollo Moon Landings and American Culture* (2014) provides a fuller examination of the moon landings in the context of emerging ambivalence towards science and rationalism in American culture.

<sup>32</sup> Booker dates this 'post-utopian' state to after WWII, however, he argues that later shifts in the 1960s and 1970s also relate to the decline in the utopian imagination.

national despair to which Sobchack refers and the theme of utter powerlessness that Keathley discusses.

The angry desolation Taylor exhibits can be compared to defeat and despair Jake Gittes (Jack Nicholson) is shown to feel at the end of *Chinatown*. In both films a cynical character tries to fight against those who control society and is ultimately defeated. Their despair stems not only from their defeat, but also from the fact that they are faced with an image that symbolises humanity's cruelty, violence, and selfishness. For Jake it is the dead body of the woman he tried to save, for Taylor it is the ruined Statue of Liberty. The latter is an image of a damaged American national identity and fear for the future of the country. These films connected with the notion that 'the American public [had] developed a mood that Jimmy Carter described as a "malaise."' (Gerlach 2011: 1035).

In 1970 *Planet of the Apes* was followed by a sequel: *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* (*Beneath*). *Beneath* was even more pessimistic in its tone and narrative than the first film. The film focuses on the surviving (free, vocal) humans who have been mutated by radiation and have formed a cult which worships a nuclear missile. The film ends with Taylor proving Dr. Zaius's view that "Man is evil. Capable of nothing but destruction" right by detonating a nuclear bomb and obliterating the entire planet.

The nihilism of the final sequence in *Planet of the Apes* has spread to the entire narrative of *Beneath*. The depiction of a blind veneration of modern warfare culminating in pointless death on a massive scale can be read as an exaggerated metaphor for the horrors of Vietnam. Indeed, Eric Greene describes the film as an 'impassioned statement against the [Vietnam] war' (1998: 69-70).

The Apes films are also a clear allegory for the racial tensions and conflicts of the time. *Planet of the Apes* is based on the 'transformation of racial power relations. This is the main motif, some might even call it an obsession' (Greene 1998: 24). This fixation stemmed from the racial violence during that period that had shaken the security of white racial hegemony (25). In the first film the white

male hero is subjugated and oppressed by 'inferior' beings, in *Beneath* the race war between the humans and the apes leads to the destruction of both. Taken together the films depict the ultimate result of racial conflict as the annihilation of the planet (70).

The first two Apes films were dominated by nihilism and an extreme pessimism about human nature and the ultimate result of humanity's propensity for conflict. Released in 1971, *Glen and Randa* is the next post-apocalyptic film in this period. It portrayed characters that embraced the optimism and ideals of the 1960s, but who were ultimately doomed by this naïve ideology.

The two title characters are a young man and woman travelling through a grungy post-apocalyptic America (mainly naked) to find a city they saw in a comic book. They fail to get to the city and they are unable to understand the world around them in any practical sense. They do not have any knowledge of the social constructs and values that govern modern society (hence the nudity), but neither do they have any ability to control or progress their own destiny. The film essentially takes the 'hippy' ideology of peace and love and represents it as harmless but ultimately useless as a way to advance human progress. The film represented the cynicism in American culture towards the idealistic dreams of the 1960s.

There is a somewhat similar theme of idealism being doomed in the other post-apocalyptic film released in 1971, *The Omega Man*. In this film an idealistic young man named Richie is cured by Neville of the 'plague' which has turned a large majority of the population into vampire-like mutants. However, Neville is pessimistic that the cure will work on the already infected mutants, as opposed to those who are only beginning to show symptoms, and suggests the mutants should be left to die. Richie reacts angrily to this cynicism and attempts to discuss the matter with the mutants, who call themselves the 'Family'. He is brutally murdered for his efforts. In contrast, Neville keeps fighting the mutants until he is mortally wounded. In fact, he is only killed at all because his machine gun jams at the crucial moment.

Therefore, Richie who tries to reason with the enemy, who are 'savage' and sub-human, is destroyed for his naïve belief that peace can be negotiated. Neville who keeps fighting the enemy is also defeated but this is shown to be because he did not have the right resources to win rather than because of a flawed ideology.

One interpretation of this aspect of the film is that there is a connection between the narrative and some of the conservative rhetoric relating to the Vietnam War. In particular the idea that the war could be won with superior supplies and better military tactics (Combs 2015: 301). This reading of the film argues that Neville as the pragmatic military doctor represents the film's individualist, patriarchal authoritarian values. Neville is juxtaposed with the grungy, communal mutants who are called 'the Family' and who represent the 1960s anti-establishment (anti-Vietnam) counter-cultural values (Hass et al, 2015: 360).

However, another reading of these scenes is that neither negotiating with the enemy nor fighting them will work, and that the only course of action is to withdraw entirely. This is precisely what Neville tells the survivors to do. This interpretation of *The Omega Man* suggests a continuation of the theme of defeat found in *Planet* and *Beneath*.

However, I would argue that, unlike in previous films the hero (Neville) is actually victorious in that he discovers a cure that prevents the 'plague' from developing once contracted. He does, therefore, posthumously succeed in changing the world. Nevertheless, this change is not a total victory. Neville dies and tells another character called Dutch to flee the city and start again in what Dutch had previously described as a "Garden of Eden, without the snake". This is the first indication of a shift in the syntax of the post-apocalyptic genre from narratives culminating in failure and despair to optimistic endings symbolised by utopia.

Although *The Omega Man* is more hopeful than previous films it still represents an absence of victory and a fear of the future. The enemy is not defeated nor will they be and there is only a limited supply of the serum which prevents the

plague developing. It is, at best, an ending which is ambiguous about humanity's future.

The ambiguity of *The Omega Man* is in itself interesting. The previous three post-apocalyptic films in this period had ended with humanity being categorically consigned to annihilation either through violence and destruction, or through an insufficient ability to function effectively in a harsh world. In contrast, *The Omega Man* is open to interpretation regarding the way in which it represents humanity's failure (too much violence or not enough). The ending is also ambiguous, humanity is not destroyed, but nor is it victorious. The ambiguity in the film relates to a wider tension in American culture between the pessimism that was currently dominant and the development of renewed optimism.

The post-apocalyptic genre was also beginning to incorporate utopian elements in the narrative. Therefore, *The Omega Man* can be understood as being on the cusp of a major shift in the development of the post-apocalyptic genre and what it represented in American culture.

In 1973 *Battle for the Planet of the Apes* (*Battle*) the last of the Planet of the Apes film series was released. The two intervening films in the series did not meet the criteria for a post-apocalyptic film and so they are not part of the corpus of films under discussion. The narrative of *Battle* follows the fight between humans and apes, and apes and other apes, in the post-nuclear wasteland that Earth has become.

The narrative ends in a scene that at first appears to be utterly utopian. The orangutan Lawgiver begins the film by telling the story of how the peace was won, the film ends with the reveal that he is telling it to a group of children and young apes 600 years after the events of the main narrative of the film. It is an image of unity and peaceful cooperation between formerly warring species.

However, this image of peace is not the final shot in the film. A child asks the Lawgiver what the future will hold and if man and ape will continue to live together in peace. The Lawgiver replies that only the dead know the future. The film then cuts to a statue of Caesar (the ape who had fought to bring peace

between humans and apes), a single tear falls from the statue's eye. This is meant to communicate that the events seen in the first film (a thousand years in the future of from the end of *Battle*) are fixed and inevitable. Humans and apes are destined to destroy each other.

The theme of despair at human nature and the future that permeated the first two films is still dominant in final scene of *Battle*. The powerlessness of the hero in *Planet* and *Beneath* is extended to all of humanity in *Battle*; not only is the future of the human race bleak, it is also fixed and unchangeable.

The ambivalence of *The Omega Man* is mainly absent from *Battle*. However, *Battle* does occupy a slightly unusual place in the development of the post-apocalyptic genre during this period because it is a sequel to films made several years earlier. The scriptwriter Paul Dehn wanted all five films in the series to function as a cohesive whole, the narrative forming a 'time circle' or loop (Freeman 2015: 169). Therefore, the ending of *Battle* had to be pessimistic because otherwise the film would suggest that the events of *Planet* would not occur.

While *Battle* is still very relevant in terms of reflecting the pessimism of the era, the influence of the story's narrative constraints should be acknowledged. Rather like the fixed future the film's story depicts, the creators of *Battle* had to end the film pessimistically because they had already created pessimistic films within the same narrative universe. The narrative structures and themes in *Battle* can be understood both in relation to the development of the post-apocalyptic genre and as the final film of Planet of the Apes series.

There were two post-apocalyptic films released in 1975 one is *The Ultimate Warrior*, which will be analysed as the case study film, the other is the cult film *A Boy and His Dog*. *A Boy and His Dog* is perhaps the most cynical of all the post-apocalyptic films discussed in this period. However, unlike the previous films which expressed a cynicism about human nature or the future of American society, *A Boy and His Dog* aims its pessimistic representations at a very specific aspect of American culture.

The majority of the narrative is a satire of small town Middle America and the conservative values associated with 1950s culture. The loss of belief in those values connects to the lack of faith in the utopian imagination that the previous post-apocalyptic films had also represented.

It is significant that the film was not a mainstream release.<sup>33</sup> It was adapted from a short story that was part of the 'new wave' of science fiction writing in the late 1960s (the novella by Harlan Ellison was published in 1969), which expressed some of the themes and attitudes of the counter-culture movement (Cornea 2007: 80). The film is aiming to reflect the rejection of middle-class suburban values.

The key way in which it does this is through the subterranean community of Topeka which is 'Orwell's vision of a Big Brother society in 1984, but dressed in Walt Disney's vision of Main Street, USA' (Shapiro 2002: 165). It is a vision of conservative small town 1950s America at its most unpleasant. There is a high school style marching band, recipes and platitudes repeated over a tannoy, and criminals are sentenced in the church.

The community is ruled by a small committee who have absolute power. Those who disobey are executed. The charges brought are always "lack of respect, wrong attitude and failure to obey authority". They are expressions of the Orwellian concept of 'thought-crime'; one's attitude is enough to lead to death. In keeping with this idea all the citizens wear clown make-up – painted on happy faces.

The film is not subtle in its satire; it creates a 'utopia' of conservative ideals and then depicts it as a nightmarish place. *A Boy and His Dog* perhaps best represents and reflects the anger felt towards America's perceived failures and values 'characterized by the explosions of youthful protests' (Kent 2001: 1). This is in contrast to the broader national mood of 'malaise' and despair expressed in the three Planet of the Apes films discussed here, *Glen and Randa*, and to a lesser extent, *The Omega Man*.

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<sup>33</sup> The film is frequently described by critics as 'cult' and was made by the relatively small independent production company LQ/JAF Productions, set-up by the actor L.Q. Jones (Palmer 1993: 203).

Nevertheless, despite the subversive and angry elements of *A Boy and His Dog*, it also shares ambivalence with *The Omega Man* in the way in which it 'pushes the edge between pessimism and optimism' (Shapiro 2002: 160). The community of Topeka is shown to be a nightmarish society, as opposed to a fulfilment of the American utopian imagination. However, in the final scenes the two central characters find personal renewal, albeit through murder and cannibalism. Vic kills Quilla, his love interest, and feeds her to Blood, the dog he is telepathically connected to, in order to save Blood's life. The film ends with the two of them agreeing to continue to search for 'Over the Hill' – the Promised Land.

As in *The Omega Man*, the film ends with rejuvenation, renewed hope, and the intention to find a utopia. In addition, both films portray a fundamentally corrupted and warped communities (the Family and Topeka respectively), which cannot be saved and are abandoned by the main characters. Interestingly, however, these communities are inversions of each other.

In *The Omega Man* 'the Family' could be interpreted as representing the anti-establishment 'hippy' communities embraced by the counter-culture movements. In *A Boy and His Dog* Topeka represents the authoritarian Middle American communities venerated by many conservative sections of society. The two films reflect the uncertainty that was felt about the future of American culture and the cultural values which would dominate it.

My argument is that in terms of genre development it is significant that images and concepts of utopia are being used in these films to represent ideologies and values which connect to conceptions of American national mythscape. Applying the syntactic-semantic approach this can be understood as the introduction of a new semantic element, the promise or actuality of a utopia, relating to the syntactic shift which saw post-apocalyptic films articulate and fulfil a new world mythology that had failed in reality.

However, it was only in *The Ultimate Warrior* and *Logan's Run* (released in 1976) that this syntax finally began to stabilise as a consistent part of the genre. It was also in these films that there was a shift from cynical and pessimistic

representations of America's future to far more optimistic, but far less subversive, visions of the world after the end.

## **CASE STUDY: *The Ultimate Warrior* (Dir. Clouse, 1975, 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox)**

### **Synopsis**

*The Ultimate Warrior* is about post-apocalyptic New York in the year 2012. A plague has decimated crops and most people have died. The Baron (Max Von Sydow) maintains a fairly peaceful small community in an enclave of New York. Vicious gangs, some of which are led by a man named Carrot, constantly attack them. The Baron has a rooftop garden and has developed seeds immune to the plague with the help of Cal, who is the gardener. His daughter Melinda (Joanna Miles) is pregnant and his grandchild's future is in danger as supplies dwindle and Carrot closes in.

He employs Carson (Yul Brynner), a knife fighter for hire, to take the seeds and escort his daughter Melinda to an island Carson knows of. They escape through the subway tunnels, fighting off Carrot and his men. Melinda gives birth and Carson loses his hand, but kills Carrot. They succeed in getting out of New York to the coast near the island.

### **Genre Context**

Shapiro states that *The Ultimate Warrior* is evidence that 'different phases of generic development do overlap' (2003: 160). While Shapiro does not elaborate on that statement it can be assumed that he is referring to the generic influences that are present in *The Ultimate Warrior*.

The director Robert Clouse is better known for directing the Bruce Lee martial-arts film *Enter the Dragon* (1973). He went on to direct a number of other martial-arts action films, including the Blaxploitation film *Black Belt Jones* (1974), a later Bruce Lee film *The Game of Death* (1978), and *The Big Brawl* (1980) starring Jackie Chan.

There are several scenes in *The Ultimate Warrior* which demonstrate the influence of the martial-arts film. Primarily, this influence can be observed in the scene where Carson is introduced as a character. He stands on a wall in deserted downtown New York, his eyes closed, shirtless, and with a knife on his belt. He is waiting for someone to hire him for his skills as a warrior (fig 1).

The imagery has associations with Samurai warrior legends and other martial-arts-orientated story-telling: the noble yet deadly warrior monk (Donovan 2008: 86).



**Fig 1:** Carson (Brynner) waiting to be hired for his fighting skills in *The Ultimate Warrior*.

The casting of Yul Brynner as this particular 'noble savage' complicates the generic make-up of *The Ultimate Warrior* even more. Yul Brynner's star persona was partly based on his mysterious ethnic origins, an obscurity he reportedly fostered (Cohan 1997: 151).<sup>34</sup> This persona was reinforced in the earlier part of his career when he played King Mongkut of Siam in 'yellow-face' in the 1956 adaptation of *The King and I* (Dir. Lang). However, he also had strong associations with the western genre because of his later role in the popular film *The Magnificent Seven* (Dir. Adams, 1960). These two aspects of his persona, otherness/strangeness and an American gunfighter, were combined to great effect in *Westworld* (Dir. Crichton, 1973).

*Westworld* is a 'weird western' which tells the story of a malfunctioning gunfighter cyborg (Brynner) stalking tourists at a futuristic Wild West theme park. Brynner's casting in *The Ultimate Warrior* incorporates these associations of an 'exotic' otherness combining with a vision of a future America in which

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<sup>34</sup> Brynner was actually from Vladivostok, Russia.

there are frightening and dangerous threats. Many images and plot points in post-apocalyptic films primarily serve to illustrate that the world we know has been utterly destroyed and civilisation has been reversed, inverted, or corrupted. As such, the strangeness of Brynner's persona combined with his association with a narrative about a weird futuristic version of American imagery underlines this sense of the world gone wrong.

In addition to these more apparent generic combinations there is another aspect to Brynner's casting. Clouse demonstrated through his filmography a clear interest in narratives featuring ethnic fighters, whether they were Asian or Black. In an interview about preparing for *Enter the Dragon* he talked about 'Westernising' Bruce Lee, and making him look comfortable in New York and London.<sup>35</sup> In regard to the interview, Yvonne Tasker argues that 'Clouse speaks through oppositions of savagery and civilisation' (2006: 447). Put in this context, the casting of Brynner is suggestive of a desire to convey that America has become a wild, barbaric place in which noble warriors survive through their skills.

The connection through Brynner to the western film and the weird western also implies that this post-apocalyptic world is a new frontier. 'The "frontier" realm [...] can also become a domain in which such individuals can make a difference, where immediate human agency is presented as free from social constraint' (King 2000: 18). The post-apocalyptic narrative similarly offers a world without the constraints and responsibilities of modern society. The connections between the western and the post-apocalyptic genres, and the eschatological and frontier mythologies, will be explored more fully in the chapter five.

However, I posit that in terms of generic development it is significant that the post-apocalyptic genre began to absorb a number of other wider influences. These interrelationships between the post-apocalyptic genre and the western and martial-arts film are not unusual; 'generic repertoires themselves can be at least partly compatible' (Neale 2005: 207). The combination of generic elements is often possible because of overlapping syntax. For example, the

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<sup>35</sup> 'Interview with Robert Clouse' John Kelly, *Inside Kung Fu* (1988).

western and the post-apocalyptic film share the syntactic strategy of setting the narrative in a dangerous and lawless world which must be braved in order to build a utopian existence.

Altman posits that generic meaning is derived from the redeployment of syntactic strategies (1984: 16). *The Ultimate Warrior* was the film that marked a distinct change in the syntactic strategies of the post-apocalyptic film genre (from pessimistic to optimistic). One explanation for the increased hybridity at this time is that the post-apocalyptic genre was developing and the syntax was changing, and as such it began to attract elements from other related genres.

Those involved in producing the films at this time, such as Robert Clouse, would have contributed to this process both consciously and unconsciously, overtly and through symbolism. They contributed by using imagery and narrative tropes from their existing filmography and by expressing cultural shifts, ideologies, and myths.

On a more specific level *The Ultimate Warrior* represents the syntactic shift in the post-apocalyptic genre from pessimistic annihilation to optimistic utopia. In order to examine the way in which this is articulated through semantic elements this chapter will begin by using close textual analysis to compare the final shots of *Planet of the Apes* and *The Ultimate Warrior*. The final images of the film communicate the fate of the characters and, by extension, the fate of humanity. For clarity the technical aspects of the scenes will be summarised next before they are analysed.

## **Comparison of Final Scenes**

### ***Planet of the Apes***

The final scene begins with an extreme high-angle shot of Taylor and Nova (a mute slave human) riding on horseback along the shoreline. The camera tracks backwards in a continuous take. A metal structure emerges in the bottom left of the frame and begins to obscure the beach and the characters. The camera zooms in on Taylor and Nova, as Taylor stares in consternation at the metal structure. The next shot is similar to the one before, Taylor and Nova are in an extreme high-angle. The camera pans left this time revealing a series of sharp

metal spikes. Taylor and Nova are framed between the spikes, and Taylor dismounts the horse slowly, not taking his eyes from the structure (fig 2). The non-diegetic music cuts at this point and only the diegetic sounds of the sea can be heard. The camera zooms in again as Taylor stands in the surf.



**Fig 2:** Taylor approaches the Statue of Liberty in *Planet of the Apes*.

The camera cuts to a mid-shot of Taylor looking up at the structure. Taylor states that he is “home” as he falls to his knees. The camera cuts to an uncomprehending Nova. It cuts back to Taylor in wide-shot; he is kneeling on the sand and hammering his fist into it in fury. He shouts “Damn you all to hell” as the sea sweeps over his legs. The film cuts to a wide-shot of Taylor and Nova from behind them, the camera slowly zooms out to reveal the ruined, half-buried Statue of Liberty. This is the final shot of the film (fig 3).



**Fig 3:** The final shot of *Planet of the Apes*.

### ***The Ultimate Warrior***

The final shots of *The Ultimate Warrior* begin after Carson has defeated Carrot and killed him. A low angle wide-shot shows Carson and Melinda and her baby climb the stairs out of the subway station, the camera pans up slightly as they begin to climb. As they reach the first landing the film cuts to a low angle mid-shot and then freezes in a still image (fig 4).



**Fig 4:** Carson and Melinda and her baby escape the subway tunnels in *The Ultimate Warrior*.

There are then a series of still images of the city and then of the countryside. The film cuts to a moving wide-shot of a coastline. Carson, Melinda, and the

baby move into shot from the left of the frame, almost silhouetted against the sky. The camera zooms in on them slowly and simultaneously pans right. An island comes into the frame and the shot freezes once more (fig 5).



**Fig 5:** Carson and Melinda and her baby look towards the safe haven of the island in *The Ultimate Warrior*.

Moving to an analysis of these scenes, I argue that one significant point of comparison between them is the location. Both films feature a coastal setting; the characters are situated on the beach and framed against the sea. Further, both films contrast juxtapose these coastal locations against images of the urban.

In *Planet of the Apes* Taylor and Nova appear to be in a completely natural, indeed idyllic setting, they are shown riding on horseback along the edge of the sea. At first these shots seem to imply that there will be a New World. Taylor and Nova ride along the shore. They appear to represent Adam and Eve; they are leaving the tyranny of the apes to begin again. However, Taylor and Nova do not get to fulfil their expected roles as Adam and Eve. The metallic shape of the Statue of Liberty literally obliterates the image of paradisiacal rebirth. The twisted black metal of the torch emerges from the bottom left of the frame as the camera tracks backwards. It eclipses the landscape of the beach and Taylor and Nova.

In *The Ultimate Warrior* the film moves from Carson, Melinda, and her baby fleeing the dark, claustrophobic subway tunnels to the shot of the open, sunlit shoreline. The contrast between the shots of the urban environment and the coastal landscape emphasises the characters' new found hope and freedom. They have escaped the squalor and danger of city, and are looking towards the island where Carson has said life still flourishes. This concept of escaping to nature is reinforced through the interceding series of still images.

The first image shows the decaying and densely urban city. However, each shot contains a smaller proportion of the urban landscape and a greater proportion of natural landscapes. The city is also further away from the camera in each shot, thus it diminishes in size as well as expanse.



**Fig 6:** One of the still shots depicting an escape for the city in *The Ultimate Warrior*.

The city's dominance in the frame reduces as its influence as a location in the characters' lives, and by extension humanity's future, decreases. The final shot of the coast is a climax to this journey of escape. There is no urban influence and it is in this setting of purity that a potential utopia is situated. In structuralist terms, resolution between the opposing forces of urban and nature is partly achieved through the gradual elimination of the urban as an iconographic element in the film.

In *Planet of the Apes* the appearance of the ruined Statue of Liberty eliminates any hope for the future. It is a human-made construct, but it also symbolises the destructive power of far more advanced technology: nuclear weaponry.

It is at this moment that ruins begin to work both forward and backward in time, [...] the ruined Statue of Liberty at the end of *The Planet of the Apes* (1968), at once a marker of apocalypse in the past and a foreshadowing of that same apocalypse in the future. (Burgess 2006: 277)

The Statue is an artefact from the future; a symbol of the fall of civilisation rather than the birth of a new one. The juxtaposition between the coastal location and the ruined Statue expresses this failure of humanity's future because of the damage caused by technological ambition.

In both films, then, images of the urban represent negative concepts of destruction and catastrophe. The ruined Statue of Liberty and the depopulated New York are both used to symbolise the absence of hope. The key difference is that in *Planet of the Apes* the urban symbol replaces the hopeful imagery of the coast. In *The Ultimate Warrior* the natural landscape of the beach replaces the urban environment of the city. In other words, there is clearly a visual and structural shift from the hope of a utopian new world being destroyed to the utopian dream being fulfilled through images of pastoral paradise.

This shift is reinforced by the way in which the characters are positioned and framed in these shots. Taylor in *Planet of the Apes* is shot from above, in an extreme high angle. He also drops to his knees and beats the sand in horror at his discovery. Thus, he is repeatedly brought low; first in relation to the world around him and then in his body language which is an expression of his internal emotions. This emphasises his powerlessness, which as discussed earlier in this chapter, is a key aspect of films in this period.

Further the Statue of Liberty is both ruined and half sunk into the beach, as such it mirrors his defeated posture; it too is broken and brought low by humanity's destruction. The Statue of Liberty is one of the most iconic symbols of America. For that reason it has frequently been used to symbolise America's

destruction. This image combined with Taylor's distraught posture conveys despair at both an individual human level and at the level of national identity.

The characters are framed very differently in *The Ultimate Warrior*. Carson and Melinda walk purposefully along the shore, their heads raised. Their body language is relaxed and they are speaking to each other nonchalantly. As with Taylor in *Planet of the Apes*, they can see something not yet revealed to the audience. However, what they can see is the island which is the place they have been seeking – a safe haven where life can grow. This is a location that signifies hope and the culmination of their journey.

They move across the frame, representing that they are travelling forward in the direction of their destination. Carson and Melinda are metaphorically looking and moving towards the future. They also form a family unit with the baby, an aspect of the film which will be analysed in greater depths later in this chapter.

The analysis of the final shots demonstrate the way in which several of the same semantic elements form part of these films, but relate to the syntax in a different way in *The Ultimate Warrior* in contrast to *Planet of the Apes*. The final scenes of both films include a contrast between urban and natural, the framing of characters against a wider landscape, and the suggestion of a new world. However, these elements convey different themes in the two films.

*The Ultimate Warrior* differs from previous post-apocalyptic films in that it ends on a far more definitively hopeful note. Whereas the idea of utopia had been used to represent ideologies previously, this representation had primarily been framed as pessimistic. Utopia was shown to be impossible because of humanity's inherent violence, or naivety. It was used as satire in *A Boy and His Dog*. In *The Ultimate Warrior*, however, rebirth becomes possible. The final image depicts a natural paradise.

The achievement of a utopian new world in this film does not reduce the complexity of the way in which the post-apocalyptic genre relates to and represents aspects of American culture. These relationships and tensions underlying the structure of the film are reinforced when the final scene of the film is compared to the opening shots of *The Ultimate Warrior*.

## Representations of Landscapes



**Fig 7:** The opening shot of *The Ultimate Warrior*.

*The Ultimate Warrior* begins with a series of completely static shots. There is no panning, cutting, or zooming in; the only editing in evidence are the fades between what are essentially still photographs. In the first image (fig. 7) there is juxtaposition between the gleaming image of the city and the dead wasteland outside it. This shot of a lustrous New York and a rotting wasteland serves to highlight a sense of deterioration and deadness invading the city.

The static quality of the image contrasts with kinetic movement associated with large metropolises, thus emphasising the decay and absence of normal life. The lack of movement on screen differs from the fast interplay of sights and sounds in other urban SF such as *The Fifth Element* (Dir. Besson, 1997) or *Blade Runner* (Dir. Scott, 1982). The city in this film is not a location of progress and exciting technology, but rather a stagnant and fading environment.

The shot is then overlaid with the title 'New York City 2012 A.D.'. The place name seems rather redundant given the iconic nature of the New York skyline. The date, however, gives an important context to the scene. 2012 is thirty-seven years from the film's date of release. This establishes the film, not only as

reflection of the on-going problems in America, but also as a projection into the future of how these tensions may develop, or indeed deteriorate.

This links to some of Sobchack's wider arguments, discussed in the literature review, regarding the development of iconography in urban science fiction films. New York in *The Ultimate Warrior* is a 'dead city'. It is not aspiring and positive like the cities in the films of the 1930s and 1950s. Instead, the post-holocaust cities of the 1960s and 1970s contained 'emptiness and stillness' which marked the 'death of the city as an actively functional structure' (1999: 131).

The depiction of the city as dead can be related to the wider fears of the future in this period combined with a feeling of despair that the American Dream, a dream built on the concept of progress and expansion, had failed. The stagnation of the city reflected the mood of 'malaise' in American culture. The city is used as a critique of the present, the post-apocalyptic scenario extrapolates actual trends and crystallises warnings (Gold 2001: 331).



**Fig 8:** An opening still shot of *The Ultimate Warrior*.

It is as the second image (fig 8) appears on the screen that the audio becomes more noticeable. Instead of non-diegetic music on the soundtrack there is a, presumably, diegetic sound of wind whistling. This emphasises the emptiness of the city, it is a sound effect that would most suitably accompany tumbleweed

in a ghost town. This is precisely the association the film is making; New York is being represented as an abandoned ghost town.

In addition, there is an odd disconnect between the sound of the wind which conveys movement and the static nature of the shot. This builds on the sense of unease, created in the first image. The film is effectively communicating that there is something wrong with this future world. There is a breakdown of the normal patterns of society. These are portraits of urban anxiety featuring “warped spaces” in which the urban uncanny appears as the nightmarish crisis of the human’ (Sundaram 2010: 13).

The other images, all in wide-shot, in this opening sequence focus increasingly on the decay of the city. Shots of buildings missing glass in the windows, or reduced to rubble. Here the urban squalor is revelled in, the images are emphasising the thrill of the ‘aesthetics of destruction’ (Sontag 1976: 128). The thrill of destruction is especially potent when the images depict New York (Page 2008: 16). It is through the ‘rubbish-strewn ruined cityscapes’ that science fiction films ‘eroticize, the effects of disaster’ (Kuhn 1999: 4).

My argument is that the prominence of destruction and decay in the establishing shots of *The Ultimate Warrior* are in direct opposition to the final shot of the film which features lush nature and a hopeful family. The shots bookend the film – it begins with empty urban decay and it ends with a family heading for an Arcadian paradise. This dichotomy between urban and natural positions the first as doomed and claustrophobic and the second as enriching and freeing.

There is a similar contrast in *Logan’s Run* which was released a year later in 1976. The film begins in ‘technologically sustained city-state’ and ends in ‘untamed nature’, where Logan declares that he and the others are “free” (Telotte 2001: 41).

In fact, the untamed nature in *Logan’s Run* is actually wilderness reclaiming the ruins of Washington D.C. The imagery in the film closely parallels other art work in American culture. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Thomas Cole created a series of five paintings: *Course of an Empire* (1836). In these he shows a landscape

(America) transforming from nearly pure nature through to a great Empire and then to destruction and desolation. The last picture *Desolation* (fig 9) is arguably the first post-apocalyptic image in American culture. It also bears a strong resemblance to images in *Logan's Run* (fig 10).



**Fig 9:** Thomas Cole's *Desolation* from *Course of an Empire* (1836) series



**Fig 10:** A ruined Washington D.C. in *Logan's Run*.

This was the beginning of a major iconographic and narrative theme in post-apocalyptic films – the contrast and conflict between the urban and the natural. As well as the post-apocalyptic film absorbing influences from other genres, as discussed above, it was also rearticulating imagery and themes which were deeply rooted in American culture. The repetition of key symbolic images which code the urban as doomed and the pastoral as a pure state indicates that these are wider mythic structures in American culture. As discussed in the literature review claims to universally shared ideologies or cultural ideals are problematic. However, I would argue that the similarity in images across time indicates that the oppositions between which landscapes define American national identity are very long-standing.

In the post-apocalyptic genre the urban is almost always represented as inferior and negative, an environment to be escaped from to the paradisiacal landscapes of the natural world. The content analysis revealed thirty-seven of the fifty-nine films in the corpus end in a utopia, or the promise of a utopia (Table 4). The majority of these utopias feature pastoral or natural locations such as farmland (e.g. *America 3000*) or a tropical island (e.g. *Waterworld*). Therefore, the generic pattern established in *The Ultimate Warrior* continued consistently in other films of the genre.

In order to understand the significance of nature and images of nature in the post-apocalyptic genre it is useful to examine *The Ultimate Warrior* more closely. Apart from the final shots of *The Ultimate Warrior*, the natural world only appears in one other location which is the roof garden. The roof garden is where Cal grows food to sustain the small 'ghetto' community and attempts to produce crop seeds which are resistant to the plague. The first shot of the roof garden is an extreme wide-shot; the garden is in the foreground and the city buildings in the background.



**Fig 11:** The roof garden in *The Ultimate Warrior*.

The plants are on trellises in rows; this visually mirrors the rows of buildings behind (fig 11). Here nature is controlled and ordered, it is a natural landscape constructed by people. It is not a setting which frees the characters, like the untamed wilderness at the end of this film or at the end of *Logan's Run*, instead it is a method of survival.

Cal works in the garden, tending to the plants and trying to grow new ones. I propose that there is a comparison to be made with Neville's continued attempts to find a cure for the human plague in *The Omega Man*. In both films a man is trying to overcome the forces which have altered his world by his own invention. While in both films the man succeeds, *The Ultimate Warrior* conveys a much more definitively optimistic ending.

A more significant difference is that Neville was trying to alter the human body. He wanted to reassert control over the behaviour and appearance of the people around him. In *The Ultimate Warrior* Cal is a "genius with things that grow"; he is trying to work with plants in order to restore the balance of the natural world. Cal is not trying to change the existing qualities or make-up of people; rather he is trying to form a symbiotic relationship with nature in order to grow new life.

The differences and similarities between the films can be related to their underlying themes. One of the major themes in *The Omega Man* is individualism, represented by Neville, as opposed to a communal mob, represented by the Family. As discussed above, this partly functions as a metaphor for the cultural battle regarding American values. The major theme of *The Ultimate Warrior* is fertility. This theme is represented by the growth of the garden, as well as by Melinda's pregnancy. Although it is never made explicit, it is implied through the close emotional relationship of the characters and the absence of any other available men that Cal is the baby's father. Thus, he is responsible for two acts of fertility.

Fertility is an important theme in a significant number of post-apocalyptic film narratives. The narrative transitions from the fallout of the disaster to the potential renewal of the future. It is fertility, both in nature and humans, which contrasts with the earlier destruction of the apocalypse and signals that new life is now possible. For example, in *Steel Dawn* (analysed in the next chapter) the main female character Kasha is linked with fertility through her status as a mother and through her potentially thriving farm. In a more recent film, *Oblivion* the film ends with the main female character living in a lush wooded valley with her young son. The two symbols of fertility, children and abundant natural life, are consistent semantic elements of the genre, connecting to the broader syntax of fertility and renewal.

I argue that *The Ultimate Warrior* is also specifically reflecting the 'eco-activism' which was a significant part of American culture during this period. A number of factors in the late 1960s and the 1970s contributed to a greater awareness and interest in environmental activism. Firstly, the influence of the 1960s 'hippie' movement, which celebrated nature, had seeped into broader American culture to a certain extent. Secondly, there was a series of environmental disasters in America which frightened Americans into supporting environmental reform (Crane 2014: 355).<sup>36</sup> Finally, there was a growing distrust of technology and science, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The result of these factors was an increased consciousness of environmental issues and a resistance to

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<sup>36</sup> For example, the Santa Barbara Oil Spill.

unchecked technological and urban developments, these attitudes even led to some government reforms on waste disposal and pollution (ibid).

The in-built premise and structures of the post-apocalyptic genre fitted well with these concerns. Post-apocalyptic films are based on the idea that the world has failed. Building on that premise post-apocalyptic films in the 1970s began to emphasise that escaping the city to the natural world was the solution to this failure. However, the representations of these concerns about the environment in post-apocalyptic films are also linked to wider tensions in American culture relating to urban and pastoral environments.

### **The Urban and the Pastoral**

Few landscapes have a more complicated status than the city does in American culture. The advancement of civilisation, the growth of technology and the movement towards modernisation are encapsulated by the ambitious architecture of the American city. The towering skyscrapers of the cityscape symbolise a modern America, a free and cultured America where Manifest Destiny has been achieved and the wilderness has been dominated by progress.

However, the American city has other associations; it is frequently perceived and represented as a place of sin, violence and danger. The city is composed of overcrowded streets where true American identity is lost in favour of decadent lifestyles, criminal activities, or foreign influences. The American city is represented in various cultural forms as one, or sometimes both, of these conflicting concepts.

The negative attitudes towards the city usually stem from an urban/pastoral binary. The city is seen in opposition to the rural; concrete rather than wood, cash rather than crops, culture rather than nature, and the individual rather than the community. The pastoral side of these divisions are often represented as preferable, more authentic and more 'American'. In the context of Bell's concept of the American mythscape, pastoral and natural landscapes are remembered and recreated as utopian aspects of American national identity.

This is not a new ideology, American novels depicted the city as a pit of vice from early in the nineteenth century, and Thomas Jefferson (in)famously condemned urban America in a letter to Dr Benjamin Rush, 'I view great cities as pestilential to the morals, the health, and the liberties of man' (1800). Robert Zecker argues that Jefferson's ideal of an agrarian America became an anti-urban foundational myth, which still shapes conceptions of the American city (2008: 3).

However, it is easy to over-exaggerate the anti-urban attitudes in American culture. The city has been celebrated and romanticised in American art from Walt Whitman to Woody Allen. It is hard to reconcile these contrasting perspectives of the city; the best explanation is that:

America has created some world famous urban landscape symbols. But while that symbol has long served our national pride it is a symbol of power, energy, daring and sophistication, but not a symbol of an attractive landscape for an American family. (D W Meinig 1979: 181)

I contend that while the pure architectural beauty, or a romanticised representation of city-living in comedies and musicals, is celebrated in American culture, Zecker is largely accurate in suggesting that there is a deep-rooted distrust of urban environments. The oscillation can be seen in all forms of 'bleak future' films (apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic and dystopian). The city is either radically altered, eerily empty, or divided into a stark binary of modern, sleek, technological beauty and dirty, cramped ghettos. In each, the city is focused on sometimes as a site of admiration, but more commonly as a setting that invites condemnation.

There is a visual trope in urban 'bleak future' films generally; the city is gazed upon intently leaving no room for doubt as to its vital significance to the narrative. 'The story becomes the display and the display becomes the story' (Kuhn 1999: 5). The condition of the city is a reflection of the condition of society; we are invited to read these cities as allusions (Jenkins 2008: 177). My argument is that the American urban post-apocalyptic film is the least positive

of the three types of urban science fiction, and most definitive in its final rejection of the city as a landscape suitable for American identity to exist.

The post-destruction of an empty city resonates with long-standing themes in American history: 'the ambivalence towards cities, the troubled reaction to immigrants and racial diversity, the fear of technology's impact and the apocalyptic strain in American religious life' (Page 2008: 4). The late 1960s and 1970s was a period of American history when there was an increased fear of technology and a 'dystopian despair' in America's progress. It is significant that the thematic structures in post-apocalyptic films in this period began to emphasise nature as freedom and renewal and the urban environment as dangerous and doomed.

This theme is made very apparent in *The Ultimate Warrior*. While the garden allows the characters to connect with nature to a certain extent it is still confined by the impurities of the urban environment. The garden is situated at the highest point in the compound. Beneath the garden, at street level, there are various fires in rudimentary grates, debris such as doors and machinery are lying around, and piping criss-crosses the area. Later in the narrative, Carrot and his men climb up to the roof using ladders to raid the garden. They murder Cal who tries to defend it. In a wide-shot we see him thrown from the roof garden and into the street below.

The garden is, therefore, not an escape from the misery and violence of the city, but a fragile attempt to hold the dangers and decay of the urban environment at bay. Cal's murder and the pillaging and destruction of the garden by a frantic mob can be read as a symbol for the insatiable greed of the urban life destroying the resources of the natural world. This reinforces the representation of environmental concerns about the destruction of nature, as well as other anxieties regarding the city which had long been part of American culture.

These anxieties are also represented in another space in the film – Carrot's base. It is located in a small underground prison. This creates a very obvious visual association between Carrot and his people and criminality and a threat to

order. This relationship between order and chaos is another significant binary in the imagery of urban post-apocalyptic films. The roof garden is an ordered, controlled, and physically elevated space. In contrast, the prison is a space that is not only chaotic, but is also being used for a purpose contradictory to its intention. Thus it is an ungovernable environment. Rather than restraining criminals from harming society, the prison is now sheltering and protecting them. Therefore, the prison space is part of two binaries; it is underground so it low as opposed to high and it disrupts normal functions so it is chaotic as opposed to ordered.

The urban post-apocalyptic film represents these fears in a variety of ways. The high/low visual binary as it relates to the theme of civilisation and chaos can also be demonstrated in another scene. In *The Ultimate Warrior* the Baron literally lives above his people.<sup>37</sup> Upon discovering that he has betrayed them to save his daughter they riot. They become a furious mob and kill him.

Integral to these scenes is not only a general fear of the urban poor and dispossessed rising up against those with power, but also the binary opposition between the structures of cosmopolitan culture and fundamental survival. The Baron's study is a collection of cultural artefacts; paintings, records, books. (fig 12). It is the only location that contains any art in the film. In a similar way to Neville in *The Omega Man*, The Baron has tried to preserve the city's cultural heritage. However, both The Baron and Neville are killed by the end of the narrative and the art they accumulated is destroyed.

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<sup>37</sup> The feudal and Old World connotations of the Baron and his title will be discussed in the second case study chapter.



**Fig 12:** The Baron's study in *The Ultimate Warrior*.

The separation between the rulers and the ruled is emphasised by the wealth of culture that surrounds The Baron in contrast to the ghetto environment his people live in. This partly motivates the people living in the commune to become an enraged mob when they learn they have been betrayed.

First, they throw a rock through The Baron's study window and he calls down to them, telling them to remain calm and that they will all mend the garden together. The camera shows both his POV looking down and the mob's looking up, both sides see each other through the broken glass, symbolising the fractured and damaged state of the community's relations. Then the most hysterical woman screams that he sold them out and they charge up the stairs and into his study (fig 13). He is knocked to floor by one man and then bludgeoned to death by his deputy (fig 14).

When the mob reaches The Baron's study they cram into it, filling the space completely. The fear of urban overcrowding is visualised, the room is crammed with starving people and useless art – it is a vision of a nightmare modern city in microcosm.



**Fig 13:** The mob invades The Baron's study in *The Ultimate Warrior*.



**Fig 14:** The Baron's body lies among his possessions in *The Ultimate Warrior*.

I argue that the urban post-apocalyptic city is often an exaggeration of varying visions of the modern American city. In this sequence the fears that the city will become a decadent mess, overcrowded and violent is played out in a symbolic visual hyperbole. The Baron represents the remote, ineffectual city officials (Page 2008: 156). The wealth that never reaches the poor is symbolised by a room of useless relics. The overcrowded and unruly community is visualised through room bursting with a violent mob. *The Ultimate Warrior*, and other later urban post-apocalyptic films, magnifies American cultural attitudes to the city.

It can be argued that this fragmentation of the city and the structures of authority reflect a post-modernist shift towards the absence of certainties and fixed values. However, the implied social conflict between decadent culture and necessary survival is resolved in the film by the discovery of the utopia. The city is represented as fragmentary and ambiguous but the arrival at the utopia signals a return to much more definitive cultural values.

It is due to these representations that I posit that the tensions and divisions between urban and pastoral environments in the American mythscape are not simply about a preference for a particular landscape. The two types of environment represent particular ideological values. The city is closely linked to modernity and progressive values, whereas the rural landscape is connected to traditional and often conservative ideals.

Reverence for nature and nostalgia for the past are interlinking aspects in the American mythscape (Stoll 2007: 36). Bell argues that locations are one of the key elements of how national mythscapes are created. A sense of national identity is linked to 'particular constructions of an often-idealized bounded territory'. Furthermore:

Time and place combine and are encoded in nationalist representational strategies, shaping the feelings of community and the construction of an inside/outside distinction, framing national identity in terms of a story about history and (a specific, often imagined) location. (Bell 2003: 76)

In America these imagined locations are depicted as an Edenic natural landscape or a rural agrarian idyll. This admiration for the pastoral landscape relates to very deeply rooted myths in American culture. The myth is that America was seen as the Promised Land, a second Eden, where a new life of purity and simplicity could be lived free of the corruption and decadence of the Old World. As Leo Marx argues 'the soft veil of nostalgia that hangs over our urbanized landscape is of the once dominant image of an undefiled green republic, a quiet land of forests, villages and farms' (1967: 6).

Columbus first started the myth by linking the American continent with Eden. He described South America as a 'Terrestrial Paradise', from where the Rivers of

Eden flowed (Zamora 1982: 1). As discussed in the introduction and the literature review, the Puritans believed America to be 'the product of divine providence' (Cassara 1982: 64). Nash also argues that they saw the harsh wilderness as a dangerous place which must be overcome in order to build perfection (2001: 35). These idealised notions of America as a utopia have continued almost to the present day.<sup>38</sup> However, they have rarely, if ever, been borne out by reality.

However, as Bell points out it is not the reality of history that is important to national identity, but the way in which memory is reworked as myth (2003: 76). What has predominantly survived in American culture is the myth of discovering a pure paradise and creating a utopia.

The idea of America as a Second Eden has been repeatedly and overtly stated. For instance, John Smith compared New England to Eden in 1614; later John Cotton compared the land charters in the New World to 'the grand charter given to Adam and his posterity in Paradise' (Eliade 1966: 265). These concepts of America as Eden provide the basis for the reverence of nature seen in the utopian imagery in American culture. 'Pastoral and Arcadian models of utopia derive their conviction largely from belief in the Garden of Eden' since that is the only workable concept we have of perfected existence (Ketterer 1974: 106). The reverence for nature and return to Eden is also the ultimate conclusion to the rejection of technology and modernity in American culture, something which was particularly significant in the period under discussion.

### **Conservative Values and Traditional Lifestyles**

I argue that nostalgically representing a version of the pastoral past as simpler and purer, uncorrupted by urban life, is a major structuring theme in post-apocalyptic films. Broderick's arguments align with this, in his article he states that post-nuclear films show surviving communities attempting a renewal of 'an earlier, superseded morality and social ethos' which usually involves an idealisation of 'agrarian toil and simplistic lifestyle' (1993: 376). In addition, he posits that this idealisation leads to a 'reinforcing the symbolic order of the

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<sup>38</sup> Parts of America such as California were actively advertised as utopias between the 1840s and 1930s, and the suburbs were as recently as the 1950s (Kitch 2000: 23).

status quo via the maintenance of conservative social regimes and patriarchal law (and lore)' (362).

The final image of *The Ultimate Warrior* demonstrates the argument that both Broderick and I make regarding nostalgia for traditional values being a key theme. The shot depicts Carson, Melinda, and her baby forming a traditional family unit of father, mother, and child. While Carson and Melinda and her baby are not a traditional family because the child is not Carson's biologically, the absence of other normal social infrastructures and institutions mitigates this non-traditional aspect of the scenario. Carson still has the seeds in a pouch around his neck. It is implied that he will be the patriarch in an agrarian utopia, the head of a family and a farmer of the land.

There are two myths of American culture combining here. The myth of the agrarian paradise and Hollywood's idealisation of the nuclear family are both represented by the final image of the film. The model Hollywood family is led by the breadwinner father (Jenkins 2015: 3). In *The Ultimate Warrior* the ending implies that Carson will literally be a breadwinner, as he will grow the crops that will allow future growth. Jenkins argues, in relation to the representation of the family in disaster films, that 'the threat to mankind is clearly aligned with a threat to the traditional American family' (101). The ending of *The Ultimate Warrior* solves both threats by making the man who will save humanity the patriarch of a heterosexual family unit.

I would argue that this conservative portrayal of the family is not isolated to *The Ultimate Warrior*; it exists in a large number of post-apocalyptic films (for example, *Waterworld*, *20 Years After*, *Steel Dawn*, *The Postman*). Nor are these conservative values confined to the representation of family. The representation of women in post-apocalyptic films is very closely linked to the way in which traditional and conservative values and lifestyles are venerated as utopian.

The nostalgia for traditional communities represented in post-apocalyptic films is also influenced by a desire for a world in which each gender conforms to a prescribed set of values. This can be linked with the discomfort in some

sections of modern American society with shifts in women's sexual and occupational freedoms. More specifically this anxiety relates to challenges to the traditional family unit, and the structures and gender traits that idea of family is based upon (Jenkins 2015: 149).

My argument is that post-apocalyptic film narratives are based on an absence of modern social norms and one consequence of this narrative trope is that they recreate archaic gender roles. A large number of films in the post-apocalyptic genre represent women in the roles of mothers, reliant on men for their survival. Since the post-apocalyptic world is one without contraception the power hierarchy inherent in the biological process of pregnancy and child rearing is reasserted. Women are made vulnerable by the physical limitations and dangers of pregnancy and the need to protect and provide for their children. They are dependent on men to help them because of these vulnerabilities.

This issue of women having control over their reproductive processes is crucially interconnected with shifts in modern American culture. Feminism and women's rights truly took off when reliable and affordable contraception meant that women could control their own bodies (Rubin 2010: URL). In America this was a slow process, despite the first pill Enovid being developed for widespread use in 1960, it was not approved as constitutional right for married women until 1965 (*Griswold vs. Connecticut*), and not for all women until 1972 (*Eisenstadt vs. Baird*).

The Women's Rights Movement was closely linked to these advancements for contraception for all women. The reason for this connection is that as the feminist critic Shulamith Firestone argues in *The Dialectic of Sex*; gender inequality is located in biology 'procreation [...] is an inherently unequal power distribution' (1970: 8). If women have a choice about becoming pregnant it frees them from an economic reliance on marriage. Thus they can, in theory at least, be equal partners in society.

The late 1960s and 1970s were a crucial time period for the Women's Rights Movement and for opponents of the movement. For example, the *Roe vs. Wade* decision secured the right to abortion in 1973, and caused widespread alarm among conservatives and the religious right (Marsden 2005: 245). These

tensions in American culture are expressed in post-apocalyptic films through themes of returning to traditional lifestyles, which also include traditional gender roles and relationships. It is understandable that these themes would be particularly emphasised in the post-apocalyptic films of the 1970s, as a reaction to the sudden and dramatic changes in American society which saw women controlling their biological role for the first time.

The scenario the post-apocalyptic film offers is one in which women's status is based on a return to a world before the changes brought by modernity, women are once again mothers and dependent on men. In *The Ultimate Warrior* Melinda is a catalyst for the film's climactic events, but she never has any agency or control over her own life – to the point of being drugged unconscious so her father's wishes can be carried out.

The two male characters she is connected with are her father and Carson. Her father is The Baron, the patriarch of the entire community. It is he who decides Carson must take her away to an island utopia, with or without her consent. Carson is the hero; he is strong, brave, and violent. Without his protection Melinda is utterly helpless. Her life is almost totally controlled by the decisions of these two men.

In *The Ultimate Warrior* there are two linked structures – the garden symbolism and the symbolism of a pregnant Melinda both stem from the same key theme of fertility. However, there is an interesting underlying allegory to the triangular relationship between Melinda, Cal, and the garden. Since it is never made explicit that Cal is the father of Melinda's baby, the film almost implies that, so great is his ability to bring new life, Melinda became pregnant simply by being around him and the garden. She therefore functions on one level as a virgin-mother figure. The virgin-mother is a 'de-sexualised mother of masculine mythology' her only importance is her 'reproductive potential' (Walker 2002: 136).

### **The Role of the Woman and Religious Symbolism**

This de-sexualised representation of Melinda reinforces the conservative values found elsewhere in the film in relation to the pastoral and the family. Christianity

offers the most famous virgin-mother figure of Western culture in Mary. Due to her status as a virgin mother Mary exists ‘only in relation to her perfect product’ (ibid).

I argue that this representation is paralleled in *The Ultimate Warrior*. The Baron’s primary concern is not for Melinda’s safety. Instead, he tells Carson to prioritise the seeds over both Melinda and the baby. He also states that “the pregnant girl” is his daughter and that “she carries my grandson” as a reason for Carson to save Melinda. As with Mary, it is only the (supposed) male child that Melinda carries that is of concern to the patriarchs.

The connection between these two women is visually reinforced in the film through Melinda’s clothing in blue and white (fig 15), which is similar to Christian iconography of the Virgin Mary (fig 16). The representation of Melinda as a virgin-mother is not overt, but even at a more implicit level it reinforces that those who are worthy of reaching or creating a utopia are those which fit into a traditional, patriarchal ideology.



**Fig 15:** Melinda after giving birth in *The Ultimate Warrior*.



**Fig 16:** A stain glass image of the Virgin Mary.

*The Ultimate Warrior* is not the only film made at this time that had narratives based on these themes. *Logan's Run* was made a year after and it depicted a 'hedonistic, post-nuclear family society [where] sex is freely available' as a dystopia that must be destroyed (Brereton 2005: 171). The development of the film's narrative reinforces this argument.

Logan and Jessica escape the "hedonistic" city to a lush wilderness, and then to a ruined overgrown Washington D.C. Here they are presented with an alternative set of values, the memory of an old man who remembers "our" world. The man's memories of a "normal" family unit, a mother and father who were married, offer Logan and Jessica a lesson in the traditional ideal of family. These values had been unsettled in the 1960s and 1970s by counter-culture, feminism, and the Civil Rights Movement.

These conflicting visions of America's future, hedonistic youth culture against traditional monogamous family values, are represented by Logan and his former friend Francis. Adilifu Nama states that 'Francis, a symbol of American cultural excess, fights Logan for his life on the Senate floor and eventually dies [... signifying] triumph for traditional American values' (2008: 26). Logan's victorious fight even includes the use of the American flag as a weapon. The

anxieties in America at the time regarding identity politics and cultural values were clearly being represented through the symbolism of post-apocalyptic films.

I also contend that there are broader and older influences on the post-apocalyptic film genre, many of which link to the way in which it has developed from religious eschatological myths. As discussed in the literature review, a number of critics<sup>39</sup> have argued that themes and structures in eschatological myths have transferred to modern science fiction narratives and the post-apocalyptic genre. These religious elements are often implicit in the modern post-apocalyptic film genre, but in some cases are explicit. For example, *The Book of Eli* (2010) is about a man who believes God has entrusted him to deliver a bible to a safe haven.

In relation to the themes of gender politics and family values these underlying ideas are particularly significant. The traditional and religious underpinnings of the American post-apocalyptic myth are in direct conflict with modern ideas regarding contraception and sexual freedom – ‘theological historians view second-wave feminism as central to the cultural war of the 1960s’ (Brown 2012: 264). As the above analysis of Melinda’s representation as virgin-mother demonstrates, religious imagery and myth provided a powerful antidote to the ideas and values of counter-culture and modern identity politics.

In wider cinematic trends at this time there were competing representations of women. Some of these films reflected the growth of female autonomy such as *Annie Hall* (Dir. Allen, 1977). Other films, such as *Straw Dogs* (Dir. Peckinpah, 1971) reduced women to the role of passive objects or helpless victims (Upton 2014: 112). The post-apocalyptic genre with its articulation of conservative values was very much aligned with the latter group of films.

I argue that women and their relationship to the hero are represented in very traditional and conservative terms in American post-apocalyptic films. The only role available to a woman in the majority of post-apocalyptic films is that of the mother. Examples of a female hero are very rare – 4 films out of the corpus of fifty-nine (these will be discussed in the next chapter). The absence of the

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<sup>39</sup> For example, Kinane and Ryan (2009), Lisboa (2011), and DiTommaso (2009).

female autonomy is problematic and reveals that while the genre was reflective of the period it has not developed greatly in terms of gender representation since then. The idealisation of the mother is still a standard trope in these films.

Yvonne Tasker comments in relation to female heroes that, 'The maternal recurs as a motivating factor, with female heroes acting to protect their children, whether biological or adoptive' (1998: 69). This holds true for the women in post-apocalyptic films. For example, Kasha in *Steel Dawn* goes to face the local tyrant because her son is kidnapped. However, these female characters are not the hero of the narrative. In narratological terms, they occupy the role of 'the princess' who the hero saves and is rewarded with (Propp 1968: 78-9). They are represented as almost as helpless as their children in some cases. Their overall function in the narrative is confined to their status as mothers; it is the hero who enacts social change. It is the hero's role as a patriarch (either temporary or permanent) which fundamentally contributes to the establishing of a utopian state.

The image of motherhood as the ideal state for all good women has obvious religious undertones, particularly in a Judeo-Christian culture. Women are either vilified as whores in Old Testament or seen as:

representatives of a higher and purer nature, to venerate them as Virgins or Mothers of God. In the first instance [whores] the borderline is seen as part of the chaotic wilderness outside, and in the second it is seen as an inherent part of the inside: the part that protects and shields the symbolic order from the imaginary chaos. (Moi 1985: 167)

The dichotomy Moi outlines is not a new idea. The Madonna-whore or virgin-whore opposition in representations of women has been the subject of considerable critical attention.<sup>40</sup> These are often the two ways in which women are represented; either as a figure of wholesome purity or as a sinful seductress or witch-figure. As Wyman argues, this dichotomy stifles social power for women because both virgin and whore are powerless positions in society (1993: 6-7).

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<sup>40</sup> For example, Mulvey (1975), Benedict (1993), and Kelly (2016).

This is particularly significant in the post-apocalyptic genre because as Curtis discusses this is a chance to build social structures and relations from scratch. Thus, my argument is that to represent female characters in these limited roles is to imply that either they are natural and inbuilt or that they are the best versions of society that can be achieved, or both. This is an extremely conservative ideology and it has a clear importance in an era such as the 1970s when gender roles were being challenged and changed.

There a number of vilified women in post-apocalyptic films. In *The Book of Eli* for instance, the woman who tries to trick Eli into helping her is so filthy and rotten in appearance she seems to grow out of the littered wasteland, the chaotic outside. In *The Road* the woman exists only in flashback, since she abandoned her husband and son she comes to symbolise weakness and the most insidious sin: despair.

In the case study film there are two women who represent Moi's ideas. As discussed there is a venerated woman in *The Ultimate Warrior*, Melinda. However, there is also a vilified woman. This woman 'goes mad' and breaks the social order by leaving the compound (fleeing the inside to the chaotic outside). She is attempting to find more supplies of powdered milk for her baby, which appears a logical requirement for any parent. Nonetheless, she is represented as hysterical and her actions lead to her own death (and loosely implied rape), and the death of her husband and her baby. Thus, her transgression annihilates the entire family unit.

It is significant that she is shown in contrast to Melinda in one scene. Melinda remains stoic and calm while Berry (the 'mad' woman) is shown to be frenzied. The two women are shown in a series of close-ups and mid-shots. Berry is shown baring her teeth in anger, giving her an animalistic appearance. She also paces the room conveying her frantic state. Berry shrieks and shouts at both Melinda and her husband. Melinda stands still and speaks quietly. Berry wants to take action and try and find more supplies. However, Melinda trusts in what she has been told by the men who rule the compound. She obeys her patriarch.

In the narrative of the film there is a clear divide between the 'good' woman Melinda, who is de-sexualised and mainly obedient to the men around her,<sup>41</sup> and the 'bad' woman who is animalistic and noncompliant, and therefore 'mad'. Significantly, both women are mothers, but it is only Melinda who accepts the protection and leadership of men that survives and reaches paradise.

Melinda is somewhat unusual in the post-apocalyptic film genre in that she does not have a romantic relationship with the hero. In later post-apocalyptic films the attractive mother manages to be both a virginal mother and the hero's lover. She is a 'virgin' because there is a strange, though consistent, disconnect between her child and the actual biological process of having children.

In some films the child is adopted, thus, in theory at least, the woman could be a virgin. This occurs in *Waterworld*, *I Am Legend*, *Reign of Fire* and a number of other films. If the child is the woman's biologically, then the father is dead and so the woman is in the respectable state of widowhood. In *Steel Dawn* the boy is about seven years old and any connection to his actual birth is far removed.

On the rare occasions the woman actually is pregnant childbirth is either not shown as in *The Postman*, or the woman gives birth in total silence in roughly three minutes, with little or no blood, as in *The Ultimate Warrior*. It is also Carson that delivers the child, while this links him to the child it also means that even in the purely feminine act of giving birth Melinda needs male help to survive.

The absence of representations of the physical processes of having children means that the woman remains a higher and purer form of nature. Women are mothers without compromising that nature: a virgin mother. This is further underlined by the fact that the child is often a symbolic icon rather than a real person.

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<sup>41</sup> Melinda does temporarily resist her father's plans, but this is shown to be a symptom of extreme grief at Cal's murder. After she wakes from her drugged state she makes no further arguments.

For instance, in *Steel Dawn* the golden haired child is encouraged by the Nomad to be a farmer, to turn the barren world into a green, agrarian paradise. It is he who must build the future. In *The Road* this link between the child and religious destiny is made overt, The Man says “All I know is that the boy was my charge. And if he was not the word of God. Then God never spoke”. The child often functions as a chosen one, a special person. The point is that the woman is pure and the carer of the symbol of the future.

I would argue that in the broadest terms the women in post-apocalyptic films can be seen to be an embodiment of mother earth. The chosen woman is often shown caring for the future in a natural agrarian paradise at the end of the narrative. Additionally, Lisboa argues that several female characters from post-apocalyptic fiction function as the Woman of the Apocalypse. One example she gives is Sarah Connor in *The Terminator* who as the would-be mother of humanity’s saviour is ‘another version of the Virgin as the Woman of the Apocalypse’ (Lisboa 2011: 77, 116). The Woman of the Apocalypse is a figure from Chapter 12 of The Book of Revelation:

a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars/ It was with child and wailed aloud in pain as she laboured to give birth [...] Then the dragon stood before the woman about to give birth, to devour her child when she gave birth/ She gave birth to a son, a male child, destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod. (Revelation 12:1)

There is a variety of interpretations as to who she is and what she symbolises, such as the Church, Virgin Mary, Eve, but it is clear that her only purpose is to give birth to a child who will become the leader of worthy humans. The woman is referred to as ‘it’ in the above passage demonstrating that she serves a function – she is not important as an actual human being. This links back to the analysis of Melinda and that her only importance to the Baron is the child she carries.

While the Woman of the Apocalypse is trying to give birth a dragon is fighting to destroy the child. Once the birthing of this child is complete she disappears into

the desert. The woman as a virgin-mother figure is, therefore, strongly linked to this biblical creation. If we replace dragon with tyrant (except in *Reign of Fire* where there is an actual dragon) then the similarities become even more obvious.

*The Ultimate Warrior* comes closest to retelling this aspect of Revelation directly, as the birth and final fight sequence of the film fit the key elements of the Woman of the Apocalypse tale. As with the Woman of the Apocalypse Melinda's pregnancy and labour are threatened by the forces of evil, in this case the tyrant Carrot. Melinda gives birth, to a male child, as Carrot and his men attack. This is very similar to the Woman of the Apocalypse giving birth to a male child as the dragon attacks. It is only because Carson fights them off and kills them that she and the baby survive.

All three of them all then ascend from the darkness of the underground tunnels and find a utopian world. Similarly, the Woman of the Apocalypse flees to a safe haven God has set aside for her because she fulfilled her primary purpose in giving birth to the chosen child.

However, the female character in American post-apocalyptic films is not as totally confined to the role of mother as the figure in Revelation. She also has a bond with the hero (through her narrative role as 'the princess'), although this is often temporary. In purely secular and practical terms it is unsurprising that the hero and the woman would have sex, since they are essentially the last human beings left alive who attempt to bathe regularly. Nevertheless, my argument is that in more symbolic terms the woman acts as a bridge. She connects the hero to the community, the past to the future, and the wasteland to the utopia. For example, in *Waterworld* it is only after the Mariner (Kevin Costner) and Helen (Jeanne Tripplehorn) have sex that he begins to believe in the fabled in 'Dryland' and agrees to help them.

In this the female plays a similar civilising role to that of women in the western film genre. Several critics have argued that the woman represents the results of peace in western films, as well as being a domesticating influence on the man and the community (Gazzaniga 2012 57-58).

In *The Ultimate Warrior* Melinda does not have any romantic involvement with Carson. However, as discussed, they form a traditional family unit by the end of the narrative. Melinda's presence and vulnerability impels Carson into the role of surrogate husband and father, thus she secures the stability of the new world both through her traditional roles as wife and mother.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter examined the development of the post-apocalyptic genre from 1968-1976. At the beginning of the time period, I argue that post-apocalyptic films were very pessimistic in tone and reflected the prevailing national mood of disillusionment. The image and narrative motif of a utopia began to become part of the genre, but it was used predominantly to represent the futility of or ambiguity about achieving such a state.

*The Ultimate Warrior* marked a distinct shift in the post-apocalyptic genre from these representations of despair that reflected the pessimism of the period, to imaginings of a utopian New World. The motif of utopia was not being used cynically in *The Ultimate Warrior*, or in many later films, but as an optimistic culmination of the narrative. Analysing the utopian element in *The Ultimate Warrior* reveals a number of broader themes in the post-apocalyptic genre and in American culture.

The representation in the narrative of the pastoral as positive and the urban as negative is clearly communicated through the juxtaposition of images in the iconography of the film. The city in *The Ultimate Warrior* is depicted as dead – the static shots of empty, rubble-strewn streets – or chaotically violent – the rape and murder of the “mad woman” and her family. In contrast, the pastoral is venerated through imagery of an Arcadian island as the location of the utopia.

The opposition between pastoral and urban can be linked to deeper structures in the American mythscape which connect true ‘American’ values with pastoral and rural landscapes and lifestyles. In addition, these representations of the urban as negative can also be connected with the increased eco-activism and environmental awareness in the 1970s.

The narrative pattern of escaping a confined and claustrophobic urbanised space to a natural paradise was also adopted in other genres. In George A Romero's *Day of the Dead* (1985) the film depicts the main characters escaping an underground compound and flying to a desert island where there are no zombies. Romero had previously used the zombie genre to critique American capitalism; the ending of *Day of the Dead* can be read as an extension of this. The escape to the beach is a metaphor for the dream of holidays and retirement Americans are sold in exchange for being part of the 'rat race' (Dendle 2007: 51). This is a far more cynical expression of American culture and one that does not embrace conservative values in the same way that *The Ultimate Warrior* does.

The key difference is that idealisation of, and nostalgia for, the rural and pastoral landscape in *The Ultimate Warrior*, and other post-apocalyptic films, is connected to a return to traditional values. I argue that the underlying driver of these representations is linked to the unease with the sudden changes in American society, such as the Women's Rights Movement.

The film establishes a heteronormative family unit in its final image. Melinda, the mother in this family unit, is shown in the film as being ruled by men around her, such as her father and her protector Carson. Within the narrative world of the film her only real worth comes from the child she carries. In this she shares similarities with biblical figures such as the Virgin-Mary and the Woman of the Apocalypse.

This depiction of traditional values as a rejection of the progressive identity politics and movements of the 1960s and 1970s can also be put in the context of the conservatism that marked the pre-Reagan years in America. An example of this is the fiscal crisis in New York in 1975; a situation which made reality mirror the urban chaos and decay portrayed in post-apocalyptic films (Page 2008: 153). This crisis was blamed on 'liberal policies towards crime, welfare, and union contracts [...] and a flight from the rigorous moral codes' (ibid). This discomfort with liberal values and politics spread throughout American culture and it contributed to Reagan's election as president in 1981.

The next chapter will explore the impact of Reagan's presidency on the post-apocalyptic genre in terms of themes, character roles, and iconography. It will also build on the brief discussion in this chapter of generic influences from the western and the martial arts films, examining why the post-apocalyptic genre was able to absorb semantic elements from these genres without losing narrative coherence.

## 5. 1982-1989: THE FINAL FRONTIER

### Introduction

In the previous chapter I examined the way in which the post-apocalyptic genre shifted from pessimism to optimism. In particular, the analysis revealed the way in which the iconographies of different landscapes (urban and pastoral) were used to represent oppositional themes of modern and traditional. These themes were underlined by the role of the female protagonist as an obedient helper and mother in the context of a heteronormative utopian ending.

In this chapter I will continue to investigate the relationship between the narrative roles of the characters and the underlying symbolism these roles embody. In addition, the rejection of modernity will be discussed in relation to the representation of technology.

The focus will be on the connection between the dominant cultural trends of the 1980s and the semantic shift in the post-apocalyptic genre. The chapter starts by drawing on Slotkin's work which examines how cultural myths, such as the frontier myth, were being adopted by Reagan and his office.

The case study film *Steel Dawn* is analysed as a representative example of the way in which post-apocalyptic films adopted imagery and motifs from the western and other genres. The reasons for this blending of generic components will be examined in relation to the return-to-primitivism trope in the post-apocalyptic genre, shared mythological structures, and the significance of the theme of violence to the role of the hero.

### Overview

The disaffection and despair of the late 1960s and early 1970s began to shift towards the end of the decade. In the 1980s there was a different dominant national mood affecting American culture. The national spirit of this time can best be described as assertive.<sup>42</sup> This dramatic shift from a sense of powerlessness and defeat to one of decisive action and success has a number of root causes. However, one of the major factors is undeniably the presidency of Ronald Reagan.

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<sup>42</sup> A number of critics use the term 'assertive', such as: Kaagan and Yankelovich (1987), Hook and Spanier (2009).

As discussed in the literature review, Richard Slotkin has identified a number of mythologies that have contributed to American culture at different stages. Slotkin argues that Reagan used the mythology of the frontier, framed through the iconography of the western, to re-establish a feeling of patriotism and confidence in the American public (1992: 644-5). Reagan utilised his persona as 'a "B" western movie actor' to give himself a heroic aura (ibid). Perhaps the most surprising aspect of this use of American popular culture is how effectively it worked.

Reagan cast the Soviet Union as an "Evil Empire", identifying them as the 'bad guy' in the myth he was using, and in so doing reinvigorated his popularity (Lichtenfeld 2007: 61). While support for Reagan was certainly not universal, it was great enough that he easily won re-election in 1984 (Raines 1984: URL). This suggests that the revival of frontier mythology as a defining aspect of the American nation was indeed 'the proper antidote to the demoralization of American culture' (Slotkin 1992: 644).

As with the mood of disillusionment in the previous period, the assertive spirit of the 1980s was reflected in the films of the time. Interestingly, however, despite Reagan's use of western iconography in his political rhetoric, relatively few of the films in this period were part of the western genre. The decline of the western as a genre in the late 1970s and 1980s (Langford 2005: 54) can be attributed to a number of factors, from the genre cycle ending to industrial disengagement with making these films.

Slotkin argues that traumas and crises in American society, such as Vietnam and Watergate, meant that the ideologies which the western mythicized had been eroded, leading to the 'declining power and appeal of the genre' (1975: 633). However, Slotkin also proposes that:

the displacement of the Western from its place on the genre map did not entail the disappearance of those underlying structures of myth and ideology that had given the genre its cultural force. Rather, those structures were abstracted from the elaborately historicized context of the Western and parcelled out among other genres [...] Violence

remained as central to these new genre-scenarios as it had been to the Western. (ibid).

Slotkin's emphasis on violence as a key structuring element in American mythology, an argument he first developed in his book *Regeneration through Violence* (1973), is echoed by other critics. James Kendrick argues that 'perhaps the most quintessential product of 1980s Hollywood is the "pure action" movie' (2009: 79). Furthermore, he suggests that action was a euphemism for violence (81) and that producers wanted to use 'the action spectacle and ethos of winning at all costs to wipe away the memories of 1970s disillusionment' (79).

The post-apocalyptic film genre is significant in relation to Slotkin's argument that the western genre was 'parcelled out'. In the 1980s, the post-apocalyptic genre expanded on the syntactic element it had previously only implicitly shared with the western – returning to a wild uncivilised frontier. Instead, semantic components such as elements of the iconography and a number of tropes from the western film genre were overtly utilised in several post-apocalyptic films.

I argue that starting with *Battletruck* (aka *Warlords of the 21st Century*) in 1982, there were a series of post-apocalyptic films which featured semantic aspects of the western, such as small towns, farmsteads/homesteads, horses, carts, saloons, boots, cowboy hats, showdowns, sinister men in long coats, deserts, mountains. For example, in *Battletruck* one of the villains knocks out the female character and puts her in a wagon. At the end of the film the hero rides off into the sunset on a horse.

Of the corpus of films identified through the content analysis there were seventeen made during the 1980s (Table 2). 8 out of those seventeen can be identified as having frontier iconography. Therefore, approximately half the films made during the 1980s used this genre blending between the post-apocalyptic film and the western.

There is a 'tail' of post-apocalyptic films which have a frontier setting in the 1990s. While the frontier films of the 1990s are interesting examples of the post-apocalyptic genre, this chapter will predominantly focus on the frontier films of the 1980s. The reason for this is that the aim of this chapter is to

examine the development of the genre through the semantic shift in the iconography. In particular, the way in which the final frontier setting relates to the political and social changes at this time.

In addition to the desire to focus on the relationship between the events of the 1980s and the genre shift in post-apocalyptic films, the degree to which these films contain the semantic elements found in the western is much more variable in the 1990s.

For example, *Steel Frontier* is very clearly linked to the frontier in both plot (a gunslinger protects a small town from a tyrant and then rides off into the sunset) and imagery (the hero wears a 'cowboy' hat and long coat).

In contrast, *Six String Samurai* is a post-apocalyptic comedy film. There is a lone hero who saves a boy from bandits and journeys across the desert. However, he also carries a guitar and is heading for Las Vegas. The film is very self-aware and is to a large extent a parody of the post-apocalyptic genre.

During the period under discussion (1982-1989) there were a number of overlapping relationships between cultural mythologies and popular culture texts, as well as a complex series of connections and hybridisation between those texts.

I argue that at the centre of these interrelations was the repurposing of frontier mythology by various sections of American culture and the action spectacle in film as an expression of a new assertive national mood. The post-apocalyptic film genre absorbed and articulated both of these cultural shifts in a way which related to its existing structural forms.

### **CASE STUDY: *Steel Dawn* (Dir. Hool, 1987, Vestron, Inc).**

#### **Synopsis**

The film opens on a barren world, scattered with remnants of civilization. There are no guns in this future world so the various fighters use swords and knives to kill and wound each other. The Nomad (Patrick Swayze), the nameless hero, meets his former warrior master called Cord (John Fuijoka) in a tavern. Cord is killed and the Nomad seeks to avenge him. He then meets an attractive widow named Kasha (Lisa Niemi) and her young son (Jux) and takes temporary work

at her farmstead. She and the other settlers in the valley are struggling to resist the bullying of Damnil (Christopher Neame) and his gang of thugs, who want to control the scarce water supply.

The Nomad quickly becomes romantically involved with Kasha, and protective of her and her son. He resists the tyranny of Damnil and his men. Damnil kidnaps Kasha's son in an attempt to make her reveal a hidden water source. The Nomad ignores both Damnil's earlier offers of wealth and Kasha's pleas for him to stay safe and goes to have a final duel with Sho, Damnil's hired assassin. He wins and kills both Sho and Damnil, and then walks off into the sunset. Kasha and Jux are left to irrigate the valley and make it "green again".

### **Genre Context and Hybridity**

*Steel Dawn* provides a representative example of the genre hybridity that was a consistent element of the post-apocalyptic genre during this period. Through various visual and narrative signifiers the film articulates different generic characteristics. The three predominant genres that are evident are the post-apocalyptic film, the martial-arts action film, and the western. These generic elements are interwoven in the film.

The opening scene of the film demonstrates one example of this generic blending. The opening shot is of the Nomad character in some kind of meditative stance, which involves standing on his head in the desert. He is framed in a mid-shot (although this is inverted). The film cuts to a shot of the sand dune in front of him, the sand is beginning to move. As the scene develops a number of figures emerge from the sand and attack him.

One key aspect of this scene is the clothing of the characters. As discussed in the literature review, one feature of the iconography of post-apocalyptic film is the ragged mismatched or strange clothing. The Nomad is wearing a scruffy silver studded waistcoat over his bare chest, as well as studded cloth gloves both of which are somewhat suggestive of armour. On his head he has a faded white band. The emerging figures are covered completely in patched, off-white rags. On their heads they have hoods and on their faces a type of breathing mask with a piping coming out of it (fig 1).



**Fig 1:** The Nomad and Sand-Dweller in *Steel Dawn*.

The overall effect of these costumes is to establish that the characters are not operating in a world that the audience would recognise as their own. Despite the excesses of fashion styles in the 1980s, these clothes are obviously not contemporary or ordinary. The clothing is a mix of practical and bizarre. For instance, the figures who emerge from the sand are dressed in a way that is entirely functional for living underground in the desert. The fact that there are people living under the sand at all suggests that this is an abnormal and damaged world.

Similarly, the Nomad's reinforced waistcoat is practical for a nomadic warrior; the existence of such a person implies a location filled with violence and danger. The dirty and worn quality of the clothing also signifies that this is not an affluent or thriving alternative world. The costumes of the characters, then, immediately suggest that this is a strange, dangerous, and depleted time and place; one that is dramatically different to 1980s America.

Having communicated a science fiction setting (it is not definitively clear yet whether this is a post-apocalyptic Earth rather than an alien world), the film then articulates aspects of the post-apocalyptic and martial-arts action films. The Nomad fights off the sand dwelling people with stylised combat. He then travels on and meets Cord, his former martial arts master.

They go to a tiny, isolated ramshackle tavern in the middle of a rocky canyon. A fight scene follows this meeting. The Nomad discovers his drink is poisoned. The poison begins to paralyse him, but he knocks the cup out of Cord's hands just before collapsing. Men leap out from hiding places in the tavern and surround Cord. Everyone is armed with swords. An assassin arrives and fights Cord. He wins by using a hidden blade to stab Cord, killing him.

There are a number of elements of these scenes which relate to the generic structures in *Steel Dawn*. The location of the tavern signifies that the film has a post-apocalyptic setting, which has already been implied by the costumes. The tavern is familiar in the sense that it is made from common materials – corrugated metal and plastic – but the way it is situated in the middle of the wasteland/wilderness is unusual. The film therefore communicates that this is Earth (the accents of the characters suggest America), but in a future which is blighted and depopulated by some major disaster. Within that setting the film also draws on structures and tropes from the martial-arts action film.

Significantly, Cord, the Nomad's warrior master, is Japanese-American. Thus, the film employs Orientalism<sup>43</sup> by playing on the stereotype of the wise old Asian warrior master. The primary purpose of Cord's character is to reinforce what has already been shown – that the Nomad is an experienced and skilled warrior. It also heightens this characterisation because the connection with a mystical Asian warrior implies the Nomad himself possesses mysterious or mystical knowledge.

The relationship between the two characters directly references a trope found in many martial-arts film; 'a reoccurring narrative has an isolated Asian master tutor a white male in martial arts or mysticism' (Larson 2006: 72). The quintessential example of this trope is in *The Karate Kid* (Dir. Avildsen, 1984).

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<sup>43</sup> The term Orientalism is being used here to mean a 'distinctive means of representing race, nationality and Otherness' of Middle Eastern, Eastern, and Far Eastern cultures that exoticise and stereotype those cultures (Bernstein 1997: 1-3).



**Fig 2:** Cord prepares to fight in *Steel Dawn*.

The fight scene (fig 2) that follows their meeting is very visually typical of the martial-arts action film genre. The skilled warrior is surrounded by henchmen of the villain. The action is framed in a wide-shot, which then cuts to a mid-shot of Cord as the camera circles around him while he calmly adopts expert-looking stances. The shots communicate the threat to him as well as his ability to defend himself effectively. The connection to the martial-arts film can be seen in the resemblance to the dojo scene in one of the earlier martial arts films to become popular in America – *Fists of Fury* (Dir. Wei, 1972) starring Bruce Lee (fig 3).



**Fig 3:** Dojo scene in *Fists of Fury*.

In both shots the fighter stands in the centre of the space preparing to fight. He is surrounded by his enemies. The lighting in the scene in *Steel Dawn* is darker; the environment is more menacing and reminiscent of a bar room brawl (thus beginning the visual link to the western genre).

The shot conveys the oppressive and dangerous nature of the post-apocalyptic world. In contrast, the shot in *Fists of Fury* is brightly lit and the camera is angled from above so that the physical skills of the hero can be visually communicated. This is important because it is part of the enjoyment of the martial arts genre. The essential elements of the shots are the same in both films but the narrative and genre purpose is somewhat different.

However, unlike Bruce Lee's character Chen Zhen in *Fists of Fury*, Cord is not the hero of *Steel Dawn*. He functions to exoticise the Nomad's character and skills, and to provide the motivation of vengeance for the Nomad. Larson argues that, 'although the image of the mystic seems to imbue the Asian Americans with power, their wisdom and tools are usually only potent when learned and used by whites' (Larson 2006: 72).

A strong example of this trope is in *Bloodsport* (Dir. Anorl, 1988), in which a white westerner is taught centuries of Japanese martial arts knowledge after his teacher's son dies. He uses this knowledge to defeat all opponents in a secret fighting competition.

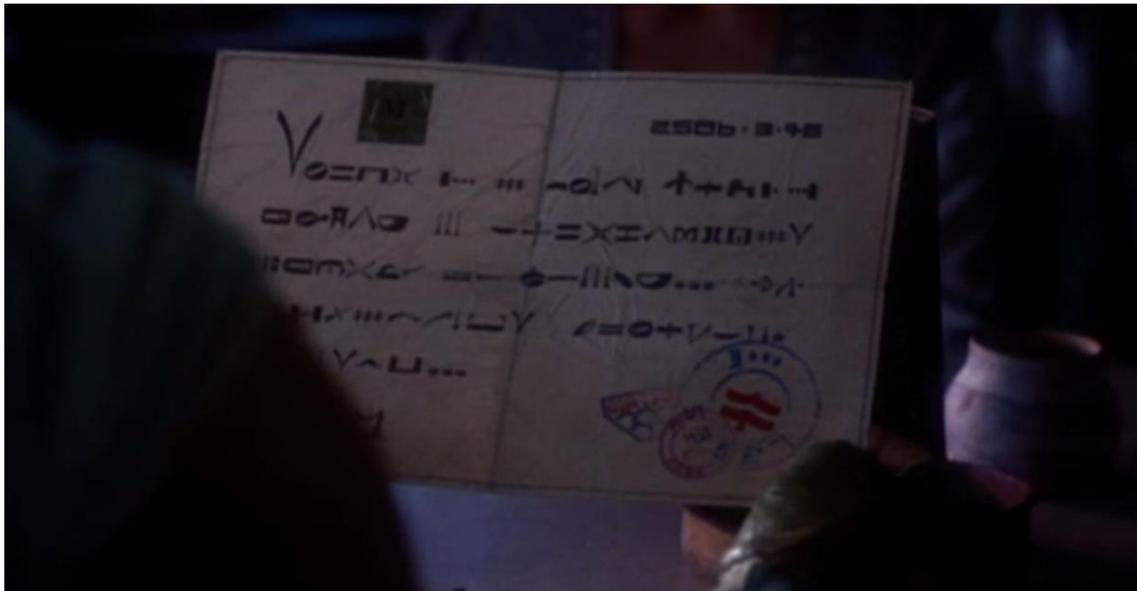
Larson's argument regarding this trope is also supported in *Steel Dawn* as Cord is killed by a (white) assassin (called Sho) shortly after he is introduced. The Nomad avenges him by defeating Sho in the climactic fight. Thus, the white characters use 'Far Eastern' fighting skills Cord demonstrates, but master them to a higher level than the Asian character.

I posit that there are two main factors contributing to inclusion of the stereotypical Asian warrior master and the visual conventions of martial arts actions films. As with the casting of Yul Brynner in *The Ultimate Warrior*, these factors are partly linked to developments in the film industry and partly linked to the development of the post-apocalyptic genre.

Martial arts films (or Kung Fu films) became very popular in Hollywood during the late 1970s and 1980s (Lott 2004 68-9). The inclusion of genre elements

from martial-arts action films must be partly attributed to a commercial desire to exploit this popularity. The connection between the two genres (post-apocalyptic and martial arts) had already been forged in *The Ultimate Warrior*. In both *The Ultimate Warrior* and *Steel Dawn* a Far Eastern exoticism is utilised in order to characterise the hero as mysterious, physically powerful, and skilled. In both films there was also a thematic element to the 'martial arts-flavoured' (ibid) influences.

The Orientalism in *Steel Dawn* also involves oppositions between civilisation and savagery in the film's structures. The dominance of Asian knowledge and skills implies a world in which American culture has been diminished. This absence of American cultural norms is clearly communicated through the letter which Cord shows the Nomad before they are attacked (fig 4).



**Fig 4:** Cord's letter in *Steel Dawn*.

The writing is vaguely futuristic in style, but it is closer to the symbols present in the Kanji or Katakana Japanese alphabets or the Cyrillic Russian alphabet than anything in the Roman alphabet used to write English.

The implication of these aspects of the film is that America has been invaded or colonised to some degree in the war which is vaguely referenced later on in the film. The political rhetoric at the time of the film's production and release made these themes very topical.

In 1984 another film starring Patrick Swayze, *Red Dawn* (Dir. Milius), had explicitly depicted the scenario of a Soviet invasion of America. This was a film that clearly endorsed the anti-Soviet, right-wing, Reaganite political agenda (Dickenson 2006: 25-6).

*Steel Dawn* is not nearly as overtly political as *Red Dawn* in its narrative. However, there is a clear association between the two films through the casting of Patrick Swayze. In addition, the blending of Orientalism, Far East Asian cultural knowledge, and the strange, grubby clothing and locations all convey a future vision of America as damaged and diminished.

My argument is that *Steel Dawn* uses martial-arts elements to 'flavour' the film and as such capitalise on their popularity in Hollywood in this period. In addition, the Otherness of the Far East Asian character and his expertise combined with the shot of the strange writing establishes a future in which American civilisation has been greatly weakened by foreign influences. This drew on anxieties that were pertinent in America at the time.

To underline this damage to America, a simple visual shortcut is used in *Steel Dawn* to definitively communicate that the film has a post-apocalyptic setting: a ship in the desert (see fig 5). This image had been used earlier in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Dir. Spielberg, 1977) to communicate the chaos caused by the arrival of alien beings. It has also been used later in other post-apocalyptic films, such as *The Postman* and *The Road*.



**Fig 5:** A ruined ship is marooned in the desert in *Steel Dawn*.

A ship marooned in the desert is an image that symbolises that the physical and social world has been radically altered. On a literal level it shows there is now no longer water where there once was a huge amount of it, enough to manoeuvre a ship in. This immense alteration of the natural world must have been caused by a catastrophe of some kind. The fallout of that catastrophe, which could be human-made or natural, is still affecting the world or the ship would have been removed. It also signals the importance of water in the narrative of the film. The lack of water is a symptom of the damage to the world; therefore the implication is that water can restore order.

On the level of metaphor and allegory, the ship in the desert symbolises that modern society has broken down. Ships frequently signify a journey, the image of one marooned in the wilderness suggests that the journey of civilisation has ended, or at least stalled. This is an even more potent allegory in mainstream American culture since the source point of both their 'creation myths' involve ships; Columbus's discovery and the pilgrims in the *Mayflower*. The dream of going to America, of building a new world by dominating and controlling the wilderness, is bluntly shattered by this image of the wilderness surrounding the very transport that brought that dream to life.

The ship in the desert shot is also part of a wider sequence which follows the Nomad's journey through the desert wasteland. Much of this sequence is

framed through an extreme high angle shot, in these shots the Nomad is a tiny figure surrounded by an arid landscape. The only living being the Nomad encounters is a stray dog. The sequence establishes the absence of both people and natural life.

The wasteland landscape is positioned as dangerous and testing; a new frontier. Prior to 1982 the relationship between the post-apocalyptic film and the frontier had existed at a structural level. As discussed in the previous two chapters, Geoff King discusses this in terms of films which create a world or space that is free from normal social constraints and which tests individual strength and determination (2000: 18).

However, some post-apocalyptic films in the 1980s made this implicit connection to the frontier myth overt through the use of western imagery and tropes. The use of this imagery was commented by reviewers at the time – ‘it is not the Old West; it is the new post-nuclear-war world’ (Goodman 1987: URL). These ‘final frontier’ films depicted a future in which America returned to a frontier world. Before exploring *why* these semantic aspects of the western were included in the post-apocalyptic film genre, it is important to analyse *how* they were included.

There are a range of images which are directly associated with the iconography of the western film genre in *Steel Dawn*. For example, a horse and cart (fig 6) and saloon doors (fig 7). These images are interwoven with the rest of the film’s iconography. Since it was established early on that the world was damaged and depleted, these images are framed as an extension of that. In *The Ultimate Warrior* the manifestation of the post-catastrophe America was urban decay and a ghetto commune, in *Steel Dawn* it is manifested as a lack of modern utilities and a frontier shanty town.



**Fig 6:** Jux, the Nomad, and Tark arrive in the shanty town by horse and cart in *Steel Dawn*.



**Fig 7:** The Nomad opens the saloon doors in *Steel Dawn*.

However, the genre blending between western and post-apocalyptic films is not limited to objects and props. There are a number of scenes and sequences which adopt not just the imagery, but also the cinematographic style of the western. In particular, there is the final fight scene in *Steel Dawn* between The Nomad and Sho (the assassin).



**Fig 8:** The Nomad and Sho face each other before their duel in *Steel Dawn*.

The scene is at Damnil's 'ranch', and the fight climaxes in a horse corral. The camera cuts between The Nomad and Sho as they approach each other. In a high angle wide shot they are shown facing each other on a barren plain (see fig 8). This is intercut with close-up shots of their faces; their eyes are narrowed and focused on each other, their jaws are set. The non-diegetic music is discordant, underlining the dramatic conflict. There is also a close up of The Nomad and Sho handling their weapons in preparation.

If this scene is compared to showdowns or duels in western films there are a number of similarities. For instance, the final duel in *Once Upon a Time in the West* (Dir. Leone, 1968) begins with a high angle wide shot of the opponents facing each other in a barren arid landscape (fig 9). The film then cuts to close-ups of their faces as they scrutinise each other.



**Fig 9:** The opponents face each other in *Once Upon a Time in the West*.

Another example of similarities can be found in one of the limited number of westerns made in the 1980s – *Silverado* (Dir. Kasdan, 1985). Again the gunfighters are shot in a wide shot in an arid location (fig 10). Similarly, the next shots are close-ups of their faces.



**Fig 10:** The stand-off before the duel in *Silverado*.

These similarities evidence the argument that the showdown is an established trope within the western genre. Further, it is a trope that is often conveyed through the particular semantic elements of imagery and cinematographic techniques, including the opponents located on an arid landscape and framed in a high angle wide-shot.

The use of this trope and the semantic elements that communicate it in *Steel Dawn* has the effect of mixing the generic worlds of the post-apocalyptic and the western. Furthermore, the martial-arts action film is signified in these scenes. After the close-ups of the Nomad and Sho, the film cuts to a wide-shot and they bow to each other. This is an action associated with Eastern martial arts, it is a sign of respect between two fighters who are about to physically compete. Additionally, the fight is with swords rather than guns.

The post-apocalyptic setting is signified by the wind-powered buggy/land cruiser, which is included in the shot of the protagonists meeting to fight. The futuristic, metallic quality of this object contrasts to the wasteland that surrounds it; as such it functions to re-establish that the film is part of the post-apocalyptic genre.

One significant point about these interrelated generic codes is that they do not conflict with each other, but rather merge relatively seamlessly. This cohesion raises a question regarding whether or not the film can be regarded as a hybrid:

a mere blending of genres cannot be equated with the novelty of the hybrid genre [...] the narrative structure of classical genre – including mixed forms – was ultimately geared towards creating fictional worlds that were coherent *in themselves*. (original italics, Schweinitz 2011: 89)

Schweinitz expands on this argument, stating that ‘in situations in which the “worlds” of two different genres were combined, the films attempted to quickly re-establish inner coherence and smooth over the fault lines between them’ (ibid). This is in contrast to what he identifies as hybrid genre films, which he posits actively emphasise their incoherence and disjointed, fragmentary qualities (90).

As discussed in the literature review, investigating theories of genre hybridity often reveals the difficulties with classifying genres as discrete concepts.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, *Steel Dawn* (and other ‘final frontier’ films) does combine aspects of three generic worlds that had hitherto not been overtly mixed: the post-apocalyptic film, the martial-arts action film, and the western. However, the

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<sup>44</sup> See Jancovich 2002, Gledhill 2000.

three generic forms are presented as unified and cohesive in the narrative of the film.

One reason for this is that, as with the merging of horror elements with the post-apocalyptic film genre, which was discussed in the literature review, there are underlying structural connections which mean that the 'regimes of verisimilitude' (Neale 1999: 28) are not broken. These structural connections between the three generic worlds mean that the narrative remains coherent and do not negate the expectations of the post-apocalyptic film genre.

There are three major reasons why the blending of these three genres did not lead to fragmentation, but rather maintained cohesion. The first is the post-apocalyptic trope of return-to-primitivism, the scenario of a world which has reverted to an earlier stage of human history after a catastrophe. The established existence of this trope in post-apocalyptic fiction means that the insertion of iconography and narrative patterns from an earlier time in history (i.e. the 'Wild West') effectively meshes with the post-apocalyptic film genre.

The second is that there are clear connections between the frontier mythology and eschatological myths. If the post-apocalyptic film and the western are understood as articulating elements of underlying mythologies, then it is significant that these two mythologies have a number of points of similarity. In particular, both myths are based on the desire for a new world and a disavowal of an older, corrupted one.

The third is that there is the structuring element of violence present in all three genres. As Kendrick contends, violence was the way in which many films reflected the American national mood of assertiveness in the 1980s. By drawing on different tropes based on violent conflict from each genre the 'final frontier' films were connecting to a wider cultural theme; what Slotkin termed 'regeneration through violence'.

### **Return-to-primitivism Trope**

As discussed in the methodology, the return-to-primitivism trope is a narrative scenario in which advanced technological civilisation reverts to a pre-technological or pre-industrial age following an apocalyptic event. This 'primitive' world is usually characterised by savagery and brutality. In the

narratives which employ this trope, crude survival is paramount, competition for resources and sometimes even cannibalism are driving forces, and violent strength is the only authority.

This trope is common in the post-apocalyptic genre. It has antecedents in post-apocalyptic literature. Jack London famously contributed to the post-apocalyptic genre with *The Scarlet Plague* (1912), a novel in which bacterial mutation destroys most of humanity, returning Earth to the Stone Age. Similarly, George Allan England's trilogy *Darkness and Dawn* (1912-14) tells the story of a post-apocalyptic world in which civilisation has been destroyed by a meteorite. In cinema the return-to-primitivism trope can be found in the very first American post-apocalyptic film, *Deluge*, which depicts a tribal culture emerging after an apocalyptic tidal wave.

There are a huge range of similar examples in much more recent films, literature, video games and comics: the agrarian community in the novel Robinson's *The Wild Shore* (1984), the tribal communities in the novel Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), the ramshackle villages and shanty towns in the *Fallout* games (Bethesda Softworks, 1997-2010), and the woodlands in the Lemire's *Sweet Tooth* comics (2009-Present).

One appeal of using this scenario for creators and audiences is it offers a world without the constraints and complications of modern society; nostalgia without the seriousness of factual history. In addition, these stories act as a critique of the modern world; a return-to-primitivism can also be a rejection of civilisation and modernity. It is a return to traditional values, lifestyles, and relationships with the environment. The world is once again a simpler place.

However, the imagery that underlines the return-to-primitivism trope does not depict a *tabula rasa*. Instead, the surviving locations are often filled with the remnants of modern life. In films, the iconography, far from being bare, is populated by technological leftovers and remnants. There are varying objects and constructions, such as: crumbling roads, dead-end railways, burnt-out cars, broken bridges, ovens, computers, tapes. An example in *Steel Dawn* is the scorched and sand-swept railway sleepers the Nomad passes on his journey across the wasteland.

There is a tension between the reversion to an earlier time and the remaining elements of the modern world. Sometimes this opposition is overtly explored in the narrative, as in *The Wild Shore* for example,<sup>45</sup> but it can also exist implicitly, especially in films that employ this trope. In films, the tension between modern and primitive can be communicated visually. This is an especially prominent feature of the 'final frontier' setting in the post-apocalyptic film genre.

I contend that the post-apocalyptic 'final frontier' film is a peculiarly American variation of the return-to-primitivism trope. It features people reverting back to the Wild West rather than to an earlier culture, such as the Stone Age. In terms of white American history, or more accurately mythologised American history, the Wild West is the most savage and barbaric era. Thus, it is particularly suitable for the characteristics of viciousness and harshness that are linked with this trope. In terms of American historical development, it is the 'Wild West' or frontier that has always been depicted with a backdrop of lawlessness and chaos.

In order to communicate this reversion to the frontier stage of history, the 'final frontier' films employ semantic elements associated with the western film genre, such as the duels and the horse-drawn carts discussed above. In using these elements of the western to signify the return-to-primitivism the 'final frontier' films create a world in which the normal temporal relationship between past and future is switched. The modern world is now the past, the frontier is now the future. This reversal does not completely eliminate modernity, but rather interrogates its impact on the world.

One example of this aspect of the return-to-primitivism trope in the 'final frontier' films is the absence (and presence) of technology. This is a variable element in the 'final frontier' setting; in some films the 'leftover' technology is more complex than in others. For instance, *Battletruck* features a motorbike and the military machine of the title. However, there is a clear relationship between the return to a pre-industrial state and a discomfort with modern technology.

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<sup>45</sup> In the narrative it is revealed that the rural life the characters live is deliberately hindered from developing by international blockades imposed by the U.S.S.R. who were victorious in the nuclear war that created these circumstances. There is a conflict between groups who wish to resist this and those who want to retain their agrarian lifestyle.

*Steel Dawn* has a number of examples of the rejection of modern technology. Firstly, there are no motorised vehicles. Horse-drawn carts and wind-powered buggies/land cruisers are the only transport available. Secondly, the film is set in a world with no guns. The weapons of choice are now swords, thus further blending the martial arts genre with that of western duels. This privileging of primitive weapons implies a rejection of modern technology (Lichtenfeld 2007: 130), a desire to be disassociated from their destructive power.

In addition, it is a strange fulfilment of Einstein's famous prediction that 'I do not know with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones' (Quoted in Ushakov 2007: 151). It suggests that nuclear power was the pinnacle of human technological power and now humanity must return to an earlier state.

There is also a scene in which The Nomad and Tark steal from Damnil's camp because his men sabotaged machinery on Kasha's farm. However, the only actual component referred to is a 'pump' which could realistically be run on green energy in the same way the rest of the farm appears to (fig 11). Additionally, technology is taken from the corrupt tyrant who uses it for evil and given to the woman who symbolises fertility and the future through her farm and her child.

Thus, technology is structured in particular ways through the film – either it is rejected in favour of more traditional or primitive means, or if it is owned by the positively represented characters it is used specifically for producing life through farming.



**Fig 11:** The wind-powered farm equipment at Kasha's homestead in *Steel Dawn*.

In addition, one of the ways in which the western and the post-apocalyptic genres are merged is that the plot of *Steel Dawn* shares a number of similarities with *Shane* (Dir. Stevens, 1953) (Lichtenfeld 2007: 131). In both films the hero helps a community resist the intimidation of a tyrannical villain and his psychopathic assassin/gunfighter. The nature of the intimidation is based on owning land, or land with water on it in the case of *Steel Dawn*. There is also a mother and son who the hero becomes close to and fond of.

I argue that the shared narrative points serve to tie the two genres together. In telling a similar story to *Shane*, *Steel Dawn* highlights the reversion to the values and circumstances of those depicted in westerns. However, the connection between the two films extends beyond just plot points. There is also a shared theme of anxiety regarding technology, particularly weaponry.

In *Shane*, Marian (the mother in the family Shane lives with) is vehemently anti-guns. She forbids Shane from teaching her son Joey to shoot and states that the valley would be better if there were no guns. While Shane initially argues that guns are simply tools, he later seems to accept she is right. When Shane has defeated the villains he tells Joey to tell his mother that "there aren't any more guns in the valley".

In *Steel Dawn* mechanised weapons are absent. Further, the Nomad does not need the same reprimanding that Shane does. He tells Jux that he should not train to become a warrior, but instead he should learn to be a farmer so he can help rebuild the world. He also defeats the villain who is misusing technology to gain power.

Therefore, in both films the hero must rid the community of 'tools' or technologies which are being used for evil. In returning to a pre-industrialised time the 'final frontier' film rejects both modern technology and connects with similar anxieties regarding the erosion of 'frontier values' in the western genre. The similarities between the plots establish the link between the 'barbaric technology' of the villains and their 'regressive and brutal oppression' (Broderick 1993: 377). It is through owning the technology or weaponry that the villains are able to deny the community their utopian rebirth.

*Steel Dawn* is, perhaps, a more intense example of how post-apocalyptic 'final frontier' films portray technology as fearful and harmful, but other films in the post-apocalyptic genre also display this theme. *Deadly Reactor* is set in an Amish-style community where simplicity and peace are symbolised by wooden houses and barefooted children. In *Battletruck* the aforementioned 'leftover' technology (the motorbike and the 'battletruck') are destroyed in the end and the hero returns to nature by riding away on a horse. The main female character, meanwhile, remains in a Quaker-style compound, where a simple lifestyle is valued.

The rejection of the city and the veneration of the pastoral, as shown in the first chapter, indicate that the structures of the post-apocalyptic film genre are articulating a general unease with modernity. However, the rejection of technology and the specific iconography and structures of 'final frontier' variation do not appear in American post-apocalyptic films throughout the period that this thesis investigates (1968-2013). Instead, it emerges at the beginning of the 1980s and then fades again during the mid-1990s.<sup>46</sup>

I argue that this correlation suggests that the emergence of the 'final frontier' setting in the post-apocalyptic genre is connected to the events and national

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<sup>46</sup> As discussed in the methodology (Table 2). The 'tail' of films in the early 1990s is discussed earlier in this chapter.

mood of the 1980s. One explanation is that the appearance of the 'final frontier' variation in the genre is linked to particular technological anxieties in the 1980s.

The technologies that were forefront in the public consciousness in the 1980s were nuclear weapons and fuel. Nuclear anxiety was a very potent force in American, and indeed global, culture. From this anxiety developed a strong anti-nuclear movement. However, the extent to which this was reflected in popular culture is debatable, but the release of films such as *China Syndrome* (Dir. Bridges, 1979) and the television film *The Day After* (Dir. Meyer, 1983) certainly heightened fears about nuclear technology as both fuel and weapons (Holloway 2000: 213).

There were also a number of action, drama, and spy films on both sides of the Atlantic which depicted the world under imminent threat of nuclear war.<sup>47</sup> Film was not the only expression of this anxiety, 'a veritable explosion of books on nuclear issues was published during this time [1980s]' (Perrine 1998: 13-14).

Driving this peak in anxiety was the 'Reagan administration's bellicose rhetoric, including talk of limited nuclear war' (ibid). There is, then, an immediate link between political shifts and the increase in popular culture texts with nuclear themes. American post-apocalyptic films were some of the most popular depictions of nuclear war in American cinema (Perrine 1998: 20). However, several critics have raised objections to this relationship between nuclear anxiety and the post-apocalyptic film genre.

For instance, Jerome Shapiro contends two main points, firstly that there was not an upsurge in nuclear themed films in the 1980s and secondly that post-apocalyptic films are not linked to nuclear anxiety. His position is that it is a critical fallacy to assume that the bomb disappeared from the minds or screens of Americans between the 1950s and the 1980s (2002: 170).

He posits that nuclear themes were part of a continuous cycle which appeared across films in this timeline, rather than intense upsurges of texts in response to historical events. 'The statistics suggest a significant basal rate of bomb film production with some variation, not wild fluctuations' (2002: 171). Interestingly,

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<sup>47</sup> E.g. *Special Bulletin* (Dir. Zwick, 1983), *When the Wind Blows* (Dir. Murakami, 1986), *The Fourth Protocol* (Dir. Mackenzie, 1987), *War Games* (Dir. Badham, 1983).

however, Shapiro does not consider post-apocalyptic frontier films to have a nuclear theme at all.

Shapiro identifies that post-apocalyptic films barely feature imagery of nuclear bombs at all.<sup>48</sup> There may be some indistinct montages of mushroom clouds at the beginning, but the narratives of what this thesis identifies as ‘final frontier’ post-apocalyptic films take place in a wasteland that is not directly connected to nuclear war except by implication (2002: 173).

There are often mutants in these films, the monstrous results of the long term radiation, but these also feature in non-nuclear post-apocalyptic films as the consequence of other disasters, such as in the three *I Am Legend* adaptations. ‘Final frontier’ post-apocalyptic films, therefore, do not foreground the nuclear technology. How, then, can they be discussed in terms of nuclear anxiety?

Broderick’s explanation is that the absence of direct references to nuclear bombs is part of a cultural denial of the full horror of nuclear war.

[T]he imaginary projections of life in a distant post-holocaust future *bypass* graphic scenes of planetary destruction, thus enabling the spectator to evade or dismiss the *human* causal chain in nuclear warfare and to replace it with an archaic mythology. (original italics, 1993: 362)

I argue that while it is true that these post-apocalyptic films do not focus on nuclear warfare or bombs directly they are relevant to nuclear anxiety and they do not deny the consequences of nuclear destruction.

Rather than the threat of nuclear war being the overt subject of post-apocalyptic films, nuclear anxiety became interwoven with existing aspects of the genre, such as the discontent with the modern world. As Franklin comments ‘the threat of nuclear devastation unleashed a whole host of fantasies already teeming in the American psyche’ (2008: 174), and indeed those already teeming in American post-apocalyptic film.

To expand my argument I posit that the ‘final frontier’ post-apocalyptic film, as a form of the return-to-primitivism trope, takes the unease with the modern world to its ultimate conclusion. The most powerful technology in human history

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<sup>48</sup> Although the majority of his analysis for this argument focuses on the *Mad Max* films, his main point can be extrapolated in regard to American post-apocalyptic films.

destroys civilisation: the fears of the bomb made real. However, the vision of devastation was not limited to nuclear weaponry, but rather nuclear technology served as a focal point for deeper fears regarding modernity.

The major theme, that takes on a new inflection in these 'final frontier' films, is the anti-technology motif. This can be found in a number of other post-apocalyptic films with a variety of settings, usually taking the form of a rejection of the modern world in favour of a natural paradise (as in *The Ultimate Warrior*). Technology is also associated in the iconography with death and destruction.

For example, in *Wizards*, the evil brother uses a projector and a robot to gain military victories (the good brother lives in the forest). In *Def-Con 4* the renegade army's (glorified thugs) fortress is made of junk and leftover pieces of technology e.g. cars, computers, fridges.

Therefore, any technology that is available is usually possessed by the villain(s) or leads to the hero being endangered. Technology in the post-apocalyptic film is often shown as the overarching cause of disequilibrium in the narratives. Since this structure already existed the post-apocalyptic genre nuclear technology could be coded as dangerous and destructive in the same way. In broader cultural terms, the images of madmen trying to use technology to dominate and destroy ordinary people must have resonated to some extent in 1980s America, which was living under the threat of nuclear war.

Consequently, I argue that, rather than a simple cause and effect between nuclear anxiety and post-destruction narratives, 'final frontier' post-apocalyptic films are an expression of the continuing theme in American post-apocalyptic films of anti-technology. This theme dovetailed with the 1980s zeitgeist of nuclear fears and a renewed interest in frontier imagery and symbolism.

The rejection of technology in the 'final frontier' post-apocalyptic films is by extension a rejection of modern America. This is not only an issue of the film's setting having an absence of everyday modern technology but it is also connected with the way in which the underlying mythologies that are being articulated. Due to the fact that the 'final frontier' films blend the western and the post-apocalyptic films, the cultural myths which underpin these genres are

also melded together. These mythologies are the frontier myth and the eschatological myth.

### **Frontier and Eschatological Myths**

My argument is that these myths relate to the rejection of modern America because both the myths are based on abandoning a corrupted old world and creating or reaching a paradisiacal new world. The frontier myth and the eschatological myth blend so well because they are both fundamentally about rebirth and about how that process of rebirth defines American nationhood.

Katerberg describes the 'Frontier West' as a 'place of rebirth' (2008: 21), and in this he, deliberately, echoes Fredrick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis (1893). As discussed, the national mythscape is constructed from stories, ideals and dramatized experiences, rather than history and politics of historical facts. The Wild or Old West is part of what Katerberg calls 'the America of myth' (2008: 1). This type of imagining of the frontier situates it as a space and time where American national identity was forged. Richard Slotkin, who has dedicated three huge volumes to the various aspects of the frontier myth, describes it as 'our [America's] oldest and most characteristic myth' (1992: 10).

Similarly, as discussed in the introduction and the literature review, eschatological myths are structured through promising the achievement of perfection through a purge of undesirable elements (Lisboa 2011: 155). The world is reborn and the worthy survive the trials in order to achieve paradise.

The generic shift towards utopian endings in post-apocalyptic films in the 1970s means that by the 1980s post-apocalyptic films are often articulating these key structures of the eschatological myth. These structures are the apocalyptic event, the battle between good and evil, and the attainment of paradise.

As an origin myth the story of frontier helps define American experiences and characteristics by looking back. The eschatological myth serves to define national identity by looking forward to a vision of the future in which the nation once again needs to be forged and built. I argue that both give a sense of a combined destiny and a shared national identity. Both myths function to resolve the same conflicts between nature and culture as well as tradition and progress.

In addition, in Kitses' structuralist analysis of the western he discusses the way in which the genre was an articulation of the myth of the West. He labels this myth 'an ambiguous and mercurial concept' (1969: 8). This myth simultaneously reflected the victory of conquering the wilderness and that that very triumph erased that way of life. The western is, therefore, set at the point when both these options are still available (12).

The post-apocalyptic genre also creates a narrative world in which the options are still open; the combination of overcoming the adversities and achieving utopia replay a similar structural dialectic to the myth of the West. The return to the "Old West" through the existing return-to-primitivism trope serves to make these shared deep mythical structures overt in the films.

The frontier in the form of a projected future world creates a powerful vision of America returning to a mythical past, one that is often celebrated as an era which defined the American character. The frontier myth satisfies 'nostalgia for a less alienating, preindustrialized time, a time when we [Americans] were closer to nature' (McMahon 2010: 337). Perhaps it is not surprising, therefore, that in the 1980s, a time when technology was at its most threatening, the frontier myth would be particularly poignant in American culture.

The frontier myth was very much part of the overall cultural fabric of the 1980s. There were a range of ways in which the frontier myth was being adapted and utilised. For instance, there were two very different competing claims to frontier mythology in that period.

The first stemmed from developments in academia. Critics of New Western History focused on Turner's frontier narrative and 'sought to excise that myth' (Nicholas 2006: xvi). These critics were essentially trying to demonstrate the complex and often grim realities of gender, race, class, and colonialism which had been hidden by the accepted and often mythologised version of history.

The second claim to the frontier myth was from President Reagan and his office which attempted, rather successfully, the 'systematic resanctification of the symbols and rituals of "public myth"' (Slotkin 1992: 643). The primary 'public myth' was the western: Reagan as a heroic cowboy and America as the Old West. Reagan and his office had no interest in the realities behind the frontier

myth; it was the imagery and symbolism of the frontier which served as a useful tool for communicating political rhetoric.

I contend that the contrasting uses of the myth in the 1980s serves to confirm its significance in American culture at that point. While the frontier myth was being analysed as a flawed vision of history in sections of academia, it was being unquestioningly celebrated and reused in politics. However, both scholars and Reaganite politicians showed that they felt the frontier myth was very important to American culture.

Although clearly it was not accepted by, or applicable to, everyone, its power and influence on American national identity was recognised and utilised on a number of levels. It is a myth that has long been part of the dominant concepts of national identity within American culture (Furniss 2005: 29). In the 1980s the frontier myth became part of the national zeitgeist; it was intersecting with a number of elements, academia, politics, journalism and, of course, popular culture.

Nevertheless, despite the clear significance of the frontier myth in American culture, the frontier is not a simple concept. It can often mean an abstract idea that is not easily definable. Its connotations can include: expansion, freedom, adventure, courage, independence, space, movement, and nostalgia.

The frontier can be broadly understood to have three main meanings; the frontier as a boundary or place, the frontier as a historical period, and the frontier as a mythical idea. The frontier as a boundary can apply to the limits of knowledge in an area, e.g. the frontier of scientific discovery. It is more commonly applied to the border between two countries, or the extreme limit of settled land. In most countries, the word frontier means the line that divides two places.

However, in America the frontier is not only the limit of settled land, but also a location in and of itself (Whitehead 2010: URL). The frontier is understood as a separate area where people live, in the same way the city or the seaside might be. This place has its own particular characteristics and scenery.

The frontier, and the people who lived there and the events that happened there, have also been discussed as a separate historical period in America. In

mythologised history this is less a strict historical timeframe and more a rather vague reference to an era populated with certain conditions, e.g. wars with Native American Indians. This is a time in history that is as much allegorical as real, 'presenting the past in broad brushstrokes [... which] often has more symbolic resonance than historical accuracy' (Fojas 2009: 29).

Due to this interrelationship between myth and history, the most popular understanding of the frontier is through the imagery of the Wild West – the subject of so many films, books and, indeed, academic work. The timeframe for the 'Wild West' is actually limited to about thirty years, 1860-1890 (Wright 1975: 5), though it gives the impression of having lasted longer because of the disproportionate amount of cultural attention given to it.

The frontier in American culture is often not a specific place or time period, but rather a mythical world – America fantasy land. The term 'fantasy land' is not an exaggeration. In the Disneyland theme parks there is Frontierland, a themed land which recreates the 'Old West'. I argue that this serves as a testament to the degree of fictional creation and myth-making that is connected with the frontier or the American West. This fantasy myth-making can largely be attributed to nostalgia for the supposed simplicity and thrill of frontier life.

It appears odd to discuss the concept of nostalgia in a nation as 'young' as America. It has been observed that America has often defined itself, and been defined by others, as a new world where anything is possible, a nation that is free from the burden of history (Duncan, Godard 2005: 5).

However, nostalgia for the past, the constant rhetoric of reliving old glories, is also a powerful influence on American culture. The opposition between these two forces has existed almost as long as the United States has, 'they could square neither their nostalgia nor their filio-piety [for the Founding Fathers] with the national mission to sweep away past precept and tradition' (Lowenthal 1985: 105).

The 'final frontier' film offers a way of reconciling nostalgia for the frontier with the contradictory desire to eradicate the corruption of the modern world and build a new world expressed by the eschatological mythology. This resolution is possible because the 'final frontier' film repositions the corruption of feudal

Europe as the corruption of modern America. The modern world is now a decadent past. As Katerberg argues:

The implicit precondition is that if such events actually do take place in the future, America will have become just another Old World, just as used up, spent, and weighed down by civilisation, inherited social conditions, and age-old traditions as Europe (2008: 23).

I argue that in repositioning modern America as a corrupted old world the 'final frontier' post-apocalyptic film fulfils these contradictory aspects of American culture. Thus, in structuralist terms, it serves the primary mythic function that Lévi-Strauss identifies – reconciling social conflicts and contradictions (1968: 45). The nostalgia for the frontier is satisfied through its recreation, but the desire for a new world is also achieved through the finding or founding of a utopian new world, America as it "should have been".

The re-emergence of the frontier in a fantasy future of America acts to purge the perceived failures of the present. As the analysis of *The Ultimate Warrior* revealed, these failures are often depicted as being related to the decline in traditional and conservative values and lifestyles.

The recurrence in popular culture of the structuring concept of the frontier as a remedy for the decadence of modern life has been observed by critics. In particular, Geoff King identifies the 'juxtaposition of "frontier" individual and technological realms'. This structural opposition between the frontier, either as a place or an ideal, and the modern world, allows the defeat of the latter.

The wilderness or exterior force seems to relish assaults on what might be seen as sources of 'decadence', in a pattern of retributive violence that echoes puritan strictures on the dangers of moral 'backsliding'. (2000: 18-25)

I would argue that in the 'final frontier' post-apocalyptic films this interrelationship between the rejection of the old world (modern America) stemming from eschatological myths and the rejection of the Old World (feudal Europe) stemming from the frontier myth is manifested most clearly in the villains.

Broderick terms these characters 'neo-feudal villains' (1993: 377). Slotkin refers to some villains in frontier-based films as 'a despotic chieftain who is half-savage and half-aristocrat' (1992: 635), a description which is also very accurate for villains in 'final frontier' post-apocalyptic films. There are various examples of these neo-feudal villains, for example, Colonel Straker in *Battletruck*, who terrorises the idyllic community of Clearwater or the Frog Commander in *Hell Comes to Frogtown*, the mutant leader of thieves and rapists.

In *Steel Dawn* Damnil is the main villain. There are a number of aspects to his character which signify this status as a 'neo-feudal villain'. Damnil's clothes are black with various medieval-style leather and metal pieces and studs. He also wears black gloves with large cuffs. In addition to this, he is often positioned on horseback, giving him a physically elevated position. The camera frequently frames him from below, suggesting his power over the community.



**Fig 12:** Damnil sits on his metal 'throne' in *Steel Dawn*.

In other scenes it is revealed that he has a type of metal throne situated in a raised hall in his encampment, or 'ranch' (see fig 12). This is suggestive of a medieval hall, and by extension implies Damnil is a monarch. In one scene Damnil approaches The Nomad, and then claims to be the "authority in the

valley”, and refers to the community living there as “peasants”. This dialogue clearly communicates not just that he is the film’s villain but also that he identifies himself as a feudal lord ruling over lesser people.

I would argue that there is a clear connection between Damnil and the character of the Baron in *The Ultimate Warrior*. While the Baron was more benevolent than Damnil, he still physically elevates himself and allows his people to suffer by taking away their scarce resources for his daughter. He also prioritises the survival of his own bloodline over the welfare of his community. The theme of tyrants and corrupt leaders is clearly one that recurs in the post-apocalyptic genre.

The theme of tyranny is closely tied to that of America as a free land, a utopia of individualism. Republican ideals often link the concept of individualism to a conservative ideology. King uses a structuralist approach to examine this concept of individualism. He argues that there are mythic oppositions in American culture, with:

ideological conceptions of transcendent individualism at one extreme and the demonization of any notion of large-scale state or enterprise at the other. The former is celebrated as the essence of what it is to be truly ‘American’, while the impression is given that the latter is merely secondary, intrusive and inessential. (2000: 10)

I argue that the ‘neo-feudal’ villain represents the perceived oppression of this individualism by the state. This connects to both the frontier myth, which situates Europe as an oppressive tyranny, and to the eschatological myth, which unseats the power systems of humanity in favour of divine judgement. In these myths the emphasis is on rejecting the control of a corrupted and authoritarian regime.

In ‘final frontier’ post-apocalyptic films, and in the post-apocalyptic film genre generally, the ‘state’ is personified in the character of the villain who wishes to control and subjugate the community. The loner hero who represents individualism resists, fights, and often kills this villain and thus ensures the establishment of a truly ‘American’ future.

Thus, these films are frequently underpinned by binary oppositions which are articulated through the ways in which the characters relate to each other and the world around them. These binary oppositions function both within the fictional world of the film and as symbolic articulations of wider cultural concerns.

I would further argue that it is significant that in a number of post-apocalyptic frontier films water is the desired scarcity that motivates the villains and the community. This is a replacement for the “greed for gold” trope in westerns. This works as an interesting metaphor in these post-apocalyptic frontier films – basic, primitive needs have become a luxury. The decadence of modern life has been removed through the apocalyptic disaster. However, those, like Damnil, who cling to the old ways, are still part of an old world mind-set which seeks to control and quantify resources.

In these films the tyrants wish to perpetuate the principles of corporate big business and/or federal government rather than embrace the opportunity to rebuild a utopia based on an individual, free land ethos. Although Damnil in *Steel Dawn* and villains in other post-apocalyptic frontier films talk about building a new world, it is clear that they simply want to rebuild the old one with all its corruption.

In addition to these underpinning mythical structures, the political shifts of the 1980s also made these ‘neo-feudal’ characters very relevant. In this context, I would advance the idea that the concept of dangerous leaders who wanted to eradicate American freedom, particularly individual freedom, fitted closely with Reagan’s rhetoric.

In a speech in 1980 Reagan referred to the ‘godless tyranny of communism’ (Saunders 1980: URL). There is therefore a connection between the depiction of the villains in ‘final frontier’ post-apocalyptic films and the way in which the Soviet Union was being characterised. In *Steel Dawn* this link is subtly underpinned by the letter in a vaguely Eastern alphabet and the association with *Red Dawn* through the casting of Patrick Swayze.

However, this branding of the Soviet Union as tyrants is not coincidentally connected to the mythical oppositions of individualism and oppressive

institutions or of utopias and tyrants. Reagan's rhetoric was directly and overtly drawing on the frontier myth, as discussed above, but it also drew on the eschatological myth.

The work of Mohammed and Pautz, discussed in the literature review, demonstrates that American politics and the American mythscape are not separate, but rather they are closely interwoven. These interrelationships and the connection to the eschatological myth are linked to the way in which Reagan related to the religious right.

Reagan actively courted the approval of the religious right, specifically evangelicals (Williams 2008: 135). One of the ways he did this was by appealing to the concept of America as a 'divinely chosen nation destined for greatness' (ibid). Other presidents have also stated this, but Reagan combined this idea with aspects drawn directly from the eschatological myth.

He stated as early as 1964 that America had a choice between "a thousand years of darkness" or preserving "the last best hope of man on Earth."<sup>49</sup> He explicitly stated his belief in the imminent apocalypse a few years later: "For the first time ever, everything is in place for the Battle of Armageddon and the Second Coming of Christ" (quoted in Vidal 1989: 108-9). The other way Reagan appealed to the religious right was by supporting 'the reduction of federal power' and a return to traditional values through a moral rebirth (Williams 2008: 139-41).

As such he was appealing to Americans by drawing on the same ideologies and mythic structures as those present in the post-apocalyptic films. The analysis of *The Ultimate Warrior* revealed unease with, if not total rejection of, modernity and progressive identity politics. This is combined with a desire for rebirth that the utopian ending fulfils. I argue that Reagan was using the opposition of tyrants and utopia in his foreign policy, individualism and oppression in his domestic policies, and modernity and tradition in his rhetoric. The narrative and symbolic structures of the post-apocalyptic genre were overt political policies for Reagan.

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<sup>49</sup> Hargis, "A Communist World: Must it Be?" *Christian Crusade*, October 1964, 34; Ronald Reagan, "A Time for Choosing," (1996).

The 'final frontier' post-apocalyptic films were articulating the desire for a new world and a disavowal of an older, corrupted one found in both the frontier and eschatological myths. Due to the way in which both these films and Reagan drew on the two myths there was a considerable overlap between the ideas they were expressing.

I argue that these ideas of individualism versus oppressive control and renouncing a corrupt past in favour of moral rebirth were simplified and personified through the character of the neo-feudal villain that had to be destroyed. This theme of redeeming America through individual power and destruction of corrupt individuals also linked to another feature of films in the 1980s – violence.

### **The Structuring Theme of Violence**

Kendrick argues that violence was repackaged as action in many of the films of the 1980s. This process made the violence more cartoonish; but it also made it much more usual and also more central to the narrative of films. He attributes this shift to both cultural and industrial factors. For example, improved cinematic technologies such as Steadicam and improved pyrotechnics certainly contributed to the increased use of violent action (2009: 79).

The cultural factors that relate to this increase are associated with the change in the American national mood. The action films of the 1980s embodied 'aggressive, optimistic, and victory-seeking values' (2009: 99). These values expressed a desire in politics and culture to reassert American dominance after the failures of Vietnam and the widespread civil unrest of the 1960s and 1970s. Similarly, Susan Jefford posits that 'the hard body [hyper-masculinity of action heroes] has remained a theme that epitomizes the national imaginary that made the Reagan Revolution possible' (1994:192).

However, the concept of violence and conflict defining the American national identity is not new. Slotkin terms this 'regeneration through violence', arguing that this is central to the mythic landscape in American culture (1992: 352). In particular, he suggests that the frontier myth is structured around the symbol of

the “savage war”, a need to achieve progress through the bloodthirsty eradication of enemies (Slotkin 1992: 11).<sup>50</sup>

These two influences of the cinema of the 1980s, violence symbolising victory and the on-going mythic theme of regeneration through violence, were being clearly articulated in the ‘final frontier’ post-apocalyptic films. Additionally, the two genres with which the ‘final frontier’ post-apocalyptic film blended, the western and the martial arts film, had both developed in response to these influences.

A development that was largely due to the increase in violence and action in cinema generally was that the few western films that were being made focused on brutality. ‘The movie West was transformed into a bleak and violent world’ in an attempt to attract audiences back to the genre (Agnew 2014: 183). As discussed above, the Wild West already offered the setting in which the restrictions of social order were limited. I would argue that the increased violence in the genre only reinforced the suitability of the western setting for the return-to-primitivism trope.

The martial arts action film is also inherently linked to physical endurance and dominance. Part of the initial attraction of Kung Fu films for American audiences was the supposed “poetics of violence” (quoted in Lau 2002: 161). The combative content of the martial arts genre lent itself to the desire for aggression that were common in the themes of films of the 1980s.

One feature that unites this theme of violence is the hero. In the 1980s, the action hero became a focal point for articulating the various desires and anxieties of the time. The action film makes the ‘hero into an emblem of the national body’ (Jefford 1994: 53). Hernan Vera and Andrew Gordon argue that the idea of the individual who single-handedly solves the problems of the wider community and/or nation constitutes an ‘American civic religion, which transforms collective endeavours into the battle of the lone individual against the forces of organised evil’ (Vera, Gordon 2003: 34).

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<sup>50</sup> Originally these enemies would have been Native American Indians, but the concept can be extended to newer adversaries as the myth developed.

However, I posit that to distinguish the violence that the hero commits from the violence which the villain commits, the hero must be morally justified. A number of critics have identified the significance of justified violence in American cinema. Jewett and Lawrence explore the idea of 'golden violence' in relation to vigilante narratives, such as *Death Wish* (Dir. Winner, 1974) (2002: 106-126). They use the term to mean that the hero is always morally justified because he is acting in the defence of himself or others.

Schubart also proposes this idea, 'The Pain justifies, even demands vengeance. No one is more justified in using violence than the victim of violence' (2001: 196). 'The Pain' comes in the form of suffering and sacrifice (ibid). For example, in *Steel Dawn* the Nomad is badly injured by Sho but reemerges despite this to battle him once again which leads to his victory.

There is another example of this in *The Ultimate Warrior*. The hero loses his hand in the final fight with the main villain. The villain has tied himself to the hero's wrist, the only thing preventing his fatal fall is the hero himself, he therefore hacks off his own hand so that the villain will be killed. In order to defeat the evil he must destroy part of himself. The combination of sacrifice and vengeful violence allow the hero to be both a Christ-like victim and an aggressive killer (the religious analogies will be discussed below).

Claire Sisco King contends that the sacrifice the hero makes acts as a 'ritual of redemption' (2001: 2). She also argues that on a national level 'signifiers of trauma and sacrifice play significant roles in managing U.S. cultural memory' (4-5). The sacrifice, redemption, and victorious violence in the action films and post-apocalyptic films of the 1980s can, therefore, be read as representing the shift from the failure and trauma of the late 1960s and 1970s to the assertive spirit of the 1980s.

My argument is that both the act and the theme of cleansing violence is a key feature of the American national mythscape. This is articulated in various narratives over time.<sup>51</sup> In particular, the western hero has embodied this theme. Some critics have argued that the heroes of genres such as the post-apocalyptic film and the action film are transposed from the western. Combs

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<sup>51</sup> See Slotkin (1973)

observes that post-apocalyptic films feature a western hero, displaced as a vigilante agent of revenge (1993: 21). Lichtenfeld comments about action films, 'urban warfare was about to receive the Western gunfighter' (2007: 23).

Lichtenfeld continues, 'mythologically the filmmakers align urban vigilantism with Western heroism and individuality' (ibid). This argument supports the notion that the three genres in the 'final frontier' films blended so coherently because they shared underlying structures. The hero and the dual mythical roles he plays as 'innocent victim' and 'lonely avenger' (Schubart 2001: 193) are syntactic elements that exist across the genres.

Therefore, my argument is that the lone hero is not only an individual character but also a force for change; a mythical being who changes the course of the nation's fate. This is often reflected in the fact he is nameless – in *Steel Dawn* and *Battletruck* the character has no real name, something found previously in westerns, such as Sergio Leone's *Dollar Trilogy* (1964-66).

The hero has no name because he has no identity that a civilised community could recognise. It also means he represents the post-apocalyptic state of the world, which also has no true identity. Rather it is often an impermanent condition between the destroyed modern world and the yet-to-be utopia. The hero is greater than his individual status and has an emblematic function.

Specifically, I argue that the function the hero has is to morally cleanse the community (and, by extension, nation) through his own suffering and the violent vengeance he inflicts on his enemies. The character of the hero that I have identified in the post-apocalyptic film genre conforms to Propp's theory of roles and functions. In Propp's theory the role of the hero is to conquer the villain and restore equilibrium (1968: 114).

The hero of the post-apocalyptic genre does fulfil this function at the level of narrative; but he also serves as an articulation of wider cultural themes of sacrifice and violence. This theme of regeneration through violence, personified through the hero, is consistent in the western, the martial arts action film, and the post-apocalyptic film.

In *Steel Dawn* the Nomad demonstrates how the hero of 'final frontier' films incorporates the three genres through the syntactic element of violent vengeance. He begins the film defending himself from an attack by mutants, the savage Other who are symptoms of the damage the apocalyptic event wrought on America. He does this by using his superior fighting skills, thus drawing on the martial arts action film. By the end of the film he is facing Sho in a duel after which he walks off into the sunset. Thus, his violent acts help the film bridge the components and patterns associated with the three genres.

However, I contend that there are also some specific nuances to this theme in the post-apocalyptic genre. The post-apocalyptic hero is a lone 'gunfighter' but he also symbolises the four horsemen of the apocalypse. The four horsemen are a group of four beings who bring the destruction of the apocalypse upon the unrepentant.

These two influences are not as disconnected as they may first appear. Broderick notes there are 'Four Horsemen' metaphors in *The Wild Bunch* (Dir. Peckinpah, 1969) and *High Plains Drifter* (Dir. Eastwood, 1973) among others (1993: 269). In both the western narratives and apocalyptic prophecy, those who oppose the righteous are violently destroyed. Again, there is a melding of myths and genres through the structuring theme of violent punishment.

The post-apocalyptic hero continues this tradition of violent destruction as part of the establishment of a new world. There are also wider religious connotations of the death and rebirth of the hero that should be considered. Death and resurrection are part of a huge range of myths and religious stories across the world. Nevertheless, the dominance of the Judeo-Christian tradition in American culture means that the concept of a messiah hero immediately suggests a Christ-like figure.

The comparison between the post-apocalyptic hero and Christ (as a mythical/religious figure rather than a historical one) can be demonstrated in *Steel Dawn*. When the Nomad is defeated in his first fight with Sho, he is left lying on the ground. Jux is then kidnapped by Damnil's henchmen. Kasha tries to protect the Nomad from being killed by locking him in a room to prevent him

going to rescue Jux. He breaks free (fig 13) and goes to duel Sho and bring peace to the valley.



**Fig 13:** The Nomad emerges from being 'entombed' in *Steel Dawn*.

I would argue that there is a parallel with the story of Christ's resurrection. In the New Testament Christ is crucified and then placed in a tomb or cave, the entrance is covered by a large boulder. When the women return to the tomb the boulder has been pushed aside, "And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre" (Luke 24:2, King James Bible). Christ has risen from the dead, thus bringing peace to those who accept him as their saviour.

While it is not an exact allegory, the underlying concept is similar. Biblical references are often not precise in mainstream cinema because they are drawn from "pop religion" rather than theology. Nevertheless, in both narratives the saviour is placed in a confined space because those around him do not believe he has the power to rise again and eradicate evil. He emerges from this entombment and goes forth to save the innocent and bring peace. The Nomad's method being notably more violent than Christ's, but that is because Nomad is the messiah-*vigilante*.

There is similar symbolism of Christ-like sacrifice and violent retribution in other post-apocalyptic films. In *The Omega Man*, for instance, Neville is shown (more than once) in a crucifixion pose (fig 14 and 15). He later dies and his blood is

used to restore life. '*Omega Man* positions Neville, and by extension the body politic for which he stands, within an Christological lineage of salvific male subjects' (King 2011: 62).



**Fig 14:** Neville in a crucifixion pose in *The Omega Man*.



**Fig 15:** Neville in his own sacrificial blood, the cure in the front of the frame, again in a crucifixion pose in *The Omega Man*.

As in *The Ultimate Warrior* the religious aspects of post-apocalyptic films are implicit rather than explicit. However, I argue that because these films are partly an articulation of the eschatological myth they do contain these religious elements and allegories. The combination of the death and resurrection motifs with the vengeful violence in post-apocalyptic films can also be interpreted as a retelling of the Second Coming prophecies.

These eschatological prophecies and narratives contain the basic foundations of the post-apocalyptic films: failure and destruction, eradication of evil and redemption, and finally utopia. The hero's identity as a messiah or prophet is, therefore, partly due to the underlying influence of religious prophecy in American post-apocalyptic films, 'in science fiction, unlike ancient or medieval apocalypses, apocalyptic eschatology is more often than not identified by the presence of eschatological motifs' (DiTommaso 2009: 224). A messiah who sacrifices himself to bring a new golden age would be one such motif.

Therefore, my argument is that there are two elements to consider in regard to the post-apocalyptic hero as what Broderick terms a 'recasting of the Judeo-Christian myth of the messianic hero-saviour' (1993: 251). The first is that while the messianic hero has an extra significance in post-apocalyptic films due to the on-going influence of eschatology and prophecy on the narratives, it is not a unique characteristic. The role of messiah-vigilante is repeatedly played by action heroes in American popular culture. The second point is that this recurrence means that heroic sacrifice reflects important beliefs in American culture.

An interesting link in regard to this idea is between Claire Sisco King's term 'victim-hero' (2001: 4) and Maurizia Natali's argument that 'Hollywood cinema, a national cinema, a collective dream, is full of self-victimization and self-heroization' (2006: 102). Clearly, there is an uneasy balance in American cinema between an image of nationhood that identifies as a victim, the persecuted Puritans or the oppressed colony, and one that identifies as a hero, America as a shining example of freedom.

I would argue that in post-apocalyptic films this juxtaposition is particularly strong – America is a failed and broken land, but it is also the last great hope for all humanity. The actual character of the hero is, therefore, often fulfilling both roles (victim and hero) simultaneously. He embodies this tension through his deeds. For example, in the recent film *Oblivion*, the hero Jack (Tom Cruise) sacrifices himself to destroy a powerful evil by flying a spaceship kamikaze-style into the alien space station orbiting earth, thus freeing the human survivors from the alien's malign reign. He is both a powerless martyr, a victim of oppression, sacrificing himself to save the community and he is a cunning,

brave hero who tricks the enemy and skilfully manoeuvres his spaceship to obliterate them.

The identity of victim-hero, or messiah and vigilante, represents a wider national identity, a tension in American culture. The duality of the post-apocalyptic hero is integral to his identity. Thus, the link between American nationhood and the post-apocalyptic myth is reinforced further by the actions and character of the hero.

The duality of his identity is, therefore, an important element in the hero's function in the narrative theme of redemption. Although these identities are closely linked and influenced by other genres, the hero in post-apocalyptic films combines them and functions in a particular manner in order to fulfil the post-apocalyptic mythic archetype as well as the conventions of the genre.

### **Female Heroes**

It is interesting to contrast the way in which the male hero fulfils these mythic and generic roles, with the rare examples of female heroes in the post-apocalyptic genre. In American post-apocalyptic films, there are 4 examples of a female hero: *Land of Doom* (Dir. Harris, 1986), *Cherry 2000* (Dir. Jarnatt, 1987), *Tank Girl* (Dir. Talda, 1995), and *Barb Wire* (Dir. Hogan, 1996). These 4 films were all made within a decade of each other. They can be understood both within the context of the post-apocalyptic genre and as examples of the wider industrial trend towards 'the sporadic integration of women into action cinema in the 1980s and 1990s' (Tasker 1998: 67).

I argue that the ways in which these female heroes are represented are certainly not as positive as the messiah-vigilante hero. Tasker argues that 'in developing roles for women as fighters, action and crime movies have made use of stereotypes and images including the 'butch' type, the tomboy and the "feisty heroine"' (1998: 68). Female heroes in action films, and in particular post-apocalyptic films, are often represented within the boundaries of these stereotypes. However, there are some exceptions.

The female hero sometimes functions as a novelty who does nothing to challenge the overall gender representations. These female heroes act as if they were men, but are physically over-sexualised, thus denying gender identity

in two ways. Alternatively, female heroes are depicted as strong and independent and 'break traditional gender roles' (Schubart 2007: 6-7). Therefore, female heroes often have a conflicting status in cinema and within the films themselves (ibid).

Considering the conservative and traditional nature of the post-apocalyptic genre, established in the analysis so far, it would be surprising if these films did feature a genuinely subversive heroine. I would argue that rather than offering any real alternative, the female hero functions as 'an anomaly', an exception that proves the rule, 'as she breaks society's gender expectations she also confirms them' (Schubart 2007: 6). By being so exceptional in terms of strength and skill the female hero reinforces the idea that typical women are not like this.

In addition, my argument is that in post-apocalyptic films this is reinforced by the theme of reversal, a world gone mad, which has been discussed previously. A violent woman who has to rescue or kill men is not part of the 'natural' order; it demonstrates how broken or non-existent civilisation is.

This 'unnatural' quality is also linked to the blending of the post-apocalyptic genre with the martial arts genre. Tasker argues that there is a tradition of showing 'exotic' women with martial arts skills in American and Hong Kong produced martial arts films (2012: 3). In a similar way to Brynner's exotic persona and the Asian elements in *Steel Dawn*, a female hero is a demonstration of the way America has been altered and damaged.

A related issue is to what extent a female hero fulfils the role that the hero does in post-apocalyptic films as a messiah-vigilante. Schubart claims that the female hero is 'rarely mythological. She does not enter society and absorb unrest [...] we are up close and personal rather than memorable and mythological' (23).

It is true that in the four post-apocalyptic films with female heroes the focus is far more on personal relationships than on a wider redemption of the community. Although all four films have similar narrative structures to those found in the genre more generally, the end result is different. The female hero has usually restored order to her own life, rather than being the catalyst for a utopia.

Redemption leads to the woman achieving a personal renewal of being free to be with the male character. 'There is a tension between the images of strength accruing to the female action hero and the narratives within which they are contained' (Tasker 1998: 69). It could be argued that in narratological terms that the female characters in these films switches from 'the hero' to 'the princess'; she goes from being the one who conquers the villain to the reward for the male character.

I would argue that the most subversive and unusual of the 4 post-apocalyptic films which have a female hero is *Tank Girl*, whereas *Cherry 2000* is the least. While *Tank Girl* is outside the time period that this chapter analyses, it makes a strong point of comparison with *Cherry 2000* which was made the same year as the case study film *Steel Dawn*. Through analysing these two films the way in which the generic structures discussed in relation to post-apocalyptic films in the 1980s, in particular the role of the hero, can be explored further.

*Tank Girl* is a loose adaptation of a comic book series. The film is about Rebecca/Tank Girl (Lori Petty) who lives in a drought ravaged world in which the Water and Power Company are tyrants. There are a series of incidents involving her capture, escape, and rebellion. These events also involve a fellow prisoner called Jet Girl (Naomi Watts) and the Rippers – mutated humanoid kangaroos. It is an experimental film, incorporating images from the comic with live-action narrative, musical numbers, animatronics, and has developed a cult following.

*Cherry 2000* focuses on a man called Sam (David Andrews) who hires a female tracker called E Johnson (Melanie Griffiths) to cross the wasteland to an android factory so he can resurrect his broken android wife. The two films have seemingly similar female heroes, but there are key differences.



**Fig 16:** Rebecca and Jet Girl in *Tank Girl*



**Fig 17:** E Johnson and Sam in *Cherry 2000*.

I posit that one important aspect of *Cherry 2000* is that while the hero is female, she is not the main character, rather the ineffective Sam is. She is, therefore, in a slightly odd version of 'the helper' role. Due to this, it is mainly through his perspective that the film is mediated. Thus, Johnson is defined by Sam's standards, as a fierce, uncouth and violent oddity. Despite Sam eventually

falling in love with her she is predominantly characterised, even fetishized, as hyperbolically strong and violent, a 'Rambolina' or 'Pambo' (Brown 2011: 73).

In *Cherry 2000* the female hero defeats the feudal tyrant who terrorises the wasteland area, half helped and half hindered by her male companion Sam. However, this defeat is a side product of the overall mission, rather than the main goal.

The primary objective is to help a man; firstly to find the technology to restore his android slave wife and secondly to make him realise he actually wants a 'real' woman. As such, my argument is that the overall result is that E Johnson achieves the clichéd personal utopia of a heteronormative romantic relationship, rather than fulfilling the mythic function to renew national identity and bring a new Eden.

In contrast, Rebecca in *Tank Girl* is both the hero and the main character. It is through her that we see events and so it is she who has our sympathies. While her primary mission is her personal freedom, she forms loyalties to a number of other characters and so becomes the rebel leader who brings redemption in much the same way male heroes do in other post-apocalyptic films.

Her victory over the tyrant does indeed bring about the freedom and utopian possibility for a community. What is particularly interesting is that the community in this film is composed of misfits and mutants. I contend that a major way in which the film *Tank Girl* subverts the conventions of the post-apocalyptic genre and its ideology is by revealing that the dreaded, savage, mutants are in fact sweet natured, brave, and funny people.

The Othering process is completely reversed and the Rippers help the hero to overcome the tyrant – any new world will belong to them. If this representation is compared to the frontier myth, it is similar to the narrative reversal in *Dances with Wolves* (Dir. Costner, 1990), the hero sides with the savage Other against the dominant white system.

In a similar way to *Dances with Wolves* the hero in *Tank Girl* not only sympathises with these others, but also becomes romantically attached to one of them. Rebecca's relationship with Booga, one of the mutant kangaroos, is

part of her wider polymorphous sexuality which sees her kiss a man, a woman, and a kangaroo mutant, all in the most casual manner.

This is in direct contrast to the vast majority of post-apocalyptic films in which homosexuality and transgenderism are usually totally absent, or linked to the villains. Suggestions of sexual or gender diversity are sometimes used to imply 'a lack of moral purity' (Lichtenfeld 2007: 127).

I argue that these two aspects are, therefore, linked – when the female hero is genuinely strong and as such challenges the traditional values of the post-apocalyptic myth, broader dehumanising of characters is also subverted. These two elements are directly connected through Rebecca's relationship with Booga – her sexuality and his 'minority' status are both diversified in the film and positioned in opposition to conservative male authority.

In addition to this diverse sexual status, Rebecca's bravery and strength is not shown as her adopting male characteristics, but rather maintaining her calm in the face of the threat of violation. The threat or actuality of rape recurs in post-apocalyptic films, as with cannibalism it is meant to demonstrate the depravity of the villains and/or the mutants.

In *The Book of Eli* for example, Solara is about to be raped by a gang of thugs until Eli intervenes, which also demonstrates his heroism. However, this threat is almost always reserved for female characters. Male rape is almost never implied or referred to, let alone shown. The main reason for this is that outside of prisons the existence of men being raped is only beginning to be acknowledged in society (Varcarolis, Halter 2012: 423), and it is very rarely represented on screen (Hoyle 2012: 76).

The two exceptions to this are in *The Road*, in which The Man's wife states that the gangs are "gonna rape me, and then they're gonna rape your son and they're gonna kill us and eat us", and *Hell Comes to Frogtown* in which the hero is going to be forced to impregnate women or face gruesome torture. In both films there is only the threat, the actuality never occurs. Therefore, male heroes in American post-apocalyptic films are never in danger of being raped. No matter how brutally the hero may be treated by the tyrant and his men, his gender and heterosexuality keep him safe from sexual violation.

This is obviously not the case with a female hero, especially when her sexuality and gender is foregrounded. Kesslee (Malcom MacDowell), the villain in *Tank Girl*, ties Rebecca up and tortures her in a variety of ways. Although none of them are overtly sexual, they are as Manners and Rutsky explain ‘about control. Just as he controls the world’s water, he also wants to not kill, but control Rebecca’ (1999: 125). Rebecca refuses to take him seriously, and uses her own diverse sexuality to mock him: “Look. You want to torture me, spank me, lick me, do it. But if this poetry shit continues, just shoot me now, please”.

Therefore, I would argue that *Tank Girl* not only subverts and parodies the hero archetype by fighting *for* an extreme Other instead of against, but it also challenges the sexual definitions and power relationships found in post-apocalyptic films and action films.

In contrast, in *Cherry 2000* the entire plot revolves around sexual desire and lust. However, it is of a perverse, but not diverse type: a man trying to obtain a replacement for his android woman. The ‘Cherry 2000’ is a pleasure android who is ‘incapable of any action which does not please her master’ (Newitz 2006: 139).

Sam is in total control, though the android cannot experience desire for freedom (supposedly), she is nevertheless a slave. Sam has the kind of total control over her that Kesslee can only dream of having over Rebecca. While Sam does learn at the end of the film that it is the tough, independent E Johnson he wants, this is nevertheless a false dichotomy set up by the film between ‘real vs fake’ (2006: 139).

I argue that both of these representations of women are based on a fantasy. Johnson is a woman who adheres to masculine heroic traits, as her euphemistic name suggests, and then forms a relationship with a man who has spent the entire film obsessed with a robot who ‘cannot ever consent to love him’ (ibid).

Johnson is as much a fantasy as Cherry the android: ‘though these narratives present this strong image as the real woman, it is no less a fantasy construction than is the uber-tough male action hero [... she is a] fetishized action heroine’

(Brown 2011: 73). In addition, she is the tomboy stereotype which Tasker identifies who 'will ultimately discard her male clothing' (1998: 68).

My argument is that E Johnson in *Cherry 2000* does disturb the narrative structures of the American post-apocalyptic films, however, not in the same way as Rebecca in *Tank Girl*. Johnson cannot fulfil the mythic narrative because she is not a messiah-vigilante hero; rather she is an anomaly, an exaggerated inversion of 'normal' gender roles. Her masculinised actions, name, and job only serve to reinforce the traits that normally belong to the male hero.

However, Rebecca in *Tank Girl* is a genuinely subversive character; the film is full of:

playful irreverence that refuses to take the male-dominated conventions of science fiction – and cinematic narratives more generally – seriously' and is 'unique not only in having a female lead, but in its comedic, and in fact self-parodic, approach. (Manners, Rutsky 1999: 123-4)

This comedic tone is also a reflection of the dominant trends in 1990s action cinema (Tasker 1998: 73).

The main ways in which *Tank Girl* defies the generic conventions of American post-apocalyptic films is in representing a female hero as a genuinely strong woman who sides with the savage Other. She is also in control of her own diverse sexuality rather than existing simply as a fetish.

The two other films, *Land of Doom* and *Barb Wire*, can be explored in similar ways. *Land of Doom* has a female hero who gets her clothes ripped off on several occasions and the film ends with her in a romantic relationship.

*Barb Wire*, another loose comic book adaptation, features a blatant male masochistic fantasy in the form of Pamela Anderson as a dominatrix-style bounty hunter. Tasker argues that, 'Barb Wire, as her name suggests, exhibits an eroticised toughness, both inviting and returning a sexual gaze' (1998: 70). While Tasker analyses the ways in which Barb is of interest to gender representations, I would argue that she certainly does not fit the role of the messiah-vigilante.

Out of the very small number of films in the post-apocalyptic genre which even feature a female hero, I would argue only one challenges the narrative structures and themes. As has been discussed, the gender roles and relationships are highly conservative in post-apocalyptic films. Consequently, any deviation from the traditional gender roles found in films such as *The Ultimate Warrior* and *Steel Dawn*, do not allow for a utopia. This is because the 'natural order' of patriarchal dominance and the traditional female role of motherhood have not been restored. Therefore, while these female heroes may be a fetish or a fantasy they are not represented as part of a new future.

*Tank Girl* is the exception to my argument. The film challenges the restrictive representation of female heroes in the post-apocalyptic genre by aligning the heroine with the mutants, but also having her redeem the community and build their own bizarre utopia free of normative male power. Rebecca does fulfil the narrative function of the hero but on her own terms. Nevertheless, most women in American post-apocalyptic films have no such autonomy – their purpose is to be a vessel for the future.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter the impact of the dominant cultural and political trends of the 1980s on the post-apocalyptic genre were explored. The major change that the genre experienced was a semantic shift in some of the films of the time. This shift saw imagery and tropes from the western forming part of the narrative world of the films. Additionally, elements of the martial arts and action films were also drawn on.

However, I would argue that while this was a semantic change, the syntax did not alter greatly. The underlying structures and oppositions remained largely the same. The rejection of modernity is present through the return-to-primitivism trope, the new world/old world binary is emphasised through the shared mythological components with the frontier myth, and the narrative roles of the hero allow for themes of national rebirth through violent action.

The examination and analysis of *Steel Dawn* and related films indicates that there are a number of patterns emerging across the post-apocalyptic genre. For instance, there are the underlying influences of religious, particularly Judeo-

Christian symbolism, as well as nostalgia for an earlier, purer time. In *The Ultimate Warrior* it is a pastoral paradise that is shown as ideal, in *Steel Dawn* it is predominantly the frontier. Melinda symbolises the virgin-mother and/or Woman of the Apocalypse, while the Nomad represents a Christ-like figure who rises again to exact justice.

These restrictive roles seemed to be challenged in the rare films, such as *Cherry 2000*, which have a female hero. However, apart from *Tank Girl*, the female hero does not represent an alternative ideology or characterisation. Instead, the female hero is shown to be another example of a 'world gone mad', of the damaged and depraved composition of a post-catastrophe America.

In *Steel Dawn* the blending of generic conventions between the martial arts, western, and post-apocalyptic films still produces a coherent narrative. I contend that this is because they function through the redeployment of syntactic strategies (Altman 1984: 16). The existing return-to-primitivism trope within the post-apocalyptic genre makes a reversion to the Wild West a believable concept within the narrative world. The myths of the frontier and eschatological myths share a key theme of establishing a new world. The structuring theme of violence is also a key element in all three genres.

I argue that the two key characters in the 'final frontier' film are the neo-feudal villain and the hero. The villain embodies the decadence and failures of the "Old World". This is a conflation of both modern America and Feudal Europe; the failure of a decadent old world is the underlying theme. Consequently, technology is associated with the villain and as such is shown to be dangerous. This connects with the fears and concerns regarding nuclear war in the 1980s.

The hero uses justified violence to bring peace. In this he is typical of the 1980s 'hard body' action hero, but the post-apocalyptic setting creates a number of other connotations, such as the religious symbolism. The one example of this overwhelmingly masculine characterisation, as well as the generic conventions attached to it, being subverted is in *Tank Girl*. In that film the female hero rejects traditional gender and sexual identity roles and sides with the mutants, who are normally dehumanised in the genre. This irreverent representation is

partly linked to the more playful and comedic tone to action films of the 1990s that Tasker identifies.

Additionally, Rebecca in *Tank Girl* also rejects the typical role of the post-apocalyptic hero in that she chooses to work with a group of others (the Rippers and fellow prisoners) rather fight alone. I argue that the male post-apocalyptic hero embodies the American value of individualism. He is represented as personifying the heroic sacrifices of the American nation. For instance, the Nomad must face Sho alone in the final battle. This value of individualism was one that Reagan publicly embraced, both in terms of policy (reducing federal power) and image (the western hero).

The relationship between politics and myth in the 1980s was very strong. Reagan utilised the frontier myth. However, he also expressed a belief in the apocalypse as a reality that was soon to happen. The impact of these beliefs on American culture and the post-apocalyptic genre was demonstrably significant.

Nevertheless, an event which had a much greater influence on both genre and American culture was to occur a decade later. 9/11 was when the imaginings of destruction became a reality on American soil. The way in which that connected with the post-apocalyptic genre is explored in the next chapter.

## 6. 2007-2013: FEARS AND EXPECTATIONS

### Introduction

In the previous chapter I examined the way in which the post-apocalyptic genre responded to the cultural influences of Reaganism and nuclear anxiety through blending the structures and imagery of multiple genres. The way in which the post-apocalyptic film functions to fulfil the beliefs and reflect the concerns in American culture through oppositional structures was examined in relation to themes of anti-technology, a rejection of the “Old World”, and the role of the messianic-vigilante hero.

In this chapter I will continue to examine how deep structures in the post-apocalyptic genre are manifested through representations of antagonists, landscape iconography, and the utopian ending. However, I will also analyse how those structures began to be contested. These discussions will be placed in the context of the effect and legacy of 9/11 on the post-apocalyptic genre. The chapter starts by outlining the impact on American cinema more generally and the dramatic consequences it had for the post-apocalyptic genre specifically. *I Am Legend* is the case study film.

The film is analysed in relation to an earlier version of the narrative *The Omega Man*, as well as to the zombie film, specifically in the context of how the dehumanised enemy is represented. In addition, the iconography of the empty city and the on-going oppositions of civilisation/chaos and urban/nature are examined in terms of how the genre has developed over time. The theatrical and alternate endings are compared; the way in which the alternate ending challenges the conventions of the post-apocalyptic genre is discussed. Finally, the later progression of the genre is explored through an analysis of how the emerging anti-structures in *I Am Legend* became postmodern themes that created a further shift in the construction of the genre.

### Overview

One question that emerges in the study of the post-apocalyptic genre in American culture is: what happens when fiction becomes reality? American popular culture had long imagined scenarios similar, if not identical in some

cases,<sup>52</sup> to the destruction of the Twin Towers on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001. However, facing it in reality provoked several new patterns in American cinema. It is well-documented, and frequently referred to in critical work on the subject of 9/11 and American culture, that many people responded to viewing the images of the planes hitting the tower with some variation of the phrase 'it's just like the movies' (Page 2008: 4, Wetmore 2012: 10, Simpson 2006: 129). And because only a small number of people saw the event in real-life, it was exactly like the movies – images of a city being destroyed viewed through a screen.

There is some debate as to what long term effect that the blurring of the line between reported reality and fictionalised images had on cinema and film genres in American culture. However, one popular theory is that the steep rise in the popularity of fantasy films, animations, and remakes stemmed from a desire to escape the horror of 9/11. Overall there was an increase in 'escapist films and television series, [which] ignored the current national anxieties' (Geraghty 2009: 103).

In conjunction with the improvement of digital technologies, the events of 9/11 partly motivated the trend for fantasy and animation films (Pheasant-Kelly 2013: 4). Kelly's conclusions are based on the box-office success of fantasy films since 2001. Though this is not always a completely reliable method of analysing trends in cinema, it is hard to ignore the sheer number of fantasy films produced since 2001.

Additionally, Wetmore argues that the horror genre was dominated by remakes and many horror tropes and characters (such as vampires) became incorporated into the romance and fantasy genre (2012: 14-21). Although, as he himself discusses, this was fairly common before 9/11, there was a distinct upsurge in the trend afterwards.

These two trends seem to indicate that following the real-life images of destruction Americans wanted to escape to other worlds, be they magical lands or the safety of the past. To an extent this is an accurate interpretation, 'fantasy

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<sup>52</sup> For example, the damage and destruction to the World Trade Centre in films such as *Meteor* (Dir. Neame, 1979) and *Independence Day* (Dir. Emmerich, 1996).

worlds offering an alternative to a frightening new reality' (Napier 2005: xi). Nevertheless, there are other trends which complicate this interpretation.

Despite the apparent desire in American culture to escape from the horrors of 9/11 one genre that saw a surge in popularity was the disaster film. There were a plethora of disaster films following 9/11 (Hamad 2013: 54). Mathias Nilges states that there was a 'renaissance of such [disaster] narratives' (2010: 23) in the post-9/11 American culture. Therefore, images of disaster were not eliminated from American cinema completely.

However, the popularity of apocalyptic or disaster films was not shared; other 'bleak future' narratives stagnated or even declined in numbers in the years immediately following 9/11. While American dystopian films did not disappear altogether, they hardly dominated the cinematic landscape either. In fact, I argue that the American post-apocalyptic genre did actually disappear from screens, for 5 years.

In 2002, there were two American post-apocalyptic films made: *Reign of Fire* (Dir. Rob Bowman) and a remake of *The Time Machine* (Dir. Simon Wells). The first aspect of these films which is significant is that neither film is set in America. *Reign of Fire* is set in Britain. The post-apocalyptic sections of *The Time Machine* are strictly still in America, but they are set so vastly far into the future that they function as an alien land. Additionally, a very brief scene in which meteors hit New York was edited out of the film (Page 2008: 204).

My argument is that these efforts to situate these films elsewhere marked a distinct break from previous efforts to locate American post-apocalyptic films as future visions of the same country. For instance, films such as *The Ultimate Warrior*, *Logan's Run* and *Cyborg* all focus on details which identify the deserted or ruined buildings as iconic American cities (New York, Washington D.C. and Atlanta respectively).

The overall narrative structure of the two 2002 films remained largely the same as that present in the genre overall, but the post-apocalyptic narrative was relocated. These films retained the same syntactic elements as earlier additions to the genre; however they removed the semantic features which set the film in America. In other words, they told the same story, but not so close to home.

In addition to these internal shifts, these films also demonstrate the way in which the post-apocalyptic genre related to the wider context of trends towards fantasy and remakes. *Reign of Fire* exchanges the cruel, destructive neo-feudal tyrants and/or thugs (e.g. Carrot in *The Ultimate Warrior* or Damnil in *Steel Dawn*), for cruel and destructive dragons. The inclusion of a fantasy element in the post-apocalyptic narrative is in keeping with the overall trend of fantasy films that provide a more comfortable way for American audiences to view images of destruction. Any parallels between the Americans fighting flying monsters who destroy cities and the events of 9/11 are filtered through a distinctly antirealist tone (Gallagher 2006: 198).

Similarly, *The Time Machine* is a remake of the 1960 film, which is in turn an adaptation of H.G. Wells's novel. Thus, it is part of the trend Wetmore identifies towards remakes and new adaptations. The desire for remakes can be largely attributed to the fact that they offer the comfort of repetition (the audience knows what to expect) and the security of past values (Wetmore 2012: 193, Faludi 2007: 3-4). Nostalgia is particularly powerful when the future is frightening or uncertain.

*Reign of Fire* and *The Time Machine* demonstrate that the structures and forms of the post-apocalyptic genre were affected by the events of 9/11. In isolation these two films would not be so significant; there are always exceptions to the generic norms. However, these films were then followed by a 5 year gap in which no American post-apocalyptic films were made at all.<sup>53</sup>

This reworking and then total rejection of American post-apocalyptic films seems to initially contradict the idea that post-apocalyptic narratives form part of the American national mythscape. My argument is that post-apocalyptic films are partly articulations of myths which act as metaphors for national experiences. They are retold at moments of crisis and change to reinforce certain shared identities (e.g. the despair of the 1970s, Reaganism in the 1980s). 9/11 is probably the greatest crisis in modern American history (Gotham, Greenberg 2014: 58). It should follow then that there would be a vast

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<sup>53</sup> According to the criteria applied in the methodology of this thesis.

number of post-apocalyptic films because the myth would be needed most at that time.

However, I contend that the post-apocalyptic genre, and the themes and myths connected to it, offer a particular vision of America and that is not always a welcome one. To best understand this it is useful to compare the disaster or apocalyptic genre, which experienced an upsurge in popularity post-9/11, with the post-apocalyptic genre.

As discussed in the literature review, the disaster genre usually presents a scenario where humanity, represented exclusively or largely by America, is united against a common threat. This threat is eventually overcome and defeated by the end of the narrative. Stephen Keane has described disaster films as providing therapeutic experiences for audiences and a renewed sense of perspective (2006: 22). Military power combined with courage and resourcefulness is victorious in the face of the pitiless terror of destruction. It is not hard to see why such a story would be popular for post-9/11 audiences. Disaster films depicted victory, 'a triumphant America' (Geraghty 2009: 103).

In contrast, I posit that the post-apocalyptic genre is inherently critical of modern America. Max Page states that after 9/11:

Suddenly, everyone loved New York. The near-universal view was that New York was a blameless victim. This generated a sense of sympathy and compassion that New York had rarely if ever seen. At least briefly, the ongoing trope of New York as a city of murder and mayhem [...] was washed away. (2008: 203)

If the attitude to New York (often considered the cultural capital of America) is taken to be representative of the attitudes towards modern urban America generally, the issue becomes clearer. A narrative in which institutions fail and the modern world is cast aside in favour of a new utopia was not the right narrative for the national mood at this time. After 9/11 the nation was more united than it had been for a long time (Bolton 2008: 268). There was no room in American culture for visions of a New World when the current one suddenly seemed so genuinely vulnerable.

However, by 2007 the situation was very different. The Iraq War had become deeply unpopular: the rising death toll, the allegations of corruption and incompetence, and the growing sense that it had all been for oil rather than freedom meant President Bush's approval rating was plummeting (Smith 2012: 172). In addition, the failure of the government to respond to Hurricane Katrina in 2005 had undermined the sense of unity and shared purpose between the government and the people.

In this context, I would argue that a narrative that condemns the failures of institutions and social structures was deeply relevant again. The narrative structure present in the post-apocalyptic genre does offer to solve problems, if only in the most extreme way. In a similar way to nostalgia, visions of a simplified future offer an escape from the complex anxieties of the present (Hantke 2010: 30).

As the previous two case studies have shown post-apocalyptic films are strongly conservative. The narrative is built on a longing for traditional lifestyles, and an almost religious certainty of good and evil. One other important reason that the post-apocalyptic genre was not needed in American culture immediately after 9/11 is because that ideology had temporarily 'won'. There was a fixed sense of who the enemy was and that they needed to be fought. As those distinctions became increasingly blurry, the post-apocalyptic narrative began to be retold.

### **CASE STUDY: *I Am Legend* (Dir. Francis Lawrence, 2007, Village Roadshow Pictures/Warner Bros.).**

#### **Synopsis**

*I Am Legend* focuses on Robert Neville (Will Smith) who is the last man alive in New York, but is not alone. A virus has either killed or mutated the vast majority of the population. The mutation makes people into bloodthirsty cannibals who share a series of traits with vampires and zombies. Robert is a scientist who is trying to find a cure to the virus from his own blood because he has natural immunity. He maintains sanity and survival by adhering to a military schedule, and his only company is his German Shepherd called Sam (Abbey).

After Sam is killed by the mutants Robert becomes irrational and suicidal. He is saved by a woman, Anna (Alice Braga), and a boy, Ethan (Charlie Tahan), who say there is a safe haven in Vermont. The mutants launch a huge attack on Neville's house and he explodes a grenade killing himself and a large number of the mutants to save Anna and Ethan, as well as the cure he has just discovered. Anna and Ethan find the sanctuary in Vermont, and Robert is remembered as a legend who saved humanity.

### **Representations of the Enemy**

*I Am Legend* was the first post-apocalyptic film set in New York after 9/11. After *I Am Legend* was released there was a marked upsurge in the number of post-apocalyptic films; while there were none in the 5 years previous, there were fourteen in the next 5 years, and none of these were a remake. This further supports the theory that as the certainties and unity of 9/11 faded the post-apocalyptic genre became increasingly relevant again.

However, *I Am Legend* was still in keeping with the wider trend in cinema identified above of remakes. The film is a loose remake of the 1971 film *The Omega Man*. It is also the third adaptation of Richard Matheson's novel (also called *I Am Legend*) written in 1954. The first of these was *The Last Man on Earth* (Dir. Sidney Salkow) in 1964.

The film's connection to previous film versions and the book create several interesting comparisons. Primarily, the similarities and differences between *The Omega Man* and *I Am Legend* are of interest because they offer insights into the genre structures across the time period under analysis. However, any pertinent connections to the source novel or the earlier film will also be included.

One significant difference is the 'evil' characters in the two films. In *The Omega Man* those mutated from the virus call themselves The Family and they are not unthinking monsters but have a coherent belief system. They are 'neo-medieval Luddites' (Hantke 2012: 178), who are against science and militarism. As discussed in the chapter four, they can be interpreted as representing counter-culture and the 'hippie' movement (Hass et al, 2015: 360).

However, they also symbolise a fundamentalist version of the anti-technology opinions that were current in the 1970s. As discussed in the first chapter there was a resistance to and scepticism regarding the technological advances at this time.

Tribbe devotes an entire chapter of his book on the ambivalence towards the space race and technology to the shift from secularisation in America to the renewed interest in religion and spirituality. In 'God is Alive, Magic is Afoot' he discusses how both evangelicalism and mystical Eastern faiths grew in popularity as a distrust of science and technology increased. Tribbe further argues that: '[m]illions of Americans defected from the secularized mainline congregations to form new, more spiritually-focused parishes or to join the evangelical or fundamentalist or New Age faiths' (2014: 174).

Tribbe even identifies *The Omega Man* as an example of popular culture representing this shift. Tribbe argues that the Family's view of Neville as "refuse of the past", a symbol of science and progress, which caused the apocalyptic disaster, is aligned with those Americans who were rejecting a secularised, scientific version of their society.

However, I would argue that the film is actually quite ambivalent in its attitude to technology. Neville does use technology, science, and medicine but 'appears conflicted by his association with destructive institutions' (Gallagher 2006: 107). As discussed previously, the film ends with the surviving characters going to build Eden.

One way of interpreting what the Luddite mutant Family represents is to consider that *The Omega Man* depicts two extremes. Neville is reliant on science and technology (and dies when it fails him through his gun jamming). He cannot sufficiently escape his identity as a soldier-scientist to help build a new Eden. The Family are as Hantke describes them 'neo-medieval Luddites'. This description is supported by the way in which the Family are depicted visually. They are shown to be hooded like monastics and carry flaming torches like medieval peasants (fig 1).



**Fig 1:** The Family in *The Omega Man*.

Hantke's label is also very similar to Broderick's term 'neo-feudal' for tyrants in post-apocalyptic films. As with the tyrants discussed in the chapter five, the Family represent the oppressive past of the 'Dark Ages'. While they are aligned with the swing away from technology, they do not represent it.

Neville and the Family symbolise two extremes: technological overreliance and a backward, oppressive rejection of American values. It is the promise of a 'second Eden', a natural utopia which is closest to the renewed interest in spirituality in American culture at this time.

Asian-based faiths which emphasised being at one with the world were embraced by some Americans, while others looked to evangelical teachings which included those that told of a Second Coming and paradise on Earth (Tribbe 2014: 174). Both strands of American religious belief favoured a return to simpler values, a focus on the Earth, and a purity of spirit. Thus, the Family are representative of overbearing and constraining ideologies that need to be escaped from in order to achieve the wholesomeness of the new world.

The mutants in *I Am Legend* are much more animalistic and much less socially complex than the Family. In contrast to the novel and the two previous film adaptations, the mutants have no ability to speak, no recognisable social

structure, and none of them bear any resemblance to people Neville has known prior to the outbreak.<sup>54</sup> They are completely dehumanised (Hantke 2012: 171).

They live in rundown buildings, huddled together like a hive of insects, only coming out at night. They move as a unified mob, even as a swarm (fig 2). They are not capable of a belief-system as the Family are. Neville refers to them as 'the infected' or the 'Dark Seekers'.



**Fig 2:** The mutants (or Dark Seekers or 'infected') invade Neville's laboratory in *I Am Legend*.

Due to its special status as the first post-apocalyptic film set in New York after 9/11, *I Am Legend* has been frequently read as a direct reflection of many of the issues and fears connected to 9/11 and the 'War on Terror'.

In relation to the mutants, one obvious analogy is between the mutants and the fear of home-grown terrorists who have been 'infected' by an anti-American ideology. Additionally, the relationship between Neville and the mutants is reminiscent of American foreign policy:

When he is not searching for a cure, Neville hunts Dark Seekers, who take shelter in the darkness of abandoned buildings, closely recalling former president George W. Bush's repeated figurations of terrorists as "shadowy" and hiding in "caves and shadows." Exploiting the nocturnal creatures' vulnerability to light, Neville stalks the Dark Seekers street by street, echoing Bush's insistence on September 20, 2001, that the United States strive "to hunt down, to find, to smoke out of their holes"

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<sup>54</sup> They seem to more closely resemble a pack, with an Alpha male.

those he believed to be responsible for the 9/11 attacks. (King 2011: 153)

There is also a comparison to be made with the concept of homeland security. Neville's attempts to keep secret the location of his brownstone house which acts as both home and secret base is 'evocative of George W. Bush's repeated assertion that the United States must fight the terrorists anywhere but at home' (Hantke 2012: 173).

Neville is characterised by the domestic environment in the film, and shots of him cooking, wearing an apron (fig 3), and running on the treadmill all position the house 'as a space of bourgeois normality' (2012: 169). The mutants' attack on Neville's house can, therefore, be read as an attack on the ideal of the American home. This can be read as a further analogy for Bush's rhetoric that the terrorists will attack at home if security measures and military action were not implemented (ibid).



**Fig 3:** Neville prepares dinner in *I Am Legend*.

I argue that in both *The Omega Man* and *I Am Legend* the mutants, and their relationship to the Neville character, relate to wider concerns in American culture of the time. In *The Omega Man* the mutants seem to only represent the distrust of technology. However, in addition they are actually an extreme and archaic perversion of this anti-technology belief. As such, they are framed as oppressive remnants of the Old World which must be defeated in order to make a utopia possible. In *I Am Legend* the mutants represent the fears of terrorism

after 9/11. In particular, they relate to the anxiety regarding Americans becoming 'infected' with violent ideologies and the need to eradicate that threat. In addition, my argument is that these readings of the mutants in the two films can also be understood as a part of a pattern in the genre overall. The swarming attack of the Dark Seekers in *I Am Legend* on Neville's house (and to a lesser extent the Family in *The Omega Man*) is visually similar to the attack on the Baron's study by the angry mob in *The Ultimate Warrior*. *Ravagers*, *Cyborg*, and *City Limits* all feature almost identical spaces, in which a semblance of domestic life is maintained while being threatened and attacked by an evil mob.

The mob is a symbol of the distrust of the urban environment in American culture (discussed in 'Pessimism to Optimism'). The fear of the chaos created by a mob is part of the anti-urban foundational myth. Abbot argues that the anxiety that Jefferson and other leaders felt about a revolution similar to the French one spreading to America and causing turmoil has filtered down into a general cultural association between cities and violent mobs (2006: 186). This has been reinforced over time by repeated race riots, strikes and marches that have had violent, sometimes fatal consequences.

From the Memorial Day Massacre in Chicago in 1937, through the Harlem Race Riot in 1964, to the Rodney King Riots in Los Angeles in 1992, the fear of the urban environment as a place of violence and unrest has not been without justification.

The mob is an integral part of the way in which urban post-apocalyptic films visualise the dark underside of the city. This fear of the chaotic masses rising up is something that was instilled in attitudes to the city from the nineteenth century. The fear of revolution, race riots, and radicalised terrorists are all represented through images of a crazed mob. The link between revolution and the post-apocalyptic mob can be seen in the way in which the mobs frequently attack figures of authority and the 'bourgeois' home. Post-apocalyptic fiction exaggerates and concentrates a complex range of arguments and attitudes into powerful images and a simple narrative.

Significantly, the mob (or swarm) in *I Am Legend* is directly created by products of the city: science and technology. It is the experimental virus that causes the mass deaths and mutations. The city creates its own destruction and damnation.

The fear of a dehumanised mass of humans who have lost rationality and humanity is an excellent symbol for the anxieties and unease with the urban in American culture. As discussed in 'Pessimism to Optimism', the city is often seen to be a space in which traditional 'American' values and traits are degraded and eroded.

I argue that a number of the key opposing structures relating to urban anxieties which underpin the narrative have remained consistent across the post-apocalyptic genre. In particular, the civilisation/chaos, culture/survival and intellect/impulse binaries that underpin the narrative in *The Ultimate Warrior* are also evident in *I Am Legend*. However, they are coded in somewhat different ways. In *The Ultimate Warrior* the opposition is first between the community and the thugs (civilisation/chaos) and later between the Baron and the enraged mob (intellect/impulse, culture/survival).

In *I Am Legend* it is Neville who represents the civilisation and the intellect, but he also embodies both sides of the culture/survival binary. In *The Ultimate Warrior* the chaos was symbolised by both the thugs and then the community itself, the culture and the intellect were linked to the Baron and thus were destroyed by the impulse and survival needs of the mob. In *I Am Legend* the opposition is not just between civilisation and chaos but also between man/animal. Neville represents reasoned humanity in opposition to primitive instinct.

The reasons for this shift in the way in which these structures are depicted can be connected to the concerns of the time. The environmental issues and the crisis of inner city crime in the 1970s meant that the city was seen in terms of instability and destruction, violent crimes and a never-ending demand for resources. *The Ultimate Warrior* represents these concerns by depicting a community descending into violence through a lack of resources. However, 9/11 provoked much more visceral fears of being attacked and of brutal,

merciless enemies lurking in the shadows. *I Am Legend* denotes these fears through the depiction of animalistic swarms invading the domestic space. The binary oppositions remain very similar, but how they are signified within the text varies according to the influences of the time the films were made.

However, the post-apocalyptic genre is not unique in depicting a scenario of dehumanised, raging swarms attacking people. The zombie film expresses similar themes. Indeed, *I Am Legend* is one of the films which are a hybrid of the post-apocalyptic genre and the horror genre. It has been discussed critically as a zombie film, a vampire film, and a post-apocalyptic film. This relationship between the zombie genre and the narrative of *I Am Legend* is further underlined by the fact that the director George A Romero cites Richard Matheson's original novella as inspiration for his zombie films (Waller 2010: 275).

As discussed in the literature review, there are a number of similarities between the zombie and post-apocalyptic genres.<sup>55</sup> In *I Am Legend* the generic codes overlap to an even greater extent. As with the three genres that merge in 'final frontier' films (post-apocalyptic, western and martial arts) the reason *I Am Legend* is a coherent mix of both the zombie horror film and the post-apocalyptic film is that it is articulating themes shared by both.

Zombie films, particularly those that were made by Romero, use zombies to symbolise the 'deformations of human personality operating within a ruthless capitalist society' (Williams 2012: 214). The most obvious example of this is in *Dawn of the Dead* (1979) where zombies aimlessly wander around an abandoned shopping mall, the temple of American consumerism (Dendle 2007: 51). Zombies are repeatedly used to represent the absence of normal behaviours.

Similarly, the mutants and gangs in the post-apocalyptic genre function as a personification of the forces of sin that have brought the original destruction. They may be mutated by the disease or radiation of the original disaster. Alternatively, they may be gangs whose 'philosophy of survival rests solely on satiating immediate, short-term desires, randomly looting, raping, and killing

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<sup>55</sup> Dendle (2007), Boon (2011), and Sutherland (2007).

those who obstruct them' (Broderick 1993: 377). I argue that in both cases they embody the perceived failures of American society that caused the apocalyptic catastrophe. The mutants in these films are symbols of the dangers of technology and science and the gangs signify the attitudes of decadence and hedonism.

In both genres these swarms of dehumanised enemies are malleable enough to remain a stable semantic element while still connecting with shifting cultural issues. Dendle termed the zombie a 'barometer of cultural anxiety' (2007: 45) and the same phrase could be applied to the mobs and mutants in the post-apocalyptic genre. The two genres use the theme of the deformed or demented human *en masse* to represent various fears, such as technology, racial tensions, and terrorism.

*I Am Legend*, therefore, sits across both genres because it utilises the semantic element of the swarming, dehumanised enemy that exists in the zombie and the post-apocalyptic genre. This element is used to express the contemporary fears regarding terrorism and the on-going anxieties in the American mythscape of anti-urbanism.

The relationship between deep-rooted cultural concerns and the newer fears that emerged because of the events of 9/11 is also important in understanding the iconography of *I Am Legend*. The imagery of *I Am Legend* is the first visualisation of a post-apocalyptic America since 9/11, and it is set in New York, so the horror of the Twin Towers' destruction clearly haunts the film.

### **The Iconography of the Opening Shots**

King argues that 'the mise-en-scene engages the traumatic iconography of 9/11' (2011: 145). The shots of an empty, ruined New York are seen as reminiscent and representative of the bleak atmosphere of the city after 9/11. It rouses a cultural memory of the literal and symbolic devastation in New York. This is also overtly referenced in the film by the phrase 'Ground Zero', which Neville uses to describe the city as the starting point of the virus.

However, it is important to also place the iconography of *I Am Legend* in the broader context of the post-apocalyptic genre. As Max Page was quoted as arguing in the literature review, 'Popular culture has been a dress rehearsal for

the city's destruction for decades' (2008: 199). My argument is that, as with nuclear anxiety and the anti-technology theme in 'final frontier' films, *I Am Legend* connects to contemporary events but still draws on the syntactic and semantic elements already existing within the genre.

If the example of the film's opening shots is analysed then this connection becomes clearer. King argues that the 'downtown skyline [...] filled with dilapidated, uninhabited buildings and streets overrun with dust, debris and abandoned cars' is responsible for 'animating the cultural memory of 9/11' (2011: 146).

There is a short scene preceding the images of the empty city in *I Am Legend*. This is a news interview with a woman called Doctor Krippin who, it is revealed through the dialogue, has used the measles virus to apparently cure cancer. The screen fades to black and an obviously post-apocalyptic image of New York appears with the title 'Three Years Later'.

The movement in this sequence is strictly confined to panning up, down or across the image. There are no zooms, fast-paced jump cuts, or other camera or editing techniques. The opening shot is of a flooded road, choked with cars, the two slip roads on either side are similarly congested. The absence of car horns on the soundtrack indicates that these cars are not occupied. In fact, there is silence except for birdsong and insects chirping. Birds fly across the frame, their tiny size against the huge buildings in the city serve to enhance the emptiness (fig 4).



**Fig 4:** The first shot of a post-apocalyptic New York since 9/11 in *I Am Legend*.

The camera tilts up from the cars to take in the background of skyscrapers, which includes the Empire State Building. There are signifiers of destruction and abandonment in the foreground, while the skyscrapers and iconic American architecture stand silently abandoned in the background.

There is also impressionistic resemblance in the shot to scenes of the construction at Ground Zero. Just left of the centre of the frame a crane can be seen in front of the largest skyscraper. The overall of composition of the shot is formed by a flat area in the bottom third of the image and which is surrounded on three sides by layers of increasingly tall buildings. The opening shot does bear comparisons to some photographs of the construction site at Ground Zero, such as the one in fig 5.



**Fig 5:** The construction site a Ground Zero, © Reuters/Gary Hershorn.

Therefore, my argument is that *I Am Legend* visually alludes to 9/11 and Ground Zero as a shorthand reference for urban destruction and death. The similarity of the images is a deliberate artistic choice which is intended to link the real life horror of 9/11 with the fictional catastrophe and destruction in the story. The consequence of the connection is that it imbues these images with a greater cultural weight and significance. The opening shot implies that this is not simply an ordinary film but an exploration of what might have been the reality of American history.

Three of the next four shots in the opening sequence are at street level with skyscrapers and tall buildings looming up from the pavement (fig 6 & 7). Here the city becomes a series of empty canyons. The shots are framed in such a way as to give an impression of death and stillness. The images on screen all show streets reaching away, framed by skyscrapers and tower blocks.



**Fig 6:** The empty streets of New York in the opening shots of *I Am Legend*.



**Fig 7:** Another empty street shot from *I Am Legend*.

While in normal urban life there would be a constant movement and activity, more and more people, more and more lives and memories, in a post-apocalyptic city there is no such regeneration. A post-apocalyptic city is a dead city. The buildings signify memory, the emptiness signifies oblivion. From street level, from the perspective of the now absent citizen the skyscrapers signify less an ascent, than a solemn memorial – skyscrapers as gravestones (Sobchack 1999: 132).

The shots are in a deep focus, the emphasis is on looking at the architecture, the landscape as a whole. Individual details of empty cars, buildings and fading signs are given equal importance in the mise-en-scène, so that each shot becomes an impressionistic image of a dead city.

There is the unnatural quality of quiet, apart from distinctly non-human bird calls. This conflicts with the images of buildings and streets that would usually be bursting with voices, music and engines. The camera angles are very low, almost ground level, thus they accentuate the height and dominance of the buildings. The perspective of the camera is looking upwards at the buildings reinforcing the might of the architecture. It is the physical buildings that are important now, there is nothing else left. As in a graveyard only the gravestones have any cultural meaning, humanity has long since gone. The buildings stand as reminders of the now vanished human life.

The second, third, and fourth shots do resemble the (relatively) empty streets of New York during and shortly after 9/11 (fig 8). However, they are also similar to the opening shots of *The Ultimate Warrior*, analysed in 'Pessimism to Optimism'. The opening shot (fig 4) resembles another urban post-apocalyptic film – *Cyborg* (1989). This film starts with a voice-over which describes the starvation, crime, and then a plague. The image on screen is the Brooklyn Bridge broken in half and surrounded by rubble (fig 9). The title says 'New York', followed by 'The Future'. The opening scenes take place in the streets of New York, but filled with abandoned cars, debris, crucified bodies and lacerated buildings. In addition *Ravagers*, *City Limits*, *Omega Cop*, and *The Last Man* feature similar opening sequences.



**Fig 8:** *Lafayette Street - Empty Except For Smoke*, September 11, 2001, Photography © NY ArtWorld 2001.



**Fig 9:** The rubble and broken Brooklyn Bridge in New York in the opening shot of *Cyborg*.

The empty city, crumbling and abandoned, is part of the iconography of the urban post-apocalyptic setting. I argue it serves to establish the primary stage of the narrative: the failure of normal institutions has led to the mass destruction

of society. Simultaneously, it represents the city as a dangerous environment. It is an exaggeration of anti-urban attitudes.

As Nilges argues, '9/11 dramatically amplified previously *existing* negative perceptions' (my italics, 2010: 26). *I Am Legend* draws on the semantic and syntactic elements that were already part of the post-apocalyptic genre. In particular, the film utilises imagery of urban decay and emptiness and articulates the theme of anti-urbanism. This theme is part of the American mythscape, but the events of 9/11 gave it a new poignancy and relevance.

There are therefore layers of meaning within these shots. 9/11 and Ground Zero are evoked as shared cultural images of urban destruction. However, as Page argues images of New York's destruction had long existed in American culture (2008: 199). *I Am Legend* draws on and adds to those existing images of the empty post-apocalyptic city but in evoking the cultural memory of 9/11 it also became part of that memory. Due to the blurring of viewed images and fictional depictions of New York the imagery of 9/11 is both part of a historic fact and part of the iconography of popular culture. As Natali argues:

The images of the attack brought together many icons of disaster, and the overwhelming spectacle was very similar to many film clichés [...] New York was offering to the world the spectacle of paranoiac fantasy *rendered manifest*. (original italics, 2006: 109)

Furthermore, I argue that this relationship between images of from 'film clichés', such as those in the post-apocalyptic genre, and the manifestation of those images as reality did not end in 2001. Rather the iconography of the empty city and the shared cultural memory of 9/11 continue to draw on each other, merging factual history with popular cultural in the American national mythscape.

*I Am Legend* is one example of this on-going intertwining of fact and fiction. Consequently, the film can be understood as both typical of the post-apocalyptic genre and unusual in its cultural position as the first post-apocalyptic film text which directly draws on and therefore influences the cultural memory of 9/11.

### **Wilderness in the City**

My argument is that the fear generated by 9/11 is expressed in other ways in *I Am Legend*. One of these is through the opposition between safety and danger, civilisation and wilderness. In *I Am Legend* the city has become a literal urban jungle. This is represented visually in the scenes in which Neville and Sam hunt deer through the streets of New York in a Mustang GT500.

Robert Neville's car breaks the predominantly static shots that open the film. The next shot on screen focuses on a very large rifle, the camera then pans up to show Neville driving. Next to him is a large German Shepherd. A herd of deer leap out in front of the car. The car swerves, but then Neville begins to chase the deer with the car. It rapidly becomes clear this is a hunt. In a fast panning wide shot we see Neville driving through a park after the fleeing deer.

The urban imagery of a car chase is juxtaposed with the deer which are connected to nature. The deer in *I Am Legend* are free and wild; they are not confined by the urban boundaries. Similarly, the car drives through the park, breaking the division between nature and city. The deer symbolise pure nature, and the car is a very potent symbol of modernity and technology. The divisions and separations that define the city are gone, deer run through the streets and cars drive through parks.

A series of shots, mainly from a low-angle wide shot, or from the POV of Neville, follow the deer running and leaping through the streets of New York. The sequence is frenetic; there is rapid editing and jump cuts between the Neville in the car and the running deer. This is in contrast to the still, static shots that dominated the opening sequences. Nature has brought the city alive briefly but in an abnormal way. The deer leap in front of abandoned shops and cafes (fig 10); the juxtaposition between the two only serves to reinforce the strangeness of the scene.



**Fig 10:** The impressionistic shot of deer leap in front of the Bank of New York in *I Am Legend*.

The chase sequence is reminiscent of police pursuits (another example of generic overlapping and mixing). In one particular shot Neville tries to shoot from the car window, the deer runs down into an underpass, thus obstructing his view. This back and forth chase, near misses and escapes, is typical of how city chase sequences are constructed in action films.

Neville leaves the car to continue the hunt; tracking the deer quietly. The pace of the editing and action slows. There is a high angle shot that follows Neville and Sam as they stalk through long grass that has grown up an area of the street (fig 11). While they are in the grass the imagery resembles a traditional hunting sequences, in films such as *The Deer Hunter* (Dir. Michael Cimino, 1978) or *Last of the Mohicans* (Dir. Michael Mann, 1992). However, as they move back into the more typical city spaces, the references in the imagery to the cinematography of crime films returns.



**Fig 11:** Neville continues his hunt through the long grass underneath posters for Broadway musicals in *I Am Legend*.

Their return to the urban is succinctly symbolised by the posters for Broadway musicals that are visible in the mise-en-scène. The posters represent the products of urban culture. These images of organised popular art contrast with the signifiers, such as the deer and the long grass, of the wilderness invading the city.

There is then a wide shot of Neville creeping along a wall, gun in hand. The camera is deliberately shaky, as if held by someone actually there, and the action of moving along the wall looks like a military or police raid. This is reinforced in an over-the-shoulder shot which shows Neville look around the corner and then a wider shot that sees him move forward under the cover of a car (fig 12).



**Fig 12:** Neville stalks the deer in *I Am Legend*; the camera work resembles a police raid.

He is interacting with and controlling the urban landscape, the deer appear to have been defeated by being in an urban environment. However, just as he is about to take the shot and kill the deer he has been following, it is pounced on by a lioness. A lion and a cub appear as Neville deliberates about whether to try and shoot the lioness so he can take the deer. The dying light forces him to leave. Wilderness and nature have overturned the dominance of humanity and civilisation.

I argue that this mixing of the semantics and aesthetics of a police raid and a hunt reveal a tension between the modes of existence being represented. The flitting between pastoral and urban and between the imagery of traditional hunting and the modern hunting of criminals creates a powerful impression of disorder. *I Am Legend* can be read as making an ironic comment on urban violence being an extension of more primal impulses. As with the links to the zombie film, these intertextual connections to the structures of other genres are used to express underpinning narrative themes which form part of the components of the post-apocalyptic genre.

As discussed in the chapter six, some post-apocalyptic films utilise the return-to-primitivism trope. In these films the entire landscape and social structure (such as it is) has returned to an earlier, pre-industrial, barbaric stage. However, the remains of the city's structures in urban post-apocalyptic films mean that the films have to express this theme through other visual methods. I argue that the visual link between the more primitive, primal act of hunting and the more modern, but equally brutal act, of mugging or capturing criminals is an expression of this post-apocalyptic theme of returning to primitivism.

I would further contend that there are a number of oppositional structures underlying the imagery of *I Am Legend*. The film connects and contrasts hunting and wilderness with capturing criminals and civilisation. The way in which the two are merged in the film is partly an articulation of the on-going fears regarding violence and savagery in the urban environment in American culture. It also connects to the fears of home-grown terrorism discussed above. A vision of New York in which basic survival against dangerous forces is paramount resonates with the local and even national mood of anxiety regarding terrorism.

However, another disaster is perhaps more pertinent here. The damage that Hurricane Katrina caused in New Orleans made the theme of natural power dominating and destroying the urban structures of civilisation very relevant. The opposition between natural and urban, wilderness and civilisation, is particularly significant because part of the horror of the destruction Katrina caused was that it obliterated such a culturally vibrant area (Eyerman 2015: 52).

As with 9/11, the destruction of landmarks and spaces which were valued as representing aspects of American culture captured the public imagination. These traumas were then absorbed into the American mythscape and articulated through a number of narratives, the post-apocalyptic film being one. The existing tensions between rural and urban in American culture, as discussed in 'Pessimism to Optimism', reinforced these new anxieties. These tensions also relate to the unease with modernity that has been evident in the analysis of the previous case study films.

The iconography of *I Am Legend* had new connotations because it was made after 9/11, but it is also another articulation of the American mythscape that renounces the modern and the urban in favour of moving towards a utopian new world. However, I would argue that the form that utopia takes and the narrative which creates that utopia are also aspects of generic structures which are somewhat altered in *I Am Legend*.

### **Theatrical and Alternate Endings**

There are two endings to *I Am Legend*. The theatrical one shows the mutants or Dark Seekers swarm Neville's house. He, Anna and Ethan retreat to his lab and hide behind bullet-proof glass. Neville realises he has succeeded in making a cure and sacrifices himself while Anna and Ethan shelter in a safe room in the walls. Anna and Ethan then drive to Vermont where they find a gated community which is protected by soldiers, and has a church and the American flag flying (fig 13).



**Fig 13:** Anna and Ethan enter the colony in Vermont in *I Am Legend*.

One reading of this ending is that it portrays a negative and oppressive vision of America's future. The walled town suggests imprisonment. This restricted area is in opposition to the images of open space and free movement which typify the nostalgically idealised visions of the frontier. In addition, the presence of the military can be read as sinister, controlling the survivors rather than protecting them.

However, I would contend that while this is certainly a different vision of a utopia to those present at the end of *The Ultimate Warrior*, *Waterworld* (also an Arcadian island), or *Oblivion* (a wooded valley), it can still be interpreted as a New World. The town is walled off, for the obvious reason of safety from the mutants; however, this means that it is a type of island as well. It is a concentrated aspect of the American landscape.

Squeezed into the shots of this small town, which is only on screen for a couple of minutes, is a range of iconography that represents conservative American values. The gates are opened by two soldiers; the military is, therefore, represented as a force that protects the ideals of America. In the background there is an American flag, representing patriotism, and a church, representing mainstream religion and also community. The lighting is warm and soft, the tree in the background suggests life and new growth.

My interpretation of the film's ending is echoed by Steffan Hantke. In his discussion of the theatrical ending Hantke specifically states that 'this town, or towns like it, are the source of the survival of humankind— utopia realized'

(2012: 168). Hantke's essay examines how the narrative and imagery of *I Am Legend* reflects history of the Bush era. He describes the theatrical ending of *I Am Legend* as 'right-wing solutions to restoring humanity' (166). He goes on to discuss how the previous adaptations of Matheson's novella compare to the 2007 film and how the fears of the Cold War can be compared to anxieties during the end of the Bush years.

One other point he discusses is the alternate ending. In this version (available online and on some versions of the DVD/Blu-ray releases) Neville realises that the dominant male mutant (or Alpha) who has led the attack on his house just wants the female mutant he captured for experiments returned to him. He acquiesces and gives her to the lead Dark Seeker (fig 14 & 15), and the mutants leave. In doing so he acknowledges that the mutants have feelings and a certain level of humanity.



**Fig 14:** The leader or Alpha of the mutants greets his mate in *I Am Legend*.



**Fig 15:** The Alpha leaves with her without hurting Neville in *I Am Legend*.

In the last scene all three of them are in the jeep, driving away from New York. Anna's voiceover states that she is travelling to Vermont with Neville and the boy Ethan. She adds "You are not alone. There is hope". The film ends with the much more ambiguous shot of the jeep receding into the distance as they cross a bridge (fig 16).



**Fig 16:** The final shot of the alternate ending of in *I Am Legend*: they drive the jeep out of New York.

Hantke argues that the alternate ending retains the same ideology as the theatrical one because the peace is based on Neville recognising a standard of humanity he himself represents and not acknowledging otherness. The cure means humans as we know them will be restored.

Neville's realization of the alpha male's essential humanity comes at the moment he recognizes his behavior as evidence of monogamous heterosexual bonding [...] Validation [of the mutants] remains inseparable from the dictate of bourgeois normality. (2012: 181)

However, my argument is that his reading does not take into account two crucial points. The first is that Neville's realisation is also based on seeing that he has been the one behaving cruelly by using the mutants as lab rats. This is strongly implied by his glance towards the photos of his dead subjects and his subsequent expression of shame through hanging his head and sorrowful expression.

The second is that despite leaving the city they have accepted this is a changed world and utopia is not assured. Also, Anna's final voiceover, in the form of a radio broadcast, does not mention the cure, whereas in the theatrical ending there is a shot of her handing it over. Therefore, the alternate ending is somewhat more faithful to the Matheson story, which showed that the mutants were not vermin but a new stage in evolution, and Neville was the monster, the stuff of legends.

In the theatrical version of *I Am Legend* the subtlety of the novel and the film's own alternate ending is erased. There is no attempt to question why the mutants keep attacking, or to understand their motivations. Instead, the mutant horde simply represents the fear of urban chaos and violence.

I argue that the alternate ending creates very different themes in the film, such as the importance of humility and the dangers of seeing our enemies as a sub-human. King comments that the 'original [alternate] ending of *I Am Legend* offers dramatic potential for revising prevailing narratives about U.S. exceptionalism, imperialism, and cowboy politics, inviting self-reflexive attention to the violence of the nation state' (2011: 155).

The theatrical version has no such subtlety. The mutants remain evil and unthinking monsters that must be cured or exterminated. However, the theatrical ending conforms more closely to the established generic narrative structures of the post-apocalyptic film. The evil is destroyed through the hero's

morally justified violence, the urban is rejected, and a utopia is found which is based on conservative and traditional values.

I posit that the revision of the original/alternate ending ensures it adheres to the post-apocalyptic genre patterns. On closer examination it is clear that the theatrical ending does not emerge organically from the narrative. The contrived quality of the theatrical ending becomes more apparent when the plot of the film is analysed.

Throughout the film there are visual and verbal indicators that suggest the mutants are more sensitive and more intelligent than Neville believes. A strong example of this is that they move one of the mannequins he 'talks' to and lay a snare which is similar and indeed superior to the one he used. This is not the behaviour of a murderous swarm but a pre-planned strategy. The dominant mutant also risks painful sunlight to try and chase the female Neville takes, indicating emotion, even love. These obvious references to the humanity and intelligence of the mutants are 'repressed by the theatrical ending' (Smith 2012: 143).

Therefore, I argue, that because these threads are never resolved in the theatrical ending, the behaviour is not explained. The narrative develops towards a particular idea (intelligent mutants) but never fulfils this. Critical reviews at the time of the film's release also commented on the inadequacy of the ending, 'the finale is swift and senseless' (Edelstein 2007: URL). It follows that since the theatrical ending does not work well artistically, it must have been chosen because it fulfilled another purpose.

One reason for the change seems to have been motivated by industry factors. The decision was apparently based on studio executives not feeling that the alternate ending was 'commercially viable' (Smith 2012: 220). Various online sources (e.g. Parfitt 2012: URL, Billington 2008: URL) suggest that the alternate ending did badly at test screenings, thus fuelling the concerns about the film selling well.

However, these industrial reasons for the change also blend with others. I posit that one of these other reasons is that the alternate ending was rejected because it did not fit with audience expectations of the post-apocalyptic genre.

The alternate ending fails to identify the dehumanised enemy as signifiers of failure and destruction; but instead suggests that they are thinking feeling creatures who deserve compassion. The certainties of 9/11 had faded somewhat by 2007. Nevertheless, humanising the enemy and demonstrating shame for the violence committed against them still did not fit easily alongside the traumas and fears in the American mythscape.

Additionally, the alternate ending failed to depict a utopian new world. Since the syntactic shift from pessimism to optimism in the 1970s the post-apocalyptic genre has been predominantly structured around finding or founding a utopia. As the content analysis revealed this is a feature of a majority of films in the corpus (62% - Table 4).

The potential absence of the new world in the alternate ending of *I Am Legend* is particularly significant because of its status as the first film after 9/11. The post-apocalyptic narrative had been rejected entirely for the 5 years previously and so it is understandable that when it returned audiences would expect an image of utopia and not ambiguity.

The two reasons for the change to the ending reinforce each other – the alternate ending deviated from both the expected generic conventions and audiences reacted negatively to these changes. This made the studio nervous leading them to reject the ending altogether. It is very significant that the replacement ending reinserts the structures of both the dehumanisation of the mutants, their destruction, and an ending in which a utopia is found. Clearly, these were identified as the components of the film which audiences' wanted.

Ultimately, the city is disavowed in both the endings of *I Am Legend*. In the theatrical ending not only is the city rejected, but after Neville has successfully created a cure he destroys his lab, himself and the mutants – thus the last stronghold of science and technology along with the representatives of urban chaos are all burnt together. The woman and boy, essentially a mother and son and as such representing family and fertility, reject the city and bring the cure to a small town utopia. It is on the values of Middle America that America will be rebuilt.

Once again the primary role of the female character is as a mother. Although Anna does help Neville, this is in keeping with 'the helper' role (Propp 1968: 78-9) that female characters often assume in the post-apocalyptic film narrative. For example, in *Waterworld* Helen helps the Mariner escape in exchange for him saving her and her daughter. However, I argue that the primary way in which the role of the female character is structured is as symbolising conservative ideals of motherhood. This ideal of motherhood as natural and fruitful is in opposition to the lifeless, violent imagery of the urban. The mother and child must abandon the city in order to attain a life in a new world.

My argument is that this is a consistent pattern in urban post-apocalyptic films. They end with a rejection of the urban as fundamentally flawed and dangerous. Christina Kennedy comments that 'cities are often seen as dystopias, as urban wildernesses or jungles, seldom seen as utopias' in American culture more generally, or specifically in science fiction (2010: 291). These endings can be seen to express the larger theme in the post-apocalyptic genre of the desire to flee the mistakes of the modern world and start over.

Nevertheless, I would also contend that it is a mistake to consider attitudes to the city in American culture as wholly negative, and indeed post-apocalyptic films sometimes reflect that ambivalence. There are often images that suggest that the empty city has an eerie beauty (Nilges 2010: 25), and that to be one of the last people left alive there would be a fantasy as much as a nightmare.

In *I Am Legend* the early scenes of Neville driving a fast car at speed through the empty street can be interpreted as an 'adolescent power fantasy' (Hantke 2012: 177). The shots in this sequence share similarities with car adverts in which cars drive through empty cities. The equivalent imagery in car adverts conveys aspirational fantasies – owning and driving this particular brand of car will make you unique, in a world of your own. I argue that in both the adverts and the film, the excitement comes from having total dominance over the urban environment, being home alone. There is a similar sequence in *The Omega Man*. Charlton Heston's Neville speeds through empty streets asserting the same dominance over the urban landscape.

These fantasies are a realisation of the paradoxical attitudes to the city in American culture, 'the ideal city contains no citizens whatsoever' (Strick 1984: 47). The city is to be looked at, gazed upon, it is beautiful but only when it is free of its primary purpose – to be a place where people live. The post-apocalyptic city is a setting that manages to encompass these contradictory and impossible attitudes. It is both a nightmare, a realisation of every anti-urban fear and anxiety, and a dream, a city of architecture and freedom, silent and empty.

### **The Legacy of *I Am Legend* – A Breakdown of Structures**

These contradictory representations of the city in *I Am Legend* fit well into ambiguity of the film's alternate (and intended) ending. They push against the fixed oppositions in the post-apocalyptic genre which code the city as negative and nature as positive. As argued above, the alternate ending deconstructs the several of the binary oppositions that underpin the genre's structures.

However, that ending was resisted and rejected by both audiences and industry. Nevertheless, later in the decade the post-apocalyptic genre did demonstrate a shift away from the established fixed structures. The narrative components of post-apocalyptic films became more fragmented and there were a number of films which did not conform to the patterns identified so far.

One of the most recent films in the corpus is *After Earth* (Dir. M Night Shylaman, 2013). The film is set 1,000 years in the future, humans have left Earth and colonised other planets, primarily one called Nova Prime. Cypher Raige (Will Smith) and his son Kitai (Jaden Smith) crash land on Earth. Cypher is badly injured and so Kitai must cross a dangerous landscape filled with monstrous animals to signal for help. They are also being hunted by Ursu, alien creatures who sense fear. These creatures can only be beaten by controlling the emotion of fear, a skill Kitai has yet to master.

This film differs from the relatively stable generic structures that can be observed in the majority of post-apocalyptic films in the corpus under discussion. Instead of the oppositions between technology and nature and between urban and pastoral, the natural world is represented as fundamentally

dangerous and chaotic. In addition, these threats from the natural world are exaggerated mutations of real animals and atmospheric conditions (fig 17).



**Fig 17:** Kitai is attacked by an ‘evolved’ version of a tiger in *After Earth*.

This is clearly a shift away from the veneration of nature as a utopian new world. The difference in the iconography from other post-apocalyptic films was noted by some reviewers in the trade press. For example, in his review of the film Geoff Pevere notes that:

Replacing the customary doomsday barrenness with a computer-generated verdancy that suggests a National Geographic special conceived by gaming geeks, *After Earth* at least looks distinctive, and the movie’s overall atmosphere reflects that of close-quarter jungle delirium. (2013: URL)

I would argue that nature is coded in this film as a disruptive force which functions to test the strength of the individual and not support a future community. This is reinforced by the fact that this is a post-human Earth and, as such, human control over the environment is totally absent. The Earth is described as a place where “everything on this planet has evolved to kill humans” (evolution apparently only takes one thousand years).

The oppositions have been inverted so that Earth is truly a new Eden, devoid of human corruption – but it is a hell not a heaven. It is the futuristic city of Nova

Prime which is visually signified as utopian (clean, domestic, safe). Similarly, technology is represented as beneficial rather than harmful (for example, the medical technology Cypher uses to assess his injuries). Further deconstruction of the dominant post-apocalyptic genre structures emerge from the way in which the main character Kitai is represented.

In one sense the film adheres to a classic Hollywood narrative trope of strained father-son relationships being reconciled (Jenkins 2015: 104), in combination with a *bildungsroman*. Kitai must become a man and learn that it is the pressures of responsibility that make his father seem unloving.

However, there are other less conventional elements to his representation. In order to achieve manhood and survive Kitai must gain total control of his emotional state, separating himself from the situation. There are numerous references in the dialogue to fear being an “illusion” created by the mind. In addition, through the use of slow-motion editing and a muted diegetic sounds, the film represents achieving this state (called “ghosting” in the film) as being a condition in which one has total mastery of the world around them.

My argument is that these elements in the film relate to post-modern ideas of fragmentation and the absence of objective reality. The film overtly communicates the idea of moving from one state of existence to another through controlling an individual’s perception of reality. The term “ghosting” implies entering a condition similar to being dead, external to the physical world. This state is achieved through separating the instincts of survival and fear from the self at will.

The hero in previous post-apocalyptic films in the corpus has predominantly functioned to represent the sacrifice and violence necessary to restore the community and nation to a prelapsarian golden age. However, the hero in *After Earth* must attain victory not by overcoming specific villains to secure the future, but by conquering and controlling internal perceptions of the world to enter a new state of being. The structures based on the opposition between individual/state, pure/corrupt, and urban/pastoral have been deconstructed by the film’s focus on the individual and their ability to control their own reality which is relative to their emotional state.

This shift from characters who wish to create a new world, to achieve national rebirth, to ones who are concerned with their personal perceptions can be understood in the context of Fredric Jameson's concept of psychic fragmentation. Jameson argues that this fragmentation leads the individual to 'live in a perpetual present' (1999: 191). In postmodern narratives this creates characters who experience fragmented, plural, and discontinuous identities (Booker 2007: 4).

I would argue that the fragmentation of time and identity are major components in *After Earth*. The film flashes forwards and back in time repeatedly, at one point Kitai hallucinates that his dead sister is alive and discussing matters of the present. In addition, it is stated in the film that to be able to "ghost" a person must cut their mind off from the possibilities of the future, which is what creates the sensation of fear. Therefore, Kitai experiences time, both externally and internally, in a very broken and disjointed way.

These anti-structures in *After Earth* can be understood in the context of themes in other post-apocalyptic films in this period. *Oblivion* (Dir. Kosinski, 2013) is still dominated by the generic structures established so far. The alien technology is destroyed and the film ends in a natural utopia occupied by a mother and child. However, the film also has themes of a false reality and the fragmentation of the self.

The main character Jack Harper discovers that not only is his entire understanding of the world a lie created by aliens, but also that he is one of many clones and so does not exist as an unique individual. In the film's final scene the 'Jack' that the narrative follows dies and his clone is taken to his wife and child to effectively replace him. Thus, the question of what constitutes the self is raised – although not explored or answered in any way.

*Oblivion* does not engage with these themes overtly in the way that *After Earth* does. It can be seen as a bridging text between the fixed structures and oppositions of earlier post-apocalyptic films in the genre and the deconstruction of those structures in *After Earth*.

Other post-apocalyptic films in this time period also show signs of this transition. A good example of this is *The Road*. The narrative follows the

unnamed father and son across a post-apocalyptic wasteland of America. The Man and The Boy must evade the cannibalistic gangs who enslave, brutalise, and murder everyone they catch. The Man tells The Boy that they are “carrying the fire”, the last remaining goodness in the world. In the last scenes the man dies and the boy is taken in by a family of fellow survivors.

The film only loosely follows the generic conventions and narrative. It is based far more on the personal relationships and emotions of the two characters. In the context of this personal focus the ending does suggest the possibility of renewal. A family find The Boy shortly after his father has died. They represent the closest to normality this dead world can get. There is a mother, father, two children and even a dog. In a strange inversion of idealised images of the perfect family holiday they stand on the grey beach waiting for The Boy.

Once again the beach is the location that signals a new world or new beginning in post-apocalyptic films. The sea was The Man and The Boy’s vague destination, their Promised Land. The sea links to the idea of new life. That is what The Boy is offered; not a utopia or Paradise but a second chance, a family. To a young orphaned boy in the most brutal of places that is a utopian dream.

*The Road*, then, does not fully embrace the wider themes of national identity and national rebirth; instead it focuses on personal renewal. One of the contrasting themes around which the film bases its narrative is despair and hope. This can be seen in a variety of conflicting characters and images. The first is the mother, who despairs, against the father, who clings to hope. Another is the iconography of The Man and The Boy framed against the grey wasteland, human survival against human destruction.

*The Road* is therefore a film which ends in hope and renewal and also depicts small moments of great happiness. This is, perhaps, representative in itself of modern American culture. Rather than a society concerned with wider values and political movements, it is finding personal happiness and satisfaction which is paramount.

*The Book of Eli* is also a film which raises questions regarding the development of the post-apocalyptic genre in this period. The setting of *The Book of Eli* is a

blend between the frontier and the wasteland settings in the genre. It has a number of features which are similar to the final frontier films of the 1980s. However, as the analysis of the case study film in the second chapter revealed the frontier setting was predominantly connected with the frontier myths that were part of the cultural zeitgeist of the 1980s. The re-emergence of the setting is, therefore, a thought-provoking development.

There is one key difference between the frontier settings of the 1980s and the one present in *The Book of Eli*. As discussed in the chapter five, the frontier films of the 1980s utilised the return-to-primitivism trope, thus the blending of the western genre iconography with the post-apocalyptic narrative maintained a coherent narrative. *The Book of Eli* does not use the return-to-primitivism trope. While there is some imagery in the film that is similar to that of western films, for example the shanty town and the bar room brawl, the film also foregrounds the existence and use of leftover technology.

The film opens with the hero Eli using a gas mask to hunt in a forest filled with harmful vapours. Technology is not forgotten by the community or the villain; cars and guns are still widely utilised. The film's ending is utopian, but the utopia is a library where books are being restored via an old fashioned printing press – which was one of the great technological leaps forward in history. However, there are also contrasting images of skeletons in burnt-out cars, suggesting technology has led to annihilation. The film, therefore, has a much more ambiguous relationship to technology than most previous films in the genre.

As established in thematic content analysis in the methodology the return-to-primitivism trope declined in the genre generally after 2002 (Table 2). The reason for the absence of the return-to-primitivism trope in *The Book of Eli* and other films of this period can partly be attributed to the effect of 9/11.

As referred to in the methodology, the tone of the rhetoric against al-Qaida and other terrorist groups framed them as backward savages. Given this shift in cultural binaries (America as democratic and civilised/terrorists as cave-dwelling primitives) it can be argued that the images of America as a primitive, pre-industrial world would be unpopular. This scenario would imply that

Americans are not different or superior from their enemies. Perhaps because of this reluctance to depict Americans as 'primitive', the frontier is only implied in *The Book of Eli*, rather than recreated.

In addition to this cultural and political reason for the decline of the return-to-primitivism trope, there are developments in production practices which influenced American cinema generally. As the discussion at the beginning of the chapter established, the trend in American cinema after 9/11 was towards lavish fantasy films. This created an expectation of films with CGI special effects or at least high production values. While *The Book of Eli* still depicts a wasteland it is stylishly gritty and captured with 'Matrix-esque' camera work. The production design tries for what could be described as a type of 'grunge chic' (Bartholomew 2010: URL), a variation on the retro-futurism of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982).

The focus on individual rather than national renewal in *The Road* and the ambiguous representation of technology as both positive and negative in *The Book of Eli* suggest that the structures that underpinned earlier films in the genre were becoming less fixed. *After Earth*, and to a lesser extent *Oblivion*, demonstrate that these structures have begun to be deconstructed completely. The way in which Lawrence sought to disrupt the narrative conventions in *I Am Legend* has been fulfilled in later films.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter the effect of 9/11 on the development of the genre has been investigated. The disappearance of the genre from American cinema gives weight to my argument that these narratives represent a way to fulfil both the apocalyptic belief in failure and the deep-seated desire to start over and begin again in the American national mythscape. When current events made the present genuinely uncertain this fantasy was not an appealing one. In addition, the unity of the nation after 9/11 offset the desire to reject modernity in favour of a return to traditionalism.

*I Am Legend* is therefore significant to the development of the post-apocalyptic genre in a number of ways. The first is that its status as the first post-apocalyptic set in America and in New York since 9/11 means it reveals a great

deal about the anxieties at this time and about the relationship between the post-apocalyptic genre and American culture.

Steffan Hantke states that *I Am Legend* 'feeds off post-9/11 anxieties' (2012: 172). However, the readings of the setting and narrative of *I Am Legend* as a reaction to 9/11 also demonstrate the fact that these elements conform to a wider generic structure. The empty, abandoned city is the essential imagery of the urban post-apocalyptic film. The shots of an empty New York in *I Am Legend* are examples of this on-going iconography in the genre.

However, they also resonate because of their similarity to the images of the immediate aftermath of 9/11. The threats to the hero are generated from both the established anxieties in the mythscape, such as anti-urban fears of the mob and riots, but also from contemporary concerns, such as terrorism. The urban post-apocalyptic film reflects much broader attitudes and issues as well as individual historical events.

For any genre to maintain its relevance it requires the correct cultural conditions. The story must be told at the right time. In the 1980s the 'final frontier' films acted as a zeitgeist, absorbing the various political and cultural forces to create a powerful metaphor. In the early 2000s the opposite happened. The post-apocalyptic genre became temporarily irrelevant because it had nothing to feed off.

Therefore, 9/11 did impact post-apocalyptic films. It briefly destroyed them. A narrative that tells of obliterating America, of the failure of the military, the government and other institutions, and of reverence for nature is irrelevant and unwanted when people are desperately clinging to a sense that America is a well-governed and united nation which will overcome its enemies. That is one of the ways in which 9/11 affected the post-apocalyptic genre – it made it incompatible with the zeitgeist.

*I Am Legend* reflects a return to the desire to escape the anxieties of a morally complex nation. The anti-urbanism and anti-modern attitudes that had long been present in American culture needed to be represented once more. In this respect, *I Am Legend* is less post-9/11 than post-post-9/11.

The second main reason the *I Am Legend* is significant is that it marks the point at which the post-apocalyptic films began to deconstruct the binary structures which had previously been part of the genre – or it would if this deconstruction was not ultimately rejected. Nevertheless, later films, such as *After Earth*, show how these themes began to increasingly dominate the genre.

Subsequent to *I Am Legend* the post-apocalyptic genre has become increasingly ambiguous in its representation of its major structuring themes of technology, utopia, and the hero. It seems probable that the post-apocalyptic genre has seen a further shift from themes of national rebirth to ones of personal reality. It is too early to ascertain whether this shift is permanent or temporary; but I argue that 2013 serves as point at which the existing structures and conventions of the post-apocalyptic genre were significantly disrupted.

## 7. CONCLUSION

“Never content just to be, America is also obliged to mean; America signifies, hence its constant and riveting vulnerability to illusion” – Martin Amis

“As once, when the armies of the empire were shattered and the strong barbarians poured in upon the soft provincials, so now the fierce weeds pressed in to destroy the pampered nurslings of man.” – George R. Stewart

### Overview

The overarching aim of this thesis was to demonstrate the relationship between the way in which post-apocalyptic films have developed as a genre and their connection to American national identity in the period 1968-2013. The thesis began by exploring the existing critical work on post-apocalyptic fiction and eschatological myths and national identity. The methodology came next; taking a ‘bottom-up’ approach to the analysis by starting with a description of the thematic content analysis undertaken and finishing with a consideration of this project’s underlying critical theory. Three chapters covering specific time periods and case study analysis followed.

The literature review established that the post-apocalyptic genre shares elements with other genres (the depiction of possible futures from science fiction, brutality and monstrous acts from horror, the breakdown of social norms from zombie fiction). Several critics (e.g. Curtis, Lisboa) have identified the scenario of a new world, society remade from scratch, as a key aspect that post-apocalyptic fiction offers. This fits with older eschatological myths in which the unworthy are destroyed and the faithful receive eternity in paradise. It also dovetails with the American national mythscape, which is partly forged from concepts of utopia and being a Promised Land.

However, Broderick’s analysis found that post-apocalyptic films specifically did not depict a radical new world, but one based on conservative ideals. Page and Sobchack both demonstrated the importance of locations, settings, and

iconography to the way in which themes are communicated in the post-apocalyptic genre.

Nonetheless, despite these contributions there remained gaps in the field of knowledge. One major issue is that post-apocalyptic films have not been examined as a coherent genre across time in a full-length study. The way in which this genre developed, including the narrative themes and structures and the iconographic patterns, had only been analysed in relation to specific time periods or particular formal aspects. In addition, the connection between the post-apocalyptic genre and eschatological myths required much greater examination. All these areas of study needed to be placed in the wider historical and cultural context of American history.

The thematic content analysis revealed that: there are a fixed range of settings which recur, the trope of returning to a more primitive society was a common narrative construct in the genre, and the utopian ending (which developed in the mid-1970s) has been a consistent feature. To interpret these findings the thesis adopted a combined methodological approach of close textual analysis interpreted through structuralism in a historical context.

The first chapter focused on the period 1968-1976 and analysed *The Ultimate Warrior* as the case study film. I argued that this film marked a divergence from themes of pessimism to ones of optimism in the post-apocalyptic genre. While previous films had ended in representations of despair and even nihilism, *The Ultimate Warrior* depicts the characters finding a utopian island in its final shots. The characters themselves represent a nuclear heteronormative family, with the physically powerful patriarch leading the obedient woman and his surrogate son to the new world. The film and its ending signify a rejection of the modern urban environment in favour of a traditional pastoral one.

The second chapter examined the period 1982-1989 and the case study film was *Steel Dawn*. In *Steel Dawn* the blending of generic conventions between the martial arts, western, and post-apocalyptic films was analysed. My argument was that this merging of generic themes and imagery was closely linked to the existing structures within the post-apocalyptic genre and also to political and cultural shifts outside of it.

In particular, the recreation of the Wild West remains coherent within the narrative because of the existing return-to-primitivism trope. Through the use of this trope the film represents a world without industrialised technology. It also creates a world that resembles the mythologised past of the frontier. The frontier shares similarities with the eschatological myth and both were key aspects of the political and cultural zeitgeist of the 1980s. The structuring theme of violence is expressed through the hero, who also embodies religious symbolism through his sacrifice and resurrection.

The final period that was investigated was 2007-2013 and *I Am Legend* was analysed as a case study film. This is a significant film because it was the first post-apocalyptic film set in America (specifically New York) after 9/11. I argued that the post-apocalyptic genre was temporarily eradicated from American culture because it was depicting a scenario of a destroyed and broken America which was too close to reality for comfort. However, when the feelings of national unity and certainty created by 9/11 ebbed away the genre re-emerged. *I Am Legend* uses the mutants as symbols of America's perceived failures, both home-grown terrorists and violent inner-city mobs. The alternate ending reveals that the film originally humanised the Dark Seekers, but the pressure to adhere to the generic formula meant that the film ends in a utopia of Middle American values.

Nevertheless, the breakdown of these generic conventions can be observed in later films in this period. Culminating in *After Earth*, I argue that there is evidence of increasing ambiguity in the representation of technology and utopia. A focus on personal renewal and altered realities suggest that post-modern themes have meant a shift in the post-apocalyptic genre.

## **Findings**

The research questions identified in the methodology were:

- What themes, tropes, characters, iconography and narrative structures recur in post-apocalyptic films?
- To what extent are these patterns influenced by eschatological myths and American history?

- What role do these post-apocalyptic films play in the American national mythscape?

The following discussion of the post-apocalyptic genre seeks to summarise the findings of this thesis.

### ***Semantic/Syntactic and Genre Structures***

There have been a number of semantic and syntactic shifts in the post-apocalyptic genre over the period 1968-2013. The element of the utopian ending was a major semantic and syntactic shift in the genre. The utopia emerged firstly as a semantic element in films such as *A Boy and His Dog* and *Battle for Planet of the Apes*. While the underlying tone and ideology of these films remained pessimistic, the concept and imagery of a utopia were being utilised as semantic elements.

In the mid-1970s there was a syntactic shift to match the earlier semantic one. Post-apocalyptic films (e.g. *The Ultimate Warrior*, *Logan's Run*) began to end in a utopia. This was not as an ironic or nihilistic comment on the impossibility of such a place, but as a coherent narrative structure.

As the thematic content analysis revealed, these corresponding semantic and syntactic elements have remained a consistent aspect of the genre since the mid-1970s to 2013. For example, there is a strong example of this type a utopian ending in the 2013 film *Oblivion*. The film ends with a mother and (male) child living in a cabin in a paradisiacal wooded valley. The hero (or his clone to be precise) returns to assume his role as family patriarch.

One major semantic shift was the emergence of the frontier setting 1980s. However, as has been discussed this new setting remained coherent within the existing structures and conventions of the genre because of the Return-to-primitivism trope.

Unlike the earlier shift to utopian endings, the semantic shift to frontier settings did not greatly impact the underlying structures and oppositions present in the post-apocalyptic genre. The narrative structure of the film remained stable. The shift in the iconography was not uniform across the genre, but can be found in about half of the films made in 1980s.

The significance of the structure of the post-apocalyptic genre can be demonstrated through the failed attempts by director Francis Lawrence to change the narrative format in *I Am Legend*. However, this version of the film proved unpopular with audiences and the studio. Put in the particular historical context of post-9/11, this rejection of the alternate narrative strongly suggests that these elements connect to important aspects of American culture and national identity. There are various themes which reveal how this relationship between American national mythscape and the post-apocalyptic genre functions.

Lawrence created a film in which the binaries and structures of the dehumanised villains, the self-sacrificing messiah-vigilante hero, and the escape to a utopia underpinned by conservative values were altered or absent. Subsequent to this attempt post-apocalyptic films became increasingly ambiguous in their representations. Post-modern themes of fragmentation of the self and relative reality can be observed in films such as *Oblivion* and *After Earth*.

It is interesting to note that Lawrence went on to direct the last three *Hunger Games* films. The narratives sit on the boundary between dystopian and post-apocalyptic. However, in the most recent film (*Mockingjay, Part 2* – 2015) the majority of the narrative takes place in a war-torn, ruined, empty city which is iconographically very similar to many of the post-apocalyptic films discussed in this thesis. The film is significant in that it inverts the gender binaries by representing the female lead as physically strong, emotionally unavailable, and responsible for saving the society. The male protagonist is emotionally dependent, domesticated and creative, and must be protected.

This is a pattern seen across recent post-apocalyptic and dystopian films. Most notably the reboot/remake of *Mad Max: Fury Road* (Dir. Miller, 2015) received a great deal of critical attention (both positive and negative) for having a disabled female protagonist. Max the title character was essentially in the role of helper not hero. Other examples include the *Divergent* series (Dir. Burger, Schwentke, 2014-Present) and *Maze Runner* series (Dir. Ball, 2014-Present). While *Cherry*

*2000* and *Tank Girl* were isolated examples of a female hero, these new gender roles can be observed across films in this period.

This inversion of gender roles and binaries from the male as hero and the female as helper, love interest, and mother to the male as helper and love interest and the female as the hero can be seen in the context of a wider shift in the genre. I argue the structures which have been identified and analysed in the post-apocalyptic genre have not only shifted but become inverted and deconstructed. In the late 1960s and 1970s pessimism developed into optimism, in the late 2000s and early 2010s that vision of a new world has transitioned into an exploration of the self and of our perceptions of reality. These developments in the post-apocalyptic genre can be best interpreted through post-structuralist theories of anti-structures and deconstruction.

There are a wide range of reasons for this shift, too many to be explored adequately here. Nonetheless, I would argue that one major influence on the post-apocalyptic genre that has to be acknowledged is the rise of social media, which allows individuals to create personal utopian reality through a specific selection of the messages, people, and wider media inputs and to also create a filtered public identity (Kumar 2015: 261). However, it is outside the scope of this study to examine these recent developments in greater detail. As mentioned below, this would be an excellent project for future work when sufficient time has passed to enable a critical perspective.

While these postmodern themes are a marked shift from the existing generic structures, the post-apocalyptic genre has also frequently adopted the conventions and structures of other genres. For example, the martial arts film in *The Ultimate Warrior* and *Steel Dawn*, the western in post-apocalyptic final frontier films, and the horror film in *I Am Legend*. The merging of generic motifs and structures is often closely connected to the way in which the post-apocalyptic genre portrays a future vision of America as broken, abnormal or malformed.

The syntactic element of the hero restoring order through violence is shared by both the martial arts genre and the post-apocalyptic genre. In addition, films in the post-apocalyptic genre utilise semantic elements of Asian narratives and

imagery to establish a strange or exotic quality to the world of the film. The iconography of the western is used to communicate the return-to-primitivism trope, a world which has reverted to a pre-industrialised way of life. Again, this serves to establish the damaged and peculiar nature of the future. Finally, the mixing of elements from the horror genre is based on depicting the depravity into which humanity has sunk.. Dehumanised enemies are used to communicate the dangerous and frightening nature of a post-apocalyptic nation.

### ***Landscape as Ideology***

One theme that has clearly emerged from this thesis is that in the post-apocalyptic genre different environments and settings function as symbols of deeply held values and ideals. The predominant dichotomy that has been evidenced is between pastoral and urban. The urban is consistently framed as a negative and inadequate location in contrast to the pastoral and rural which is represented as a hopeful and often utopian environment.

The reasons for this anti-urbanism are partly linked to the strange status of the American city in American culture. Although it has been represented in art as both a symbol of progress and of decadent failure, it has generally been depicted in opposition to Middle American values. It is these conservative and traditional values that are dominant in the post-apocalyptic genre.

The rejection the urban environment is also a dismissal of modernity and the progressive values that accompany it. This can be seen in chapter four. In the final scenes of *The Ultimate Warrior* and *Planet of the Apes* there is juxtaposition between untainted coastal landscapes with symbols of the urban environment. This contrast is used in both films to signify that the city is representative of destruction and failure. However, the symbolism in *The Ultimate Warrior* goes further than that by linking the pastoral utopia with the traditional depiction of family and gender.

*I Am Legend* depicts a comparable rejection of the city. In a similar way to *The Ultimate Warrior*, the film opens with static shots of an empty and decaying city. Both films also end with violence and an escape from the city by a mother and child who have a cure for the disaster that has befallen America. In *I Am*

*Legend* and *The Ultimate Warrior* the city environment is shown to be the obstacle to achieving a utopian second chance. This is one of the ways in which the genre has shifted recently – in *After Earth* the natural world is not paradisiacal but deadly and the city is utopian.

*Steel Dawn* represents this rejection of the urban somewhat differently. In this film the elimination is predominantly of technology rather than the urban landscape. The veneration of the rural is symbolised through the nostalgic recreation of the frontier. The mythologised past in *Steel Dawn* is not simply alluded to through traditional values, but openly returned to through the use of the iconography of the western.

Fundamentally, the depiction of landscape in post-apocalyptic films stems from two major ideological impulses. The first is a continuation of the mistrust and even anger towards technology and scientific progress that emerged in the late 1960s, as part of a wider mood of disillusionment. The second is a conservative nostalgia present in American culture. This is a desire for a world in which traditional morality is once again dominant.

The landscapes serve to fulfil these impulses by showing a world which is empty and in need of conquering – a new frontier. The landscapes symbolise the lifestyles and values that compete and are negotiated in the American national mythscape.

### ***Religious and mythic symbolism***

The post-apocalyptic genre appears to be part of secular popular culture. However, when the films are analysed it is clear that there is a great deal of religious symbolism present in them. Religious themes are sometimes more overt. For instance, in *Waterworld* the atollers use the word “blasphemy” to refer to the Mariner’s belief in ‘Dryland’ (paradise). However, it is more usual that religious references function on a symbolic level.

In *The Ultimate Warrior* it is Melinda who primarily represents these themes. As a pregnant mother for whom conception and childbirth are bizarrely sterile affairs, she functions as both the Virgin Mary and the Woman of the Apocalypse. These two biblical figures are unified by their singular function – to

produce a male child. As with Melinda, the only worth these two figures ultimately have is as mothers to male children who represent future glories.

This religious symbolism connects with the other representations of Melinda based on the conservative ideologies discussed above. She is shown to be obedient in contrast to the 'mad' woman who causes her own family's death. Additionally, Melinda's actions are controlled by two patriarchal figures, first her father and then Carson.

The hero is also linked to religious symbolism. In *Steel Dawn*, the Nomad is badly injured and is entombed. He emerges from this and returns stronger, ready to defeat evil and make paradise possible for those who believe in him. These scenes share some parallels with the story of Christ's resurrection. In *The Omega Man* and *I Am Legend* the hero dies (in *The Omega Man* his corpse is overtly positioned in a crucifix pose), but his blood is used to save humanity. Again, there are similarities with the story of Christ.

There are also broader connections to the eschatological myth in these narratives. In particular, the destruction of the old world and the emergence of a paradise, the messianic figure who brings justice, and dualism of light and dark (a theme that is visually realised in films such as *The Road*, *I Am Legend*, and *The Ultimate Warrior*).

In more recent films the religious themes have not diminished. *The Book of Eli* and *The Road* are both overtly religious in their themes and dialogue. A number of online blogs and mainstream newspapers reported that *After Earth* was 'Scientology propaganda' (Abramovitch 2014: URL). Looking only at the text of the film, there is a belief system represented which is based on extreme self-control and overcoming the "illusions" of perception. I would, therefore, argue that religious themes are still a key element in the post-apocalyptic genre.

This religious symbolism is one of the major ways in which the post-apocalyptic genre connects with American politics. The anti-technology feelings in the 1960s and 1970s were accompanied by a renewed interest in both evangelical and Asian-based faiths. This shift towards faith in narratives of a shared destiny can be included among the factors which propelled Reagan to victory. His open

and enthusiastic belief in the eschatological myth of Armageddon ensured that American culture and post-apocalyptic scenarios remained intertwined. This relationship can be demonstrated by the fact that when faith in the realisation of a truly unified America began to fail in the mid-2000s, the popular rearticulation of the eschatological myth became popular again.

### ***Then and Now, Them and Us***

The post-apocalyptic genre represents villains in two quite specific ways. There are neo-feudal tyrants and there are dehumanised swarms, be they mutants, monsters, or gangs. These two types of enemy represent two anxieties in American culture.

The neo-feudal villains represent the 'Old World'. This both the old world of Europe (which was left behind by the Puritan settlers) and what has become the old world of modern day America (their past is our present). These old worlds are interchangeable in the post-apocalyptic genre because they both represent the same failures of decadence, officialdom, and stagnation.

This seems to be in contradiction with the theme of nostalgia for the past. In one way it is contradiction, as many critics have argued, the function of myth to reconcile contradictions within cultures. However, the two types of 'past' are different, or are perceived differently in American culture. The mythologised past of the pastoral lifestyle or the frontier is yearned for almost as an absence of history. It is a nostalgic vision of a timeless landscape and mindset in which a version of America and 'Americanness' existed. In contrast, the old worlds of Europe and modern America are specific historical time periods and as such are subject to all the failings and complexities of reality.

The neo-feudal villains are clearly represented as being decadent or decrepit in some way and corrupted by their connection to the past. In *The Ultimate Warrior*, the Baron is not a villain, but nor is he a very sympathetic character. His name has obvious connotations of feudalism. Additionally, he clings to the material symbols of urban life while failing to be an effective leader of his community.

In *Steel Dawn* Damnil is linked to the old world through his medieval style clothing of studded leather and through his throne room. He overtly refers to the frontier community as “peasants”. He is also associated with the limited remnants of technology. Thus, he is connected to both the old worlds (Europe and modern America). This representation has particular resonance in the final frontier post-apocalyptic films because of the nuclear anxiety and political rhetoric in the 1980s, which created a fear of corrupt tyrants with destructive weaponry.

The second type of villains is the dehumanised enemies. These are enemies which act unthinkingly and uncaringly and *en masse*. They function to characterise anxieties and personify the specific failures that have precipitated the post-catastrophe state of the world. In *I Am Legend* the mutants symbolise both the more recent fear of home-grown terrorism and the older on-going anxiety about urban violence and mob riots.

In *The Omega Man* the Family combines both types of villains. They function as a swarming, dehumanised mob but also as neo-medieval luddites who believe that all progress is evil. As such, they represent both the anxieties regarding the communal values of ‘hippie’ counter-culture and the ‘anti-American’ backward values of those who wish to return to the stagnation of Feudalism.

These two types of enemies represent a specific way of life and particular values which are perceived by some sections of America (white, Evangelical, affluent) as corrupted. However, they also symbolise more immediate threats to America. The way in which these characters function in the post-apocalyptic genre is linked to the ideologies discussed above. They are the antithesis of the utopia of traditional moral values and the biblical prophecies. They are either decadent and corrupted representatives of the old world, or dehumanised personifications of vice and violence.

These three themes interrelate in the post-apocalyptic genre to create a coherent narrative in which anxieties and discomfort with modern America are represented by villains, the hero and the mother figure fulfil their symbolic roles, and a utopia of traditional, conservative values is often found or created.

The landscapes of urban, rural, and frontier are ideologically charged, often creating a binary between modern, technological, urban and traditional, agrarian, pastoral. The post-apocalyptic genre frequently fulfils the desire for America to be a Promised Land and also offers the same underlying scenario of destroying the unworthy and giving the faithful paradise as the eschatological myths.

### **Possible Future Work**

Although this thesis is useful in increasing our understanding of American post-apocalyptic films there are other aspects and areas which could provide greater insight into the topic of post-apocalyptic narratives. The most significant of which is a future study on the shift in structures that is currently emerging. Another important area of work would be to examine how American post-apocalyptic narratives function in other media, such as television and video games.

Two interesting examples would be the recent series *Falling Skies* (TNT, 2011-Present), which does some very interesting things in terms of recreating the American War for Independence and Founding Fathers (both overtly alluded to). There is already some work being done on this series, and its relationship to other post-apocalyptic fiction, by Felix Kirschbacher a PhD researcher at Mannheim University, Germany. Another example of work on the post-apocalyptic myth in other media would be the Bioshock series of video games which take the philosophy found in Ayn Rand's novel *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), and presents a post-apocalyptic world of a failed utopia. Thus, reversing the narrative structure I have identified.

Other lines of research could compare the post-apocalyptic genre in American cinema to post-apocalyptic films of other national cultures. For instance, American post-apocalyptic films which are closer to the fantasy genre, as opposed to science fiction, would make an interesting point of comparison with Japanese post-apocalyptic films which are similarly fantasy based.

### **Summary and Contribution**

This thesis has made an original contribution to disciplinary knowledge through examining the post-apocalyptic genre across an extended time period. I argue

that this project has established that post-apocalyptic films do function as a unified genre across the time period 1968-2013. By applying close textual analysis and a combined theoretical approach of structuralism and historical investigation I have demonstrated that there are repeated structures and binary oppositions which articulate specific cultural concerns.

Although the post-apocalyptic genre often blends with others, it retains a coherent narrative structure. This project has mapped several of the key semantic and syntactic shifts in the post-apocalyptic genre across the time period. The close textual analysis has also revealed the significance of previously under-examined films, such as *The Ultimate Warrior* and *Steel Dawn*.

The analysis of the genre as a whole and of the individual film texts has revealed a number of significant aspects to the genre. These include: the utopian ending, the rural/urban modern/traditional binaries, the dehumanised swarm and the Old World tyrants, heroes and female characters fulfilling roles charged with religious symbolism, and the symbolic and ideological significance of landscape.

My argument is that these elements are closely related to the way in which the post-apocalyptic genre has developed from eschatological myths and older post-apocalyptic narratives. I also argue that it has been changed by immediate historical developments. For example, the utopian ending emerged out of the transition between a national mood of despair and one of renewed optimism and assertiveness, however, it also connected to the older mythic structure of the paradise given to the faithful. Similarly, the frontier setting connected with the zeitgeist of Reagan's America, but was also a rearticulation of the return-to-primitivism trope which had antecedents in post-apocalyptic literature. Finally, the shots of New York as a dead city in the opening of *I Am Legend* resonated in post-9/11 America, but this also connects with a much older distrust of the urban in American culture and previous iconography of the city in post-apocalyptic films.

Through this thesis I have therefore identified major contributing factors to the development of the post-apocalyptic genre that were not previously fully

recognised in this context in criticism. I also argue that this analysis has demonstrated that these structures are part of the American national mythscape. The post-apocalyptic genre partly functions to fulfil the desires of some sections of American society to erase the values of modern America. The consequence of this destruction is depicted as the achievement of the utopian promise of a paradise on Earth, one which is built on traditional social roles and values. I contend that within this overarching structure, the post-apocalyptic narrative has also been used to express on-going anxieties in American culture about technology, weaponry, and violent enemies.

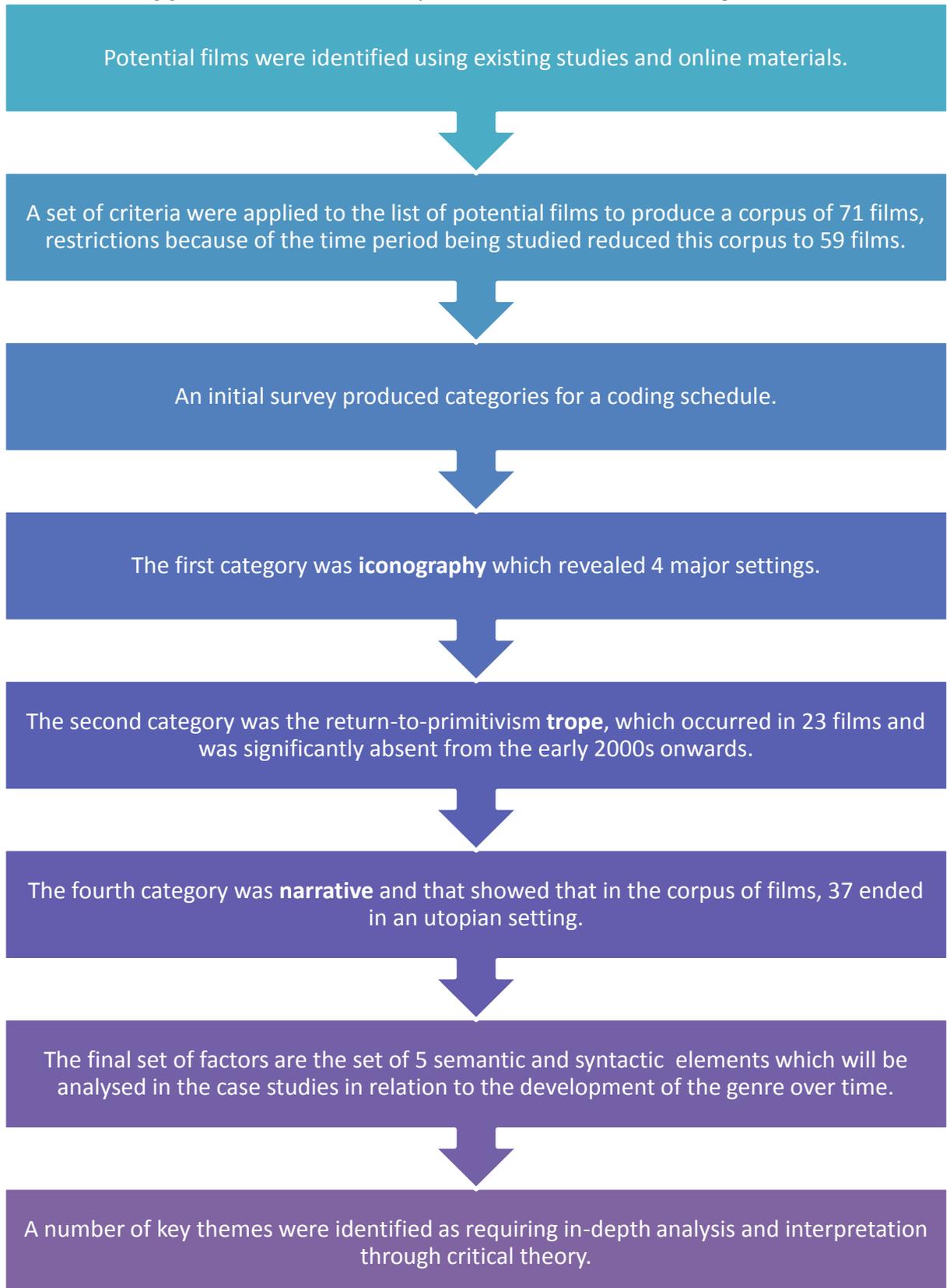
In many ways post-apocalyptic films serve a similar function to biblical eschatological myths: to create a sense of shared identity through depicting a scenario of punishment for those who represent sin and failure and glory for those who adhere to righteous values. What those sins are and what constitutes righteousness is subject to interpretation, thus while the core narrative remains fairly stable the symbolism can be more flexible.

For certain (still) dominant sections of American culture, these sins are those of modernity and righteousness lies in conservative nostalgia. However, a further major shift may be currently occurring in the post-apocalyptic genre which rejects these values and certainties in favour of postmodern themes of relativism and fragmentation.

'It isn't necessary to imagine the world ending in fire or ice — there are two other possibilities: one is paperwork, and the other is nostalgia'. – Frank Zappa

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Process Map of Thematic Content Analysis



**Appendix 2:** Table Listing Production and Distribution Details of Film Corpus.

<b>Film</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Produced</b>	<b>Distributed</b>
<i>Planet Of the Apes</i>	1968	APJAC Productions	20th Century Fox
<i>Beneath Planet Of the Apes</i>	1970	"	"
<i>Glen and Randa</i>	1971	Universal Marion Corporation	Universal Marion Corporation
<i>The Omega Man</i>	1971	Warner Bros	Warner Bros
<i>Battle for Planet of the Apes</i>	1973	APJAC Productions	20th Century Fox
<i>A Boy and his Dog</i>	1975	LQ/JAF	LQ/JAF
<i>The Ultimate Warrior</i>	1975	Warner Bros	Warner Bros
<i>Logan's Run</i>	1976	Metro-Goldwyn- Mayer	United Artists
<i>Damnation Alley</i>	1977	20 <sup>th</sup> Century Fox	20 <sup>th</sup> Century Fox
<i>Wizards (Animation)</i>	1977	"	"
<i>Deathsport</i>	1978	New Concorde	New World Pictures
<i>Quintet</i>	1979	20 <sup>th</sup> Century Fox	20th Century Fox
<i>Ravagers</i>	1979	Cinecorp Production	Columbia Pictures
<i>The Aftermath</i>	1982	Nautilus Film Company	Vci Mod (C)
<i>Warlords of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century</i>	1982	Battletruck Films Ltd	New World Pictures
<i>Radioactive Dreams</i>	1985	ITM Productions, Manson International	De Laurentiis Entertainment Group (DEG)
<i>Def-Con 4</i>	1985	Salter Street Films	New World Pictures
<i>Warriors of the Apocalypse</i>	1985	BAS Film Productions Inc	A-S Panorama International Films Inc
<i>City Limits</i>	1985	Film Ventures International (FVI), Island Alive	Atlantic Releasing
<i>America 3000</i>	1986	Golan-Globus Productions	Cannon Films
<i>Land of Doom</i>	1986	Matterhorn	Pegasus Home Video (C)
<i>Cherry 2000</i>	1987	Orion Pictures,	Orion Pictures

		ERP Productions	
<i>Creepozoids</i>	1987	Titan Productions, Beyond Infinity, Empire Pictures	Urban Classics
<i>Steel Dawn</i>	1987	Vestron, Inc.	Vestron, Inc.
<i>Warlords</i>	1988	American Independent Productions	Unavailable
<i>Hell Comes to Frogtown</i>	1988	New World Pictures	New World Pictures
<i>World Gone Wild</i>	1988	Apollo Pictures	Warner Home Video (C)
<i>Cyborg</i>	1989	The Cannon Group	Metro-Goldwyn- Mayer
<i>Escape from Safehaven</i>	1989	Avalon Productions	Unavailable
<i>Deadly Reactor</i>	1989	Action International Pictures	Action International Pictures Home Video
<i>Omega Cop</i>	1990	Overseas FilmGroup, Romarc Inc	South Gate Entertainment
<i>Mindwarp</i>	1992	Fangoria Films	Columbia Pictures
<i>No Escape</i>	1994	Columbia Pictures Corporation, Pacific Western, Platinum Pictures	Savoy Pictures
<i>Tank Girl</i>	1995	Trilogy Entertainment Group	United Artists
<i>Steel Frontier</i>	1995	PM Entertainment Group	Madacy Entertainment
<i>Waterworld</i>	1995	Gordon Company Davis Entertainment Licht/Mueller Film Corporation	Universal Pictures
<i>Barb Wire</i>	1996	PolyGram Filmed Entertainment, Propaganda Films, Dark Horse	Gramercy Pictures

		Entertainment	
<i>The Postman</i>	1997	Tig Productions	Warner Bros. Pictures
<i>Six String Samurai</i>	1998	Palm Pictures	Palm Pictures
<i>A.I.</i>	2001	Amblin Entertainment Stanley Kubrick Productions	Warner Bros. Pictures, DreamWorks Pictures
<i>Planet of the Apes</i>	2001	The Zanuck Company	20th Century Fox
<i>The Last Man</i>	2002	Castle Hill Productions Inc.	Lions Gate Entertainment
<i>The Time Machine</i>	2002	Parkes/MacDonald Productions	DreamWorks Pictures, Warner Bros. Pictures
<i>Reign of Fire</i>	2002	Touchstone Pictures Spyglass Entertainment	Buena Vista Pictures
<i>I Am Legend</i>	2007	Village Roadshow Pictures Weed Road Pictures Overbrook Entertainment Heyday Films Original Film	Warner Bros. Pictures, Roadshow Entertainment
<i>Tooth and Nail</i>	2007	Morningstar Films	After Dark Films
<i>Wall-E (Animation)</i>	2008	Walt Disney Pictures Pixar Animation Studios	Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures
<i>20 Years After</i>	2008	Kooroc Films	MTI Home Video (C)
<i>From Inside (Animation)</i>	2008	Lakeshore Records	Lakeshore Records
<i>9 (Animation)</i>	2009	Relativity Media	Focus Features

		Starz Animation, Tim Burton Productions, Bazelevs Animation	
<i>Carriers</i>	2009	Likely Story This is that	Paramount Vantage
<i>The Road</i>	2009	2929 Productions	Dimension Films, The Weinstein Company, FilmNation Entertainment, Icon Productions
<i>Mutant Chronicles</i>	2009	Grosvenor Park	Magnet Releasing
<i>Terminator Salvation</i>	2009	The Halcyon Company, Wonderland Sound and Vision	Warner Bros. Pictures, Columbia Pictures and Sony Pictures Entertainment
<i>2084</i>	2009	Kelly Blumetti Entertainment Group	Unavailable
<i>The Book of Eli</i>	2010	Alcon Entertainment Silver Pictures	Warner Bros. Pictures, Sony Pictures Releas
<i>Downstream</i>	2010	Downstream, Famous Monsters of Filmland Magazine	Schroeder Media (C)
<i>Stake Land</i>	2010	Belladonna Productions	Dark Sky Films
<i>Priest</i>	2011	Tokyopop, DMG Entertainment	Screen Gems
<i>The Divide</i>	2012	Preferred Content Instinctive Film Julijette Inc	Anchor Bay Films
<i>Oblivion</i>	2013	Relativity Media,	Universal Pictures

		Chernin Entertainment, Monolith Pictures, Radical Studios	
<i>After Earth</i>	2013	Overbrook Entertainment, Blinding Edge Pictures, Relativity Media	Columbia Pictures

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*20 Years After* (Dir. Harris, 2008, U.S.)  
*2084* (Dir. Blumetti, Kelly, 2009, U.S.)  
*28 Days Later* (Dir. Boyle, 2002, UK)  
*9* (Dir. Acker, 2009, U.S.)  
*A Boy and his Dog* (Dir. Jones, 1975, U.S.)  
*A.I.* (Dir. Spielberg, 2001, U.S.)  
*After Earth* (Dir. Shyamalan, 2013, U.S.)  
*America 3000* (Dir. Engelbach, 1986, U.S.)  
*Annie Hall* (Dir. Allen, 1977, U.S.)  
*Armageddon* (Dir. Bay, 1998, U.S.)  
*Barb Wire* (Dir. Hogan, 1996, U.S.)  
*Battle for the Planet of the Apes* (Dir. Thompson, 1973, U.S.)  
*Beneath Planet of the Apes* (Dir. Post, 1970, U.S.)  
*Blade Runner* (Dir. Scott, 1982, U.S.)  
*Bloodsport* (Dir. Anorld, 1988, U.S.)  
*Brazil* (Dir. Gilliam, 1985, UK)  
*Captive Women* (Dir. Gilmore, 1952, U.S.)  
*Carriers* (Dir. Pastor, 2009, U.S.)  
*Cherry 2000* (Dir. Jarnatt, 1987, U.S.)  
*Children of Men* (Dir. Caurón, 2006, UK/U.S.)  
*China Syndrome* (Dir. Bridges, 1979, U.S.)  
*Chinatown* (Polanski, 1974, U.S.)  
*City Limits* (Dir. Lipstadt, 1985, U.S.)  
*Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Dir. Spielberg, 1977, U.S.)  
*Creepozoids* (Dir. Deloteau, 1987, U.S.)  
*Cyborg* (Dir. Pyun, 1989, U.S.)

*Damnation Alley* (Dir. Smight, 1977, U.S.)

*Dances with Wolves* (Dir. Costner, 1990, U.S.)

*Dawn of the Dead* (Dir. Romero, 1978, U.S.)

*Day of the Dead* (Dir. Romero, 1985, U.S.)

*Day the World Ended* (Dir. Corman, 1955, U.S.)

*Dead Snow* (Dir. Wirkola, 2009, Norway)

*Deadly Reactor* (Dir. Heavener, 1989, U.S.)

*Death Wish* (Dir. Winner, 1974, U.S.)

*Deathsport* (Dir. Corman, 1978, U.S.)

*Def-Con 4* (Dir. Donovan, 1985, U.S.)

*Deluge* (Dir. Feist, 1933, U.S.)

*Downstream* (Dir. Bartesaghi, 2010, U.S.)

*Escape from Safehaven* (Dir. Jones, 1989, U.S.)

*Falling Skies* (TNT, 2011 – Present [TV], U.S.).

*Fists of Fury* (Dir. Wei, 1972, HK)

*Five* (Dir. Oboler, 1951, U.S.)

*From Inside* (Dir. Bergin, 2008, U.S.)

*Get Carter* (Dir. Hodges, 1971, UK)

*Glen and Randa* (Dir. McBride, 1971, U.S.)

*Godzilla* (Dir. Edwards, 2014, U.S.)

*Gravity* (Dir. Cuarón, 2013, U.S./UK)

*Hell Comes to Frogtown* (Dir. Jackson, 1988, U.S.)

*High Plains Drifter* (Dir. Eastwood, 1973, U.S.)

*I Am Legend* (Dir. Lawrence, 2007, U.S.)

*I Am Legend* – Alternate Ending (Available from <http://www.movieweb.com/movie/i-am-legend/alternate-ending> Last accessed June 4th 2016, U.S.).

*Independence Day* (Dir. Emmerich, 1996, U.S.)

*It's Great to be Alive* (Dir. Werker, 1933, U.S.)

*K-9* (Dir. Rod Daniel, 1989, U.S.)

*Land of Doom* (Dir. Harris, 1986, U.S.)

*Last of the Mohicans* (Dir. Michael Mann, 1992, U.S.)

*Last Woman on Earth* (Dir. Carman, 1960, U.S.)

*Logan's Run* (Dir. Anderson, 1976, U.S.)

*Mad Max: The Road Warrior* (Dir. Miller, 1981, Australia)

*Meteor* (Dir. Neame, 1979, U.S.)

*Midnight Cowboy* (Dir. Schlesinger, 1969, U.S.)

*Mindwarp* (Dir. Barnett, 1992, U.S.)

*Night of the Living Dead* (Dir. Romero, 1968, U.S.)

*Oblivion* (Dir. Konsinski, 2013, U.S.)

*Omega Cop* (Dir. Kyriazi, 1990, U.S.)

*On the Beach* (Dir. Krammer, 1959, U.S.)

*Once Upon a Time in the West* (Dir. Leone, 1968, U.S.)

*Pacific Rim* (Dir. Del Toro, 2013, U.S.)

*Panic in the Year Zero!* (Dir. Millars, 1962, U.S.)

*Planet of the Apes* (Dir. Burton, 2001, U.S.)

*Planet of the Apes* (Dir. Schaffner, 1968, U.S.)

*Priest* (Dir. Stewart, 2011, U.S.)

*Prince of Persia: Sands of Time* (Dir. Newell, 2010, U.S.).

*Quintet* (Dir. Altman, 1979, U.S.)

*Radioactive Dreams* (Dir. Pyun, 1985, U.S.)

*Ravagers* (Dir. Compton, 1979, U.S.)

*Red Dawn* (Dir. Milius, 1984, U.S.)

*Reign of Fire* (Dir. Bowman, 2002, U.S.)

*Resident Evil* (Dir. Anderson, 2002, U.S.).

*Salt of the Earth* (Dir. Biberman, 1954, U.S.)  
*Shane* (Dir. Stevens, 1953, U.S.)  
*Silverado* (Dir. Kasdan, 1985, U.S.)  
*Six String Samurai* (Dir. Mungai, 1998, U.S.)  
*Soylent Green* (Dir. Fleischer, 1973, U.S.)  
*Special Bulletin* (Dir. Zwick, 1983, U.S.)  
*Stake Land* (Dir. Mickle, 2010, U.S.)  
*Steel Dawn* (Dir. Hool, 1987, U.S.)  
*Steel Frontier* (Dir. Volk, 1995, U.S.)  
*Straw Dogs* (Dir. Peckinpah, 1971, U.S.)  
*Tank Girl* (Dir. Talda, 1995, U.S.)  
*Teenage Caveman* (Dir. Corman, 1958, U.S.)  
*Terminator Salvation* (McG, 2009, U.S.)  
*Texas Gladiators* (Dir. Mancuso, 1982, Italy)  
*The Aftermath* (Dir. Barkett 1982, U.S.)  
*The Book of Eli* (Dir. Hughes Brothers, 2010, U.S.)  
*The Day After* [TV Film] (Dir. Meyer, ABC, 1983, US).  
*The Day After Tomorrow* (Dir. Emmerich, 2004, U.S.)  
*The Deer Hunter* (Dir. Michael Cimino, 1978, U.S.)  
*The Divide* (Dir. Gens, 2012, U.S.)  
*The Fifth Element* (Dir. Besson, 1997, U.S.)  
*The Fourth Protocol* (Dir. Mackenzie, 1987, UK)  
*The Great Train Robbery* (Dir. Porter, 1903, U.S.)  
*The Karate Kid* (Dir. Avildsen, 1984, U.S.)  
*The King and I* (Dir. Lang, U.S.)  
*The Last Man* (Dir. Raltson, 2002, U.S.)  
*The Last Man On Earth* (Dir. Salkow, 1964, U.S.)

*The Magnificent Seven* (Dir. Adams, 1960, U.S.)

*The Matrix* (Dir. Wachowski Brothers, 1999, U.S.)

*The New Barbarians* (Dir. Castellari, 1983, Italy)

*The Omega Man* (Dir. Sagal, 1971, U.S.)

*The Postman* (Dir. Costner, 1997, U.S.)

*The Road* (Dir. Hillcoat, 2009, U.S.)

*The Terminator* (Dir. James Cameron, 1984, U.S.)

*The Time Machine* (Dir. Wells, 2002, U.S.)

*The Ultimate Warrior* (Dir. Clouse, 1975, U.S.)

*The Wild Bunch* (Dir. Peckinpah, 1969, US)

*The World, The Flesh and The Devil* (Dir. McDougall, 1959, U.S.)

*Tommorrowland: A World Beyond* (Dir. Bird, 2015, U.S.)

*Tooth and Nail* (Dir. Young, 2007, U.S.)

*Touch of Evil* (Dir. Welles, 1958, U.S.)

*Wall-E* (Dir. Stanton, 2008, U.S.)

*War Games* (Dir. Badham, 1983, U.S.)

*Warlords* (Dir. Ray, 1988, U.S.)

*Warlords of the 21st Century* (Dir. Cobeliss, 1982, U.S.)

*Warriors of the Apocalypse* (Dir. Suarez, 1985, U.S.)

*Waterworld* (Dir. Reynolds, 1995, U.S.)

*Westworld* (Dir. Crichton, 1973, U.S.)

*Wizards (Animation)* (Dir. Bakshi, 1977, U.S.)

*World Gone Wild* (Dir. Ratzin, 1988, U.S.)

*World War Z* (Dir. Forster, 2013, U.S.)

*World without End* (Dir. Bernds, 1956, U.S.)

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