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## **Environmental Messages in Popular Twenty-First Century Science-Fiction Blockbusters: *Snowpiercer* (2013) and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015)**

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Environmental Messages in Popular Twenty-First Century Science-Fiction Blockbusters:  
*Snowpiercer* (2013) and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015)

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## Introduction

Since the 2010s, climate change has become a dominant theme in mainstream film, TV and literature. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, many films revolving around humanity's relationship with nature revolved around subjects like spiritual journeys through the natural wilderness (e.g. *Into the Wild* [2007], *127 Hours* [2010]) or natural disasters (e.g.. *2012* [2009], *The Perfect Storm* [2000]). The disaster movie has been popular for far longer than that, of course: but it is safe to say that from roughly the 1970s onwards, the genre gained momentum (Montano and Carr 85), and reached its peak during the 1990s. Disaster films, like *Twister* (1996) and *Dante's Peak* (1997), can be seen as the foundation for much climate fiction today. Disaster films often present their protagonist, or the culture he originates from, as heroic. These films often validate individual and collective action in the face of natural disaster. An clarifying example of a film on the edge of both 90's disaster films and 2010s climate fiction is Roland Emmerich's *Day After Tomorrow* (2004); the plot centres around a disastrous freezing event in the northern United States, but it is framed within an climate fiction context, since it is explicitly stated that this "new ice age" is caused by climate change.

Both *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) and *Snowpiercer* (2013), unlike disaster films, clearly present human actions as the cause and the remaining problem as agents of destruction on the landscape. This is highlighted through the focus on landscape, the encoding <sup>1</sup>of an explicitly environmental message, and the shift away from showing the impact of natural disaster in terms of individual property; instead, both these films reveal the

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<sup>1</sup> In his essay "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse" (1973), Stuart Hall challenges the conventional direct model of communication current in this field, which posits a sender transmitting a communication to a receiver. Hall found this process too simplistic and asserted that the only implicit deformation lies in the receiver's capability to comprehend the intended communication. This thesis will refer to this theory as decoding and encoding.

damage to human societies. Thus, this thesis will analyse these two popular mid-2010 science fiction blockbusters from an ecocritical perspective, in order to decode messages about climate change within the worldbuilding, narrative and setting of these works. I will analyse *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) and *Snowpiercer* (2013) through the lens of eco-criticism, as presented, amongst others (climate trauma, phobic pressure points, biopolitics and necrofuturism, etc.), in Gerard Garrard's *Ecocriticism* (2012). In short

ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies. (Glotfelty xix, qtd. in Garrard 3)

This means one large aspect of the films this work will focus on is landscape (in a broader context, setting in general), in order to decode the effects of environmental degradation and disaster on the worlds and the characters in it. This is because both Miller and Boon develop tragic scenarios through these elements (the effects of the apocalyptic events) to communicate a warning to the audience about global warming and its potential for destruction on the landscape; if society continues existing in the way it does now, eventually the earth will look like *this*. Working within the field of ecocriticism, this means I will be approaching these films as ecocinema, thereby drawing on Paula Willoquet-Marcondi's explanations of the differences between different forms of environmentally engaged cinema in "Shifting Paradigms: From Environmentalist Films to Ecocinema." Willoquet-Marcondi explains that the genre "ecocinema" aims to help the audience examine their choices and question whether these are "expressive of "ecological wisdom" (environmentally conscious) or "ecological insanity," (harmful to the environment)" (163). According to Willoquet-

Maricondi, ecocinema can assist in providing emotional context for these choices and guide audiences through making the right one(s). Thus, cli-fi films can work on audiences' perceptions of nature and of environmental issues through a variety of approaches.

Alternatively, ecocinema can deploy an overt activist approach to inspire care, inform, educate, and motivate to act on the knowledge they provide. Because cinema serves as a recreation of the real world, it presents a kind of "virtual environment," while simultaneously modelling how audiences experience and interact with their physical environment. From this point of view ecocinema can provide an alternative model for depicting and working with (or against) nature (Willoquet-Maricondi 44). These provision of alternative models can be successful in the sense of activating the audience, or fail and fall flat.

In *Climate Change in Literature and Literary Studies*, Adeline Johns-Putra explains how ecocritical analyses of climate fiction can be successful: "... some ecocritical analyses promote literary representations of climate change as providing lessons to their readers on how to cope with, adapt to, or mitigate against climate change" (274). The two films discussed in this thesis have been chosen because they are effective in conveying the intentional warning about possible disastrous outcomes of our current lifestyles. Both *Mad Max Fury Road* (2015) and *Snowpiercer* (2013) achieve this through the presentation of the landscape, the design of the fictional socio-economic systems, plot structure, and the solutions and causes both films suggest to the issues of environmental degradation of the world outside of the cinema.

The landscapes presented in both these films consist mainly of barren wastelands, devoid of any natural plant and animal life; this conveys a certain sense of hopelessness regarding the ability of the landscape to recover from anthropogenic environmental degradation, especially in *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015). I will explain this in detail in the

Landscape section of the first analytical chapter. In addition to this, in both *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) and *Snowpiercer* (2013), audience's expectations are subverted through the structure of the narrative; both films do this by changing the standard science fiction/action film quest storyline. The characters in *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2013) find out halfway through the story that the Green Place (their final destination) does not exist; they will have to turn around back to the Citadel. *Snowpiercer* (2013) does this by building tension between the plot structure and the overarching narrative; the plot literally moves forward through the train, but at the end it is revealed that history aboard the Ark is circular by design, and Curtis' efforts were in vain. These elements, in addition to specific details about the worlds in these films, are the core of the effectiveness of the environmental message. In the analytical chapters I will unpack each of these arguments. They will have the following structure.

Chapter one will analyse how the world of *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) depicts life after a devastating thermonuclear apocalypse. It focuses on the societal dynamics and responses to environmental degradation, resource scarcity, and the reconstruction of society. This analysis will explore the effects of climate change, which serve as the underlying cause of the off-screen thermonuclear apocalypse in the film, and thus the post-apocalyptic society the characters are subjected to. By examining the society led by Immortan Joe, the chapter aims to shed light on the complex ways the depicted community copes with the challenges posed by a devastated environment, limited resources, and the urgent need for societal reconstruction, in order to decode ecocinematic messages present in *Fury Road*.

In the first section, the landscape of *Fury Road* is the main focus; the first part will explore the desert as a conceptual space of spiritual journeys and as representations of "ravaging climate change" (Eckenhoff 93). In addition to this, the section will explain how the desert creates a feeling of dehumanisation. Following this, it will specify what kind of

wasteland viewers encounter in *Mad Max*, how the wasteland in post-apocalyptic media almost universally depicts consequences of climate change and how the wasteland functions as a post-human landscape. The second section of this chapter will link the images of Immortan Joe's tyranny and Furiosa's (and later, the five wives') dream of the Green Place to the concepts apocalypse and utopia, as explained in the first chapter. In addition to this, the apocalypse section will seek to reconstruct the resource wars and thermonuclear disaster the population of Mad Max suffered, and analyse their effects on the population. The third section of this chapter will analyse the social structures and economic system on display in *Fury Road*, based on Gerry Canavan's concept of "necrofuturism" and Michael K. Richardson's concept of "climate trauma." These critical concepts, and the application of these concepts in this project's analysis of the films, will be further explained in the Apocalypse section of each chapter and the Economy section of each chapter.

The second chapter will present an analysis of Bong Jong-Hoo's *Snowpiercer* (2013) following the same analytical structure as *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015). I will start with the landscape section; the first part of the section will focus on how the entire structural design of the train propagates the extreme class division that forms the foundation of Wilford's ideal society through exploration of several compartments of the train and their meaning within the "landscape." In the case of *Snowpiercer*, the train functions as a landscape because the whole film takes place inside of Wilford's luxury train, the Ark. The second part of the section will concentrate on the usage of the narrative trope of the Wasteland applied to the icy remnants of civilization outside of the Ark, and how it both represents imminent death and utopic hope for a better future. As in Chapter one, the second section will reconstruct the apocalyptic events that took place in the narrative before the events of the film, as well as the life, death and nature in Wilford's synthetic, overtly designed dictatorship. In order to do so effectively I will build on Stephen King's theory of "phobic pressure points," and I will also draw on

Michael K. Richardson's "climate trauma." Both these concepts will be further explained in the Apocalypse section of the chapter. The third section will analyse the economical and societal structures of the Ark according to Gerry Canavan's "necrofuturism" and Michel Foucault's concept of "biopolitics," as from Anderson and Nielsen's explanation in *Biopolitics in the Anthropocene: On the Invention of Future Biopolitics in Snowpiercer, Elysium, and Interstellar*”).

In order to decode the messages behind both *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *Snowpiercer*, these following concepts will be used to analyse the repercussions of catastrophic climate disasters these worlds struggle under: Landscape, apocalypse and utopia, and society and economy. In order to analyse the effect of environmental degradation and climate change on the world and the characters inhabiting them, landscape will be used to seek real-life effects on human way of life and habitat explored by these films through their setting. This will be done through close reading of the landscape in the film itself, and through the literary concept of "the wasteland." In addition to this, to extrapolate the perceived survival chances both the creators of these films and the characters themselves believe or do not believe are possible under their circumstances, usage of both apocalyptic and utopic imagery in both these films will be analysed, drawing on Greg Garrard's definition of apocalypse. Finally, in the society and economy section, this work will explore how the societies in these worlds rebuild themselves and how scarcity of resources and environmental degradation influence (a lack of) social, political and economic structures.

## Ecocriticism and Climate Fiction: Explanation of Core Concepts

### Apocalypse, apocalyptic imagery & post-apocalyptic worlds

In everyday usage, “apocalypse” refers to “a great disaster” (Merriam-Webster). But the concept has been a trope in fiction, theology and philosophy since, arguably, the Bible (Higgins 114), or even Zoroaster thought dating back to 1200 BC (Garrard 85). Within an eco-critical context, apocalypse, means “to un-veil” (Garrard 85): it “takes the form of a revelation of the end of history” (Thompson 13-14, qtd in Garrard 85). This is significant as within eco-criticism apocalyptic narratives include the meaning of apocalypse as it functions in the Bible: Revelation (see Higgins 14). The concept is “designed to stiffen the resolve of an embattled community by dangling in front of it the vision of a sudden and permanent release from its captivity” (Thompson 13-14, qtd in Garrard 85). In this work specifically, I will be examining the water wars and (thermo)nuclear conflict in *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), and the release of CW-7 in *Snowpiercer* (2013). I will also decode the meaning of apocalyptic imagery used in both films; for *Snowpiercer* (2013), this includes the scars of the “old world,” frequently shown through windows, and the general setting of the Tail Section, due to its muted, dark colour palette and the salvaging DIY aesthetic the inhabitants portray. In *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) this mostly pertains to the landscape itself, but also the images of the societies that were created in the wake of the nuclear disaster.

The films analysed in this thesis are both set in a post-apocalyptic world, and the catastrophic events that lie at the foundation of the structure of these worlds are caused by the same phenomena: climate change and environmental degradation, in addition to the systems necessary to cause climate change. Whether this resulted in a world which is entirely designed as a solution to the consequences of this apocalyptic event (like *Snowpiercer* [2013]), or a result of the viscous struggle to acquire and maintain

resources in the face of consequences to this event (like *Mad Max: Fury Road* [2015]), apocalypse inherently shapes both the inner and outer worlds of the characters in these films.

### **Phobic pressure points**

Phobic pressure points is a term coined by Stephen King in *Danse Macabre* (1981) to describe cross-cultural fears. He himself succinctly summarises it as follows: "fears which exist across a wide spectrum of people...often political, economic and psychological rather than supernatural" (5) King claims that by exploring these pressure points in horror films, horror texts allow the audience to come to terms with these fears. He uses this concept specifically to analyse horror, but I think it is very useful to pinpoint what makes the apocalypses before the events of *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) and *Snowpiercer* (2013) so terrifying, and how this terror carries over to the characters' post-apocalyptic world and worldview.

After reviewing literature around climate fiction, I have concluded that the phobic pressure points that occur in the genre on average, have shifted. In the late twentieth century, phobic pressure points aim at playing into audiences' fear of nuclear war and/or disaster. This is visible, for example, in the *Snowpiercer* graphic novel *Le Transperceneige* (The Escape) from 1982 frames the icy world as an nuclear winter as evidenced by dialogue around the disaster like "the bomb [that] destroyed the climate" (81), and "...back then they reassured us the climate weapon was fully operational" (81-82). For decades, nuclear disaster was a very real fear, and post-apocalyptic worlds depicting the consequences of nuclear disaster, or stories centred around preventing nuclear war, were very popular during the 1980s (and early 1990s), like *Mad Max 3: Beyond the Thunderdome, Testament* (1983), *Radioactive Dreams* (1985) and *Godzilla 1985* (1985). In these works, environmental degradation and pollution is either presented as a consequence of nuclear fallout, or largely side-lined for the

phobic pressure points that elicits more emotion; nuclear disaster. However, in the last years (roughly from the mid-2000s onwards), the phobic pressure points of popular science fiction films, especially in post-apocalyptic films, have shifted towards consequences of environmental degradation/climate change, and large natural disaster as a direct result of anthropogenic climate change. This can be seen in films like *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), *2012* (2009), *Beasts of the Southern Wild* (2012) and *Interstellar* (2014). There has been an significant increase of films that (attempt to) engage with environmental themes like pollution and climate change recently, especially from 2010 onwards. This is why *Snowpiercer* (2013) and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) are such significant objects of analysis; the popularity and mainstream appeal of these films reflect an audience's increased awareness of climate change, and one more willing to engage with these themes than a 1980s or early 1990s audience.

### **Climate trauma**

Michael Richardson uses the word “trauma” in both the literal and figurative sense when he says “climate catastrophe works on ecologies and bodies alike as a kind of *wounding*” (3, emphasis mine). Richardson describes climate trauma as a wound to “to the very constitution of experience and expression” (3). There is another concept that builds on climate trauma, which will also be used in this thesis. Pre-trauma, in the context of climate trauma. Richardson draws from E. Ann Kaplan's *Climate Trauma* (2016), which explains pre-trauma as: “...the traumatic imagining of future catastrophe” (2). Through messages on social media, the news and scientific reports, audiences are traumatised through their own imagination or anxieties around climate change.

Pre-trauma can be seen mainly in the characters of *Mad Max: Fury Road*, because they have been presumably bombarded with “shocking, debilitating imaginings of what may

soon take place” by the news, which the audience is confronted with in the beginning of the film. There seems to have been close reporting done on the water and oil wars in the world before the nuclear disaster, thus mentally traumatising the population even before the great nuclear disaster that “killed the world” (00:14:12).

In *Snowpiercer* (2013), climate trauma mainly pertains to the sudden shock of having to adjust to a world that has been stripped of any familiarity by a devastating disaster. It goes beyond the physical harm caused by these disasters and affects the very essence of individuals' experiences and expressions. In contrast to *Mad Max: Fury Road*, where pre-trauma experiences are significant, in *Snowpiercer*, the sudden manifestation of the catastrophe diminishes the importance of pre-trauma. However, one could argue that the pre-trauma in *Snowpiercer* encompasses the passive anticipation of the impending radical destructive events that mark the end of human life and the meaningfulness of the concept of the world itself. This conscious experience of the world's end leads to resentment, which is evident in Wilford's propaganda that derogatorily labels the Old World People as "frigging morons." This resentment reflects the perception of previous generations and signifies intergenerational warfare, where one generation's actions disadvantage subsequent generations in terms of resource consumption and management. Curtis and his rebel group not only fight against Wilford's hierarchical regime but also strive to overcome the fate that their ancestors have imposed upon them, with the aim of creating a better future for the younger generation represented by Timmy, Andy, and Yona.

In addition to this, climate trauma plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of the message(s) of cli-fi fiction in general; by forcefully traumatising audiences in the relatively safe space of a contained film, the film(s) convey the urgency of the issue and the danger inherent in staying passive or denying climate change altogether. In addition to this, climate

trauma also influences characters and their behaviour in both films chosen for this thesis; I will expand on this point with analyses in the Apocalypse section of the *Snowpiercer* chapter, and the Conclusion of this work.

### **Necrofuturism & necrocapitalism**

Both films in this thesis depict a necrofuturistic view on the future of capitalist societies. In “If the Engine Ever Stops, We’d All Die,” Gerry Canavan explains necrofuturism as

the endlessly rehearsed landscape of death and disaster that dominates contemporary visions of the coming decades. Necrofuturism premediates the unhappy economic and ecological future that will emerge out of current trends, but not in a register that suggests or nurtures alternatives; rather, necrofuturism resigns us to a coming disaster we can anticipate but not prevent (3).

Thus, necrofuturism is asking what happens if we keep subscribing to this idea of eternal growth, not just in our personal lives but in the way we structure our (inter)national economies? What happens if we continue to base our social capital and (self) worth on owning material possessions? These questions, however, are almost rhetorical; we already live in the aftermath of people in the 90s and 00s asking exactly those questions and doing absolutely nothing to solve either of them.

In *Fury Road*, the economic structure reflects the consequences of exploitative capitalist systems and lifestyles. Immortan Joe has succeeded in dehumanizing individuals and reducing them to resources and commodities, as seen with the War Boys and the struggle of the Wives to break free from this mindset. In a world where basic resources like water are

scarce, the lack of property and human rights leads to a Hobbesian <sup>2</sup>state of constant conflict. However, the characters in the film challenge this commodification and reclaim their personhood. They recognize their inherent worth as human beings and reject the dehumanizing system that governed their self-perception. Through their positive relationships and unity, they overthrow Immortan Joe and distribute vital resources to those in need.

*Snowpiercer* also explores the consequences of necrofuturism within a rigidly controlled society aboard the train. The struggle for survival and the unequal distribution of resources demonstrate the devaluation of human life and the commodification of individuals. However, the rebel group led by Curtis aims to break free from this oppressive system and create a better future for the next generation. By rejecting the notion of being mere commodities, they challenge the necrofuturistic attitude and strive for a more equitable society where entitlement to vital resources is based on shared humanity rather than exploitation.

Both *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) and *Snowpiercer* (2013) attempt to answer necrofuturism's questions in a world where immensely destructive forest fires and soul-sucking droughts have become normal aspects of the modern summer, in a world where climate change triggers increased amounts of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes and tsunamis. This is the most important feature of necrofuturism; the fact that humanity is staring our extinction straight in the eyes, and still, cannot take any actual meaningful action. I will go into detail as to how each economy is structured along the principle of necrofuturism in the Economy section of each chapter.

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<sup>2</sup> "Hobbesian" here refers to a state of nature described by Thomas Hobbes. A state of nature here is "a real or hypothetical condition of human beings before any political affiliation," (Encyclopedia Britannica). Hobbes believed humanity's state of nature was "a constant and violent condition of competition in which each individual has a natural right to everything, regardless of the interests of others" (Encyclopedia Britannica).

## Biopolitics

The term "biopolitics," coined by philosopher Michel Foucault, refers to the paradigm that studies how life and bodies are manipulated to exercise power and control over (certain) populations. It examines at both macro and micro levels how power, knowledge and biological processes work together to govern and govern people in today's society. Foucault originally explained biopolitics as follows:

To say that power took possession of life in the nineteenth century, or to say that power at least takes life under its care in the nineteenth century, is to say that it has, thanks to the play of technologies of discipline on the one hand and technologies of regulation on the other, succeeded in covering the whole surface that lies between the organic and the biological, between body and population. We are, then, in a power that has taken control of both the body and life or that has, if you like, taken control of life in general – with the body as one pole and the population as the other (252-3)

Thus, biopolitics examines the many strategies that authorities use to influence and shape social life by examining methods such as surveillance, discipline, normalization, and medicalization of the body. Foucauldian biopolitics emphasizes the importance of population control and the improvement of human life, and how power operates beyond conventional notions of sovereignty and oppression, permeating the fabric of modern administration.

This concept will be used in the second analytical chapter about *Snowpiercer* (2013), in order to decode how Wilford exerts control over the population not just when it pertains to power, politics and resource distribution, but also literally over the bodies of the people who live in the Tail section of his train. Biopolitics will be applied according to Andersen and

Nielson's article "Biopolitics in the Anthropocene" because of the article's specific focus on biopolitics in modern cli-fi films. The treatment of the Tail section in the film aligns with this biopolitical perspective, as it reflects a Malthusian<sup>3</sup> nightmare where a lack of control over living conditions can bring destruction to the collective. *Snowpiercer* illustrates various examples of this approach, such as the compartmentalization of the train and the control of living resources. Wilford himself advocates for a form of manmade natural selection as a solution to the scarcity of resources. In the Tail section, every aspect of life is regulated, including living quarters, food distribution, and population size through head-counts. The dehumanization of the Tail section is emphasized through the commodification and objectification of individuals, treating them as biopolitical units in need of management. Children are measured and taken away from the Tail section, revealing the disregard for their personhood and their reduction to economic considerations. Mason's speech reinforces this dehumanization, as she views the Tail section inhabitants as tools and resources necessary for maintaining the functioning of the train. She compares them to inanimate objects and threatens a culling of a specific percentage of the population to maintain balance. This ultimately leads to the massacre of the Tail section residents.

Now that a solid understanding of the research context is established, this thesis will continue to the first analytical chapter, focused on *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015).

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<sup>3</sup> "Malthusian nightmare" here refers to the theoretical outcome of the Malthusian growth model. Thomas Malthus theorised that population growth was potentially exponential, growing in geometric progression, but food supplies only "increase in arithmetic progression" (Malthus and Winch).

## Chapter 2: Deserts and Desperation: Climate Change in *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015)

In 2015, George Miller decided to revive the iconic Mad Max franchise, which had originally ended in *Mad Max: Beyond the Thunderdome* (1985), by making *Mad Max: Fury Road*. The movie, despite being surrounded by controversy due to it having a female co-protagonist in Furiosa, ended up winning many awards, amongst which 6 Academy Awards. *Fury Road* is a fast-paced tale about Max Rockatansky, who helps Imperator Furiosa with transporting five of Immortan Joe's wives across the desert wasteland, which the world has become after the events of the last Mad Max instalment.

Filmmakers like Edgar Wright call *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) the “best action film of all time” (Thompson). The expertly crafted environmental message, a warning for the possible future of our current society, is one point of many that form the reasons for the excellence of the film. Miller himself explained the story was explained by imagining how

all the things we read about in the papers come to pass at once...So the power grid goes down, and once that happens you're losing so much of technology. All the banking is electronic, so that would go, and eventually currency is no longer important. The internet would go down and you'd lose a lot of your history. You couldn't look at Google or Wikipedia and so on. It wouldn't take long before you'd evolve into a more elemental state. More medieval (MacInnes).

In addition to being directly inspired by imagined consequences of current trends (which is a prevalent trend in climate fiction, see for example Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*), Miller extrapolated these events to socio-economical systems, citing his inspiration for Immortan Joe as an imagined “new dominant hierarchy that tyrants have in the past, using the architecture of power to control the major resources, especially the water” (MacInnes).

This chapter will analyse how the world of *Mad Max: Fury Road* depicts life after a devastating thermonuclear apocalypse. It will explore how does the society depicted in the film, lead by Immortan Joe, struggles with surviving environmental degradation, resource scarcity, and the restructuring of society. The focus of this analysis will lie on the effects of climate change on the environment (including water shortage, soil quality degradation, natural resource shortages), which caused the off-screen apocalypse in this world.

In the first section, the landscape of *Fury Road* is the focus; the first part will focus on the desert as a conceptual space of spiritual journeys and as representations of “ravaging climate change” (Eckenhoff 93). In addition to this, the section will explain how the desert creates a feeling of dehumanisation in the characters of *Fury Road*. The second part of the landscape section will explain what the function is of Wasteland as a setting, specifically in post-apocalyptic narratives. Following this, it will specify what kind of wasteland is encountered by the viewers and the characters in *Mad Mad: Fury Road*, how the wasteland in post-apocalyptic media universally depicts consequences of climate change and how the wasteland functions as a post-human landscape.

The second section of this chapter will compare and contrast utopian and apocalyptic imagery to reveal a specific vision of post-apocalyptic society found in Immortan Joe’s tyranny and Furiosa’s (and later, the five wives’) dream of the Green Place, as explained in the first chapter. The apocalypse section will reconstruct the resource wars and thermonuclear disaster the population of the world shown in *Fury Road* suffered. The Utopian part focuses on the effect that the belief in the Green Place has on the main characters and attempts to analyse what it means to them when the Green Place turns out to not exist anymore.

The third section of this chapter will analyse the social structures and economic system that govern the desert-society in *Fury Road*. I will explicate the old relationship

between the economic system that led to the thermonuclear apocalypse and the new one born out of this disaster. Specifically, this section will explore how socio-economic systems have evolved based on the environmental challenges, and how they replicate features of previous economic systems. For this, I will contextualise my analysis within Gerry Canavan's theory about and concept of Necrofuturism.

### Landscape: Wilderness, The Wasteland and Dwelling

The landscape in *Fury Road* is alive. The desert wasteland that acts as the setting for George Miller's film not only influences the manner in which characters are (un)able to move forward, its effects are extended to becoming a deciding factor in key battles and even plays a key role in the emotional journey of the film's protagonists. For example, the landscape implicitly "chooses a side" when Furiosa strikes a deal with the Buzzards to block the passage through the canyon with rocks. Even when Immortan Joe manages to free the way for his war party, this momentarily setback ultimately becomes the salvation of Furiosa's small tribe; because of the clearing of the passage, they can kill Immortan Joe, and take over the Citadel when they return.

### The Desert: Fire and Blood

Deserts are used often as representations of "ravaging climate change (Eckenhoff 93). Some classic science fiction stories in this vein include J.G. Ballard's *The Burning World* (1964), Harlan Ellison's "A Boy and his Dog" (1969) and Doris Lessing's *Mara and Dann* (1999). Right now, an estimated one-third of the earth is threatened by desertification, caused by anthropogenic climate change. As the IPCC says in their most recent report on climate change: "Climate change has contributed to desertification and exacerbated land degradation, particularly in low lying coastal areas, river deltas, drylands and in permafrost areas." This immediate threat of desertification means expanding deserts now symbolise the immensely destructive effects of man-made climate change and environmental degradation on humanity and non-human nature.

In *The Sacred Desert* (2004), Jasper argues that

images of rising sea levels, fire, or an anthropomorphized planet suffering from high temperature constitute attempts to meet this challenge and make the consequences of climate change palpable. Similarly, desert wastelands such as featured in the action film *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) provide the popular imagination with a sublime landscape of destruction visualizing the anthropogenic environmental impact that is ultimately impossible to represent comprehensively. (qtd. in Eckenhoff 93)

The desert, as a conceptual landscape, represents anxieties about environmental degradation and drought. This is because, in the world outside of the cinema, desertification is a real-life, presently happening consequence of the century-long slow destruction of humanity's home planet in the form of anthropogenic climate change. Fundamentally, deserts are a space where humanity cannot survive; one of the harshest environments on earth, one to which our species cannot adapt. The thought that the whole of our fertile, green planet covered with water would end up as a desert is understandably a terrifying concept for audiences.

Jasper goes on to frame the desert as “an absolute otherness that negates and exposes every construction and defence of human civilization and culture” (Jasper 73, qtd. in Eckenhoff 103). This is because of the lack of vital life resources, notably water, and the extreme survival pressures of the desert. However, this otherness also gives the desert its mystical feel. There is no shortage of stories of figures who cross the desert, not just as a physical journey, but also as a spiritual journey. Classic examples of this include stories from the Bible, like “The Temptation of Christ”, in which Jesus, after his baptism by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:13–17) is challenged by the devil in the desert after fasting in the desert for forty days and nights. The devil tries to tempt him, but is ultimately refused by Jesus. (Matthew 4:1-11). Another example is “Elijah in the Wilderness” (1 Kings 19:4-7), in which

Elijah flees into the desert because Jezebel threatens his life after he murders the prophets of Baal. Afterwards, he sits down under a tree and asks God to kill him. God sends him an angel who carries bread and water to him, which gives him the strength to journey through the desert to Mount Horeb. As Eckenhoff explains: “To cross the desert and to face its physical and psychological challenges sometimes means facing God, sometimes the incomprehensible scale and sublime power of the natural world.” (103). However, in *Fury Road*, this spiritual journey is subverted. The characters physically cannot cross the salt planes, which means they cannot complete their spiritual desert journey in the traditional sense. Instead, the psychological shift necessary for growth for Furiosa, the Wives, and even Max (who has spent most of the film half-feral, up until this point) is facilitated by the whole party *turning around* and returning where they came from. They know it is going to be a harrowing undertaking to take the Citadel from Immortan Joe, but this anticipation of struggle and violence finally causes them to take agency in their own journeys. Thus, their growth comes from acknowledging their human limitations and deciding to make a better future in the place where they came from, instead of continuing being chased by Immortan Joe and his allies for the rest of their lives.

#### The Dehumanising Effect of the Desert



Figure 1: *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), (00:19:10)

In *Fury Road*, the desert dwarfs everyone who resides in it. The Buzzards, the desert bandits who attack Max in the beginning of the film, perfectly merge with the landscape. Not just with their clothing, the thick brown rags they use to cover their bodies against the sun and violence from the raids, but also their vehicles. Even though all Buzzard vehicles are covered in huge, iron spikes, the vehicles blend into the background because of their muted colours; “vanishing into the terrain” (Eckenhoff 104). The Wretched, the people who have



Figure 2: *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), (00:50:34)

taken refuge at the foot of the Citadel, also seem to have become one with the desert. In their brown and beige clothing, covered in filth, wearing “screen contraptions that serve as protection from the glare of

the sun” that make them “merge almost seamlessly with the ground, reminiscent of animals adapted to visually vanish in their surroundings” (Eckenhoff 104). This speaks to the lack of individuality in Immortan Joe’s social hierarchy; people are categorised based on groups, and outwardly reflect this categorisation through visual merging with their environment around them.

The fact that large swaths of people become part of the desert plays into what Rob Nixon describes as “the slow violence of climate change and environmental degradation that disproportionately affects the poor of the global south” (41). It is very fitting that this merging of people and landscape takes place in the desert, because one of the largest threats to the global south in terms of environmental degradation is desertification. This then speaks to the erosion of structured human society and impartial institutions after the thermonuclear



Figure 3: *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), (00:08:48)

conflict that created the desertified wasteland the characters of *Fury Road* try to survive in. *Survive* is a key word here; the Wretched are reduced to survival instincts concerning

basic needs on Maslow's pyramid<sup>4</sup>, especially water. In *Fury Road*, the panic and violence surrounding water as a resource is used to represent the degradation of humanity of the people residing in the Wasteland, in tandem with the degradation of the environment around them. They are regressing to animal-like interactions; in the Wasteland, the strongest win the resources, and the weak perish.

This all-encompassing struggle for survival becomes apparent in a deleted scene. The scene portrays a woman holding up her baby to the War Boys and Imperators on the mechanized platform that transports them between the Citadel and the ground below. "Take him!" she begs, but her baby is quickly rejected for being "half-life;" deformed and full of tumours. The woman, astonishingly, throws aside her baby and exposes her breasts. "Then take me!" she cries. "I am a milker." Shortly thereafter, she is pulled on the platform, presumably to become one of Immortan Joe's milkers. They are depicted as human cattle, chained to milking machines, rocking dolls in their arms in lieu of babies. The Wretched of the Wasteland do not have the privilege of empathy. As Max says in the opening scene of the

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<sup>4</sup> Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a psychological theory of human development; he theorises general societal needs are at the bottom of his pyramid-shaped hierarchy, which is divided into deficiency and growth needs. "Basic needs" here correspond to what Maslow defines as physiological needs in his hierarchy, corresponding to deficiency needs.

film: “My world is fire and blood” (00:00:23). Everyone’s world is reduced to “fire and blood,” fighting under the huge pipes peaking out of the Citadel for a sip of muddy water.

In *Fury Road*, the last bastion of humanity outside of the Citadel is the area that used to be Green Place. In the “place with all the crows” (01:20:59), scarecrow-like figures skulk around on long stilts. They are fittingly called “The Crow Walkers” in the script. These figures do not blend into *Fury Road*’s mise-en-scene of bright orange and deep brown desert by day but melt into the deep blue desert night by wearing dark rags in the colours of their



Figure 4: *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), (01:14:44)

namesakes. The name of these Crow Walkers is significant past the resemblance to the actual birds; as Eckenhoff says: “[Crows’] stereotypical association with death and penchant to be shown scavenging battlefields underscores

the hopeless sense of post-war decay and with the formerly resilient ecosystem of the Green Place finally collapsed, the film suggests that their days, too, are numbered” (Eckenhoff 104). The only way in which Furiosa’s party can reverse this threat of death is by denouncing their goal of repopulating the Green Place. To do this, they have to not just defeat Immortan Joe, but also turn back around to the Citadel, in order to build a tangible future there. The implications of this will be further discussed in the “Utopia” section.

#### The Wasteland: A Blighted and Polluted World

The desert landscape of *Fury Road* is not merely a desert. Outside of the Citadel, no other plant life is seen, and the only non-human animal life visible are the bug and the two-headed lizard eaten by Nux and Max. “The earth is sour” (00:00:50) is heard throughout the

film, from the opening scene where a woman laments that “we have become half-life” (00:00:53) after the thermonuclear conflict that destroyed the world, to the Vuvalani Keeper of the Seeds bringing Furiosa the news that the Green Place is forever gone. The wasteland in the sense of “waterless or treeless region, a desert” (OED) does largely seem to be descriptive of the kind of wasteland we are dealing with in *Fury Road*, if not for the sinister undertone of radiation poisoning of both the soil (and ground water supply) and the inhabitants of this wasteland. Even after generations, the radiation still marks them, more than a “half-life” is not possible for most.

The only place where the desert wasteland seems truly alive is when characters are on the road. The roads are the lifeblood, the veins of the desert. However, they are only veins in the metaphorical sense; in fact, they have the opposite effect of veins in the human body. Instead of nourishing the desert, the roads carry remnants of the cause of the death of the environment they reside in, namely a dependence on fossil fuels and cars. I will further expand on this dependency and its implications in the section “Cars: Forever on the Fury Road.” The roads enable this triangular economy between the Citadel, Bullet Farm and Gas Town to exist. They enable Max to drift further and further away from humanity, running “from both the living and the dead” (00:02:46). Without the existence of roads, Furiosa’s plan to escape to the Green Place could not even exist. However, all the dizzying wide shots of these roads carving through the desert also evokes a sense of disorientation. As Eckenhoff writes: “the roads have all but disappeared into the wasteland, signalling not only that there are not enough people anymore to use them but also suggesting geographical disorientation and a sense of being lost.” (102). The audience may well get lost in the sense of depersonalization that occurs in the desert and disoriented by the sights of these tangled roads lining through it, but the characters of *Fury Road* are never not in their place. They do not get lost. Max and

Furiosa have honed their senses, their skills, and their instincts in order to make it through this wasteland.

In the context of the underlying themes of environmental degradation and man-made climate change of *Fury Road*, the wasteland setting has become a symbol for

the extent to which anthropogenic ecological changes literally lay waste to the world.

The wasteland becomes the site where extreme environmental conditions meet themes of extreme exploitation, trauma, and deprivation. Control of resources means social power, usually enforced by violence, and engendering dystopian, often fascist, racist, and patriarchal social structures among survivors of the disaster. (Eckenhoff 95)

*Fury Road* clearly and directly depicts just these extreme environmental conditions, combined with rigid social hierarchy enforced by violence and informed by primal animalistic power relations between the weak and the strong. Starting with the voice over in the opening credits where the oil and water wars are laid out, to the news messages about the thermonuclear conflict that caused the end of human civilization as presented in the earlier *Mad Max* instalments, the whole film is brimming with real, tangible consequences to the current relationship between humanity, the planet they reside on and many of humanity's interpersonal relations. And thus, "the wasteland becomes an emblem of the Anthropocene and the large-scale irreversible changes in the planet's geography wrought by humans." (Eckenhoff 102). One way in which these "emblem[s] of the Anthropocene" are portrayed is in the way in which the social and economical hierarchies are structured in the Citadel, which will be expanded upon further in the "Economy" section.

## Apocalypse and Reconstruction: Dystopian vs Utopian Environments

In *Ecocriticism* (2011), Garrard calls apocalypse the “consolation of the persecuted” (86). We certainly see this in *Fury Road*, for example, in the Wretched straining to look when Immortan Joe will let down water from his aquifer. However, there is a significant polarity that takes place in the film between (post)apocalyptic and utopian ideals in the form of the desert wasteland that forms the setting for the duration of the film, and the Green Place that Furiosa initially tries to reach. Immortan Joe’s Citadel and the post-nuclear desert form the dystopian landscape, where every requisition of resources requires struggle and violent action, where a harsh social-economic hierarchy largely leaves the populus at the bottom to fend for themselves. In a world where no agriculture is possible, where no natural water occurs apart from what Immortan Joe can access from his aquifer and where people naturally already live a half-life (a reference not only to the quality of life experienced by the inhabitants of *Fury Road*’s desert wasteland, but also to the rate of decay of radioactive material, thus connecting their mutations and tumours to the nuclear disaster which occurred before the events of the film) because of severe radiation poisoning, this becomes a recipe for an existence that is “poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” As Richardson explains: “It depicts humanity at what Thom van Dooren calls the “edge of extinction,” the “slow unraveling of intimately entangled ways of life that begins long before the death of the last individual and continues to ripple forward long afterward” (Richardson 9). The “killing of the world” [WHO KILLED THE WORLD, (00:14:12)] happened long before it was blown up by thermonuclear bombs, not by weapons and excessive violence, but because of the rapid exploitation of the Earth and the people on it by old-world systems of rigid patriarchy, commodification of vulnerable populations, and necro-capitalism (this will further be explored in the section “Society and Economy”); this message that is both echoed by the surviving power structures in the film.

The fascinating aspect of the *Fury Road* apocalypse is that, even though it forms the evolutionary pressures for all the characters in the film and shapes the entire world the audience sees during the film, it occurred off-screen. The only inkling viewers receive of the various apocalyptic events that happened to the *Fury Road* world are the snippets of the news segments in the opening scene. The events that led up to the destruction of societies with strong institutions and democratic governments are referenced at the beginning of the film; first, the oil (“guzzoline”) wars, then the water wars, and after that, worst of all, the “terminal freak out point...the] thermonuclear skirmish” (00:00:48). This is especially terrifying for audiences in 2023, since oil and war have already become associated with each other in the wake of the use of motorized vehicles increased since the First World War (IWM). In addition to this, conflicts around water have been predicted to take place in fifty countries across five continents in the next 25 years. There is even a database of 1298 conflicts around water, made by [wordwater.org](http://wordwater.org)<sup>5</sup>, the most recent of which is the Russian destruction of the Ukrainian dam that fed water into the Crimea in 2022. Miller may well have drawn directly on such contemporary anxieties around resources to form the foundation of his vision of an apocalyptic society. This corresponds with Stephen King’s phobic pressure point theory; the pressure points Miller seems to “press” in *Fury Road* are desertification due to environmental degradation from anthropogenic climate change and the commodification of both basic needs and human bodies.

Even though the film vaguely alludes to its apocalypse that occurred before the period in which it is set, the forces that caused it are clearly defined. In the words of Richardson: “[T]he forces that continue to animate these remnants [of the society]—hypermasculinity,

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<sup>5</sup> The [worldwater.org](http://worldwater.org) “Water Conflict Chronology is a project from the Pacific Institute. The project was started in the 1980s in order to “track and categorize events related to water and conflict” (Pacific’s Institute) and has been most recently updated in March 2022.

capitalist resource exploitation, authoritarian control—are surely responsible” (7). These underlying causes are also present in the way the Gas Town, Bullet Farm and Citadel triumvirate set up their economy and society in the desert; they do not just control the resources necessary for life (water, gasoline, weapons, car parts and bullets), they control more than that. It is fundamentally control over “the bodies of women and of reproduction itself, over the very capacity of the human to continue” (Richardson 7). Immortan Joe steals what seems like all the “full-life” women for his breeding pen, leaving the Wretched to bearing sick children, and thus condemning humanity to the half-life we see them being chained in during the film. I will talk more about societal dynamics and the economy/resource distribution in *Fury Road* in the “Economy” section.

All this post-apocalyptic imagery is contrasted by the instances when characters talk about the Green Place. In the prequel comic it is revealed that Furiosa carries a picture of it around in her pockets, even after almost 20 years (“seven thousand days”) in Immortan Joe’s service. The Dag folds her hand and reverently mutters “we’re going to the Green Place, we’re going to the Green Place” (00:51:46) when they are chased by the triumvirate. For the wives, the Green Place is a physical manifestation of the hope to escape their captivity and role as breeders. For Furiosa, it is about coming home, but also about “redemption” (01:16:18) as she admits to Max; we as an audience can only imagine what she has had to do to become the only female Imperator.

We see the utopian role of the Green Place especially in the conversation around agriculture, lead by the women of the Vuvalini. The Keeper of the Seeds describes the Green Place as an idyllic heaven away from the devastation of the wastes: “Trees. Flowers. Fruit. Back then, everyone had their fill. Back then, there was no need to snap anybody” (1:23:51). The lack of competition for resources in the Green Place meant the extreme, horrific violence



Figure 5: *Mad Max: Fury Road* ([2015], Sexton graphic novel), (69).

the film is seeped in (very effectively used as spectacle but appalling nonetheless) was not necessary there. They did defend the Green Place against raiders and invaders, since The Keeper of the Seeds tells The Dag “Killed everyone I ever met out here. Headshots. All of ‘em. Snap—right in the medulla” (01:23:12), which

implies she has been trained in shooting even when the Green Place still existed.

Their society is organised in clans; presumably matriarchal, since all the people Furiosa mentions to show her history as Vuvalini are women. This is in sharp contrast with the Citadel, which is not only ruled by men, but only has women in the roles of Breeders and Milkers, except, of course, Furiosa. The only crops grown are for Emperor Joe’s clique, presumably the Milkers (to keep up milk supply) and for trading with the other two cities around the wastes.

To come back to the speculated lack of violence, right before the group reaches the Green Place, The Dag reveals that Angharad used to refer to bullets as “antiseed[s]” (01:04:20). This is used as a reference to “a culture of cultivation and stewardship over nature as opposed to the culture of violence perpetuating a system of oppression and exploitation that continues in the same vein as the one that destroyed human civilization” (Eckenhoff 98). Again, this is used to signify the contrast between the Wives, Vuvalini and Furiosa and Immortan’ Joe’s clans. “The Green Place” and the Vuvalini are continuously presented as the

utopian alternative to the dystopian ways of Immortan Joe. Over the course of the journey, however (especially after Nux joins them), the Green Place is more presented as hope and a (more) sustainable future and less and less as an actual place. This, of course, plays into the fact that the Green Place has been eradicated by “sour earth.”

As Eckenhoff explains, the realization that the Green Place no longer exists and that there is no safe paradise left to escape to marks a “moment of environmental nostalgia, the cautionary moment in which the audiences are encouraged to consider and conserve the pristine, Edenic nature that still exists in our material reality, even if it no longer exists in the film” (99). This same realization is also what triggers Max to convince the group to turn around. Since any possibility of “Edenic nature” returning seems impossible, the only thing they can do is to escape to the Green Place they *know* exists: The Citadel. Reactions to the narrative of *Fury Road* from online communities reveal that various commentators joke about how the film is one long chase scene, and that at the end they go right back to where they came from. Clearly, during its initial release, the decoding of the environmental message was not achieved by the audience: Viewers entered the cinema prepared for a standard formulaic action film, but like in the case of *Snowpiercer*, they experienced a subversion of classic action-adventure narratives in favour of a cyclical plot structures.

The cyclical nature of the film is particularly significant; in the case of *Mad Max: Fury Road*, it marks how humanity stops running towards escapist fantasies of better places, symbolised by the Green Place, and start to deal with the actual issues happening in their own direct environment, which is what drives Furiosa and Max to lead their group back to Immortan Joe’s Citadel. From the moment the Milkies open the water pipes, the audience knows the Citadel will never be the same again.

## Economy in *Fury Road*: Necrofuturism

Both films in this thesis depict a *necrofuturistic* view on the future of our capitalist society. For example, the thermonuclear disaster that caused the desert wasteland in *Fury Road* is a direct consequence of the destructive capitalism and greed that we see in today's society. There already *are* water wars. Outside of *Fury Road*, modern wars are already (partly) fuelled by a desire to acquire oil. It does not matter whether fuel is called gasoline or guzzoline. Necrofuturism is asking "what happens if we keep subscribing to this idea of eternal growth, not just in our personal lives but in the way we structure our (inter)national economies? What happens if we continue to base our social capital and (self) worth on owning material possessions?" In this vein, *Fury Road* and *Snowpiercer* both attempt to answer necrofuturism's questions in a world where immensely destructive forest fires and soul-sucking droughts have become normal aspects of the modern summer, in a world where climate change triggers increased amounts of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes and tsunamis. This is the most important feature of necrofuturism as a popular-culture genre; the fact that we stare our extinction straight in the eyes.

The economic structure in *Fury Road* echoes the way the film seeks to depict the consequences of modern, exploitative, capitalist systems and lifestyles. Immortan Joe has successfully convinced human beings to view themselves as resources and commodities; notably the War Boys, but the Wives also visibly struggle with letting go of this mindset. This is because "the lack of property rights, and indeed most basic human rights, leaves the remainder of humanity in a Hobbesian state of bellum omnium contra omnes" (Eckenhoff 97) There is such a strong relationship between (self-)commodification and security; in a world where people must fight over such primary resources as water, freedom and being seen as a human being seem like a far-away luxury. An example of this is when Capable and the Dag consoles Cheedo after Angharad has died:

Cheedo: He'll forgive us, I know he will!

Capable: There is no going back!

Cheedo: We were his treasures!

Capable: Cheedo!

Cheedo: We were protected! He gave us the high life. What's wrong with that?

Capable: We are not things!

Cheedo: No!

The Dag: Cheedo, we are not things!

It is clear that Cheedo feels conflicted; Angharad's death is a permanent reminder how dangerous their undertaking is. Life on the road is rough; Max's character is a testament to this fact. She is willing to trade her humanity for security. The Dag and Capable, in contrast, are among the biggest advocates for their personhood in the group, and The Dag ultimately is the one who drags Cheedo back to the Rig. This shows how the group defeats the necrofuturistic attitude which forms the base for Immortan Joe's downfall; by acknowledging their own inherent worth as human beings, they become able to reject the commodification that used to be the foundation for their own self-perception. By using the strength that comes from that realisation, and the positive, supportive relationships forged between Max, Furiosa, Nux, the Wives, and the Vuvalini, they retake the Citadel. In the end, they make the vital resources kept in the Citadel available for everyone, even the Wretched. This is why it important that the Milkers open up the water pipes; once commodified for their bodily fluids (the only reason that Mother's Milk is such an important resource for Immortan Joe is

because of the lack of food and drink available in the desert), they eventually become the ones who open up Immortan Joe's post-apocalyptic equivalent to a dragon's hoard of resources to the people who need them most. The simple act of being human now governs entitlement to life's most important substance, not what your body can offer (i.e., being cannon fodder like the War Boys), or what you can offer from your body (Mother's milk or children like the Wives and Milkers).

Cars: Forever on the Fury Road

Next to the extreme commodification of the human body, another way in which *Fury Road* shows "a future that is doomed to continue modern capitalism's unsustainable and immoral practices even as those practices become more and more destructive and self-defeating" (Canavan 1) is through the use, depiction and function of cars in the film. The audience is confronted with the role of cars/the combustion engine immediately, in the opening sequence, when the oil wars are introduced: "We're killing for guzzoline" (00:00:19) says a disembodied male voice. The oil is positioned above even water; "[w]ater and oil hold the same weight...Max's world may be fire and blood, but that is only due to the fact that this world is lacking water and oil" (Pesses 45).

There is only one thing which keeps Max Rockatansky from becoming a complete wild *thing*, one thing that anchors him to his humanity, after all he has been through: his Pursuit V8 Special. His 1973 Ford XB Falcon, which he steals from the Halls of Justice in *Beyond Thunderdome* (1985) is, at the beginning of the film literally his anchor to humanity and the only instrument that can actualize his constant wandering. Significantly, Max defines his humanity through non-human objects; the object he uses is a symbol for the death and decay of the natural environment around him, not just by owning the car, but by moving around in it. However, Max is not the only one who desperately needs a vehicle to move around in. Every character we encounter in the desert of *Fury Road* is somehow

connected to a matching vehicle. From Furiosa and her War Rig to the Vuvalini with their motorcycles and the Buzzards with their quads, motorized vehicles seem to be the only way in which characters are able to move through the desert wastes of *Fury Road*. This concept can be used to explain the importance of cars (and to a lesser extend, motorcycles) in this film is *ecomobility*. Ecomobility can be explained as “a way in which human bodies ought to move through the Earth’s ecosystems. [*Fury Road*’s] specific ecomobility blends human and machine into the only assemblage/hybrid capable of traveling the wild and desolate spaces of this apocalyptic wasteland.” (Pesses 44).

*Fury Road*’s ecomobility is not only dependant on cars, but also on oil to fuel them. Without cars, and thus without oil, there is no humanity. Without oil, without “guzzoline,” there is only the half-life of the Wretched; crawling around in the dirt to fight over Immortan Joe’s scraps. Immortan Joe literally set the Citadel up for this exact purpose; having a preferential position when it comes to acquiring gasoline. His triumvirate is once again exploiting desperate people who have no other option than to use gasoline to achieve any sort of mobility, echoing the pre-nuclear war old-world systems of greed and exploitation that destroyed modern human civilisation in the first place.

In addition to this overwhelming dependency on cars and oil, there is a certain merging of the human with the machine. This is most exemplified by Furiosa, who not only owns a mechanical prosthetic arm, but also drives the War Rig. The fluidity of her movements when she controls it give away how much she and this machine are one whole. This is also because she is the only one capable of driving the War Rig, or rather, driving it correctly. Max attempts to drive it in the beginning of the film, but because he is unfamiliar with the litany of kill switches Furiosa has installed he fails almost immediately. The only

times when other people (Max and Nux specifically) are able to actually move around in it is when she allows them. She belongs to the War Rig, and the War Rig belongs to her.

In the film cars are not simply a way to facilitate movement through the desert. The mise-en-scene of most of *Fury Road* revolves around cars; whether they are driving over the sizzling asphalt, crashing into each other, or propelling other people forward in order to cause the fantastically chaotic death scenes, cars hold the focus of the camera from the beginning to the end. Even more importantly, the movement driving facilitates is not only the main driver for action in the film, but also a main aspect of character arcs. Not just the driver, but everyone who can fit inside or on the car uses the movement generated by the driver to reach their own destinations and goals.

A good example of this is Nux. When Nux is first introduced, he is hyper focused on being the driver and using his (steering) wheel, even though both his lancer and the Organic Mechanic keep telling him he is physically too weak to drive. The War Boys spray their mouths with chrome when they feel they are going to die to literally *become the engine*; they also have V8 engines carved into their chests, and their (steering) wheels are kept in a large shrine-like structure. It is the vehicle that can drive them (literally) towards honour, glory, and eternal life. Nux is also trapped in this, still stuck in his own commodification; he is convinced his life does not have value unless he dies on the Fury Road and McFeasts with the Immortan in Valhalla. Nux' journey goes from Max's stolen car to Furiosa's War Rig, to Immortan Joe's War Rig and back to Furiosa. Only when he starts to break free from the War Boy mindset, he becomes a part of Furiosa's War Rig crew, a part of the War Rig. This is visible in how he becomes a part of the fluid interplay between Max and Furiosa; Max beckons him to help fix engine one, and in front of our eyes, Nux shifts from cannon fodder to a real person.

All the elements analysed in this chapter serve to encode Miller's warning about our current lifestyle and its cost to the environment; the decaying desert wasteland, the overt dependency on fossil fuels and cars, the references to the nuclear disaster, the commodification the people are subject to under Immortan Joe. The framing of the Green Place as an Utopian heaven and the subsequent disheartening realisation it cannot be saved, combined with the return to the Citadel in order to build a better life at the place they came from serve as a proposed solution by Miller: we, people inside and outside the cinema, cannot turn our backs on our planet. This makes *Mad Max: Fury Road* a powerful film that draws attention to the devastating consequences of climate change. Even though it was not fully acknowledged during its initial release, the film is a call to action that should not be ignored, as we all have a role to play in creating a safer and more equitable world for ourselves and future generations. However, I will discuss the impact and message of the film in the conclusion of this work.

## Chapter 2: *Snowpiercer* (2013): Darkness & Desolation

From the infinite desertscape of *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), this analysis moves on to Bong Joon-Ho's icy wastes from his critically acclaimed 2013 film *Snowpiercer*. The film illustrates a world in which the remnants of humanity hide away inside a train, the Ark, that continuously travels around the world due to its eternal engine. It follows Curtis, and his attempt to rebel against the order created by the train's designer, Wilford. The film follows the rebels on their journey through the different compartments until they eventually reach Wilford and the eternal engine. This chapter will analyse *Snowpiercer* (2013) by using the same structural elements as in the previous chapter about *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), in order to decode the environmentalist message that is communicated through and reinforced by these elements.

When asked about key themes and images he wanted to keep from the original graphic novel, Bong Joon-Ho explains: "There are so many characters, but they're all stuck inside. They say they want to move to the front, and they fight to get there, but they're still ultimately inside the train" (Abrahams). This is exactly why the environment in the film is highlighted constantly as a direct threat to human survival (and even the survival of commodities before they go "extinct"); without the high stakes of imminent death outside of the train enables Wilford to exert the amount of control over the population that is stuck there. The focus of *Snowpiercer*'s devastating climate disaster does not lie on environmental degradation like in *Mad Max: Fury Road*, but rather the possible consequences of mankind trying to control the outcomes of climate change through geo-engineering. This means the effectiveness of Bong's warning lies within the horrific visuals of living under Wilford's biopolitical tyrannical technocracy; as mentioned before, the real apocalyptic dread the film explores lies in the survival of the people *inside* the train, and not the existence of the frozen corpses outside of it.

In the first section, the analysis will focus on landscape. For this film, that means both the train itself and the frozen world outside. The first part of the section will focus on how the entire structural design of the train propagates the extreme class division that forms the foundation of Wilford's ideal society. The second part of the section will concentrate on the usage of the Wasteland setting as seen in the elements of the icy remnants of civilization outside of the Ark, and how both these settings represent imminent death and utopic hope for a better future.

The second section of this chapter will deliberate on the contrast of these post-apocalyptic and utopian elements in both the imagery of the landscape and the train compartments, and the plot structure of the story itself. It will reconstruct the apocalyptic release of CW-7 and the subsequent struggle to board the Ark, with input from both the film and the comic book. It will explore the tension between two threads in the narrative: one seeking a warning tone of tragedy and cruelty, reinforced by the dark colour palette at the beginning and end of the film, and the other constructing a more hopeful and utopic tone, reinforced by the colour white.

The third section will analyse the economic and societal structures of the Ark according to Gerry Canavan's understanding of Necrofuturism. For the society part, Wilford's extremely hierarchical design of society will be viewed through Andersen and Nielsen (2018)'s understanding of Foucauldian biopolitics. I am using this interpretation of Foucault rather than the original lecture series "Society Must Be Defended" (1975–1976) because Andersen and Nielsen apply biopolitics directly to climate fiction.

### Landscape: The Whole Wide Train

One of the most intriguing moments of *Snowpiercer* is when it is the revelation that Wilford knew CW-7 was going to “freeze the world” (68). Wilford was so obsessed with trains that his wealth directly comes from his own “transportation empire” Wilford Industries. As we gather from “The Wilford Story” (the propaganda film shown to school children), this enabled him to gather the resources to build his luxury train, despite critiques of over-engineering. He wanted to connect “railways of the entire world into one” (68), which speaks to the amount of power and influence he had before the disastrous outcomes of CW-7. The train would make “a complete one circle [around the world] every year“ (68). The idea of the train becomes more suspicious when it is revealed that Wilford built it to be self-sustainable, even before realistically knowing what the outcome of the mass adaptation of the aerosol was going to be. As the teacher says: “Wilford knew something Old World People did not” (69). Has he doomed what is left over of humanity to this metal prison? Was he genuinely “prophetic,” or was he just another one of the world elite seeking to escape the environmental consequences of their own lifestyle? There is a clear connection here, for example, to Elon Musk presenting a colony on Mars as “the solution” to global warming, except for the extremely sinister suggestion that Wilford planned his salvation at the price of the destruction of human civilization. The Ark is the Earth to Wilford’s God complex, alluding to the eco-feminist critical tradition that has posited a direct relationship between the concept of a patriarchal and all-powerful God and the domination and exploitation of the environment (Lorentzen and Eaton 2002). The functioning of the train is dependent on him having complete control. This is especially visible in his rigid categorization of the structure of the train cars and his conceptualization of the train as a “closed ecological system” (63). I will now start my analysis of the train as the most prominent landscape featured in the film, using four sections as reference points: the Tail, The Prison, the Greenhouse, and the School Section. I will begin with the car we spend the most time in, The Tail.

### The Tail Section

The first part of the train we see from the inside is The Tail section. The audience is immediately confronted with how dark it is. This darkness, both in terms of lighting and in colour palette remains a defining feature of the Tail section in general if for one simple fact: there are no windows. Even when Andy's father's arm is frozen off as punishment for "forgetting his pre-ordained place" (18), the hole through which this punishment is administered is covered with a cap afterwards. According to Bong Joon-Ho and his production designer Ondrej Nekvasil they were inspired by "living arrangements in poor areas of Hong Kong and elsewhere" (Murphy). This references the impact of climate change on the already precarious lives of poor communities all over the world, and has also been a significant part of Joon-Ho's *Parasite* (2019). Apart from the dark palette and the degree of crowding, this inspiration is further translated to small bunk beds on top of each other, the repurposed trash serving as furniture or building material for limited structures and the



Figure 6: *Snowpiercer* (2013), 00:11:30

aforementioned lack of windows (interestingly, windows partly serve as a visual motif for class differences as well in *Parasite*, where the rich family has wide glass French doors and gigantic

windows, the poor working-class family has very small windows in their semi-basement apartment, and the family living under the house has no windows at all).



Figure 7: *Snowpiercer* (2013), 00:04:14

In the same *New York Times* article in which Bong and Nekvasil mention being inspired by living conditions in poor parts of Hong Kong, they also mention their backstory for how the Tail section was created: “When people moved in, they didn’t renovate the cars, so the inhabitants turned what was there into something liveable: storage shelves and containers converted into small, cramped bunk beds.” The *Snowpiercer* script describes a (pan-shot? montage?) through the Tail section as follows: “Tim leads us on a merry chase through the Tail Section, a slum crowded with multi-ethnic residents, giggling and holding his protein block aloft, through the cubbyholes, hung blankets, passageways, pipes...” (3). Note the emphasis on constructions in both quotes. This is because they are built by the inhabitants themselves. Wilford left them out in his design of the train. They were not anticipated to survive and/or come aboard the train at all. The inventiveness of their surroundings shows the inventiveness and drive to survive of the people in the Tail. Even though they have no real food, no adequate sleeping arrangements, no privacy, no silence, and no facilities at all apart from protein blocks and water, they survive. We can see this striking difference between being planned for and being an afterthought when we go outside of the Tail section.

### The Passages to the Front

The first section after the Tail is the prison section, where Curtis and his team free Namgoong Minsoo. It is very harrowing that even in the prison section, where people are either kept in small square cages or closed stainless steel drawers (like in a wardrobe), there is more light than in the Tail. There is also a switch in the colour palette; we go from dark greys, muted neutral tones and blacks to bright white and light grey, bright stainless steel and solidly build furniture. This switch reflects the difference between the two sections: while the darkness of the Tail is primarily used to communicate the hopelessness and depression of the “tailies,” the sterile and bright setting of the Prison Section is used to emphasize the complete control over the prisoners and the dehumanisation that imprisonment brings in this world. This point is further illustrated by the conditions the prisoners are kept in; they are completely at the mercy of Wilford’s regime. This is the first sign of the relationship between



Figure 8: *Snowpiercer* (2013), 00:29:36

class and environment found in *Snowpiercer*; while the prisoners are considered inhuman, or burdens to society,

at least they get designated, clean, well-lit spaces to be imprisoned in. The Tail does not even have that luxury.

From the Prison, the group enters a passage, where they encounter their first window. For young adults like Edgar, this is the first window they have seen in their life. Some of them even have to shield their eyes against the brightness of the sunlight reflecting off the snow. The reverent tone of the scene is strengthened by the fact that they wheel out Gillian to look through the window. Even though windows are a direct reminder of the catastrophe humanity has lived through, the increase in windows and natural light are used as symbols of possible hope, freedom, and progress throughout the movie. By using windows and light as a



Figure 9: *Snowpiercer* (2013), 00:35:46

visual motif, *Snowpiercer* highlights the extreme class divide explored by the film and the human desire for change and a better future, which ultimately leads to the destruction of the Ark

itself. I will further explore the utopic implications of the increase of light and the change in the colour palette in the Apocalypse section.

#### The Greenhouse and School Sections

The film further explores the relationship between class division and the environment in the Greenhouse Section. Even the introduction of the car in the script ensures to emphasize the contrast between the world known to the people from the Tail and the world they step into when they enter the Greenhouse: “WHOOSH - the Gate opens to reveal bright sunlight. Even the ceiling is made of a special kind of glass. Full of vegetation and plants, this Section is ludicrously clean; everything is a pleasant, mind-cleansing green” (61). The prison section was clean as well, but clinical and sterile. Here, the cleanliness of the train car, in tandem with the workers caring for crops and harvesting, seems to revolve around one of

*Snowpiercer*'s central ideas; that of (natural) balance. <sup>6</sup>The Greenhouse is where we first encounter the idea of a "closed ecosystem"; humanity (or Wilford) has managed to cultivate crops by presumably using fertilizer, seeds and water generated by the production and consumption chains within the train. This idea is later extrapolated from the food production and consumption chains to the human population inside the train, but I will analyse this further in the Economy section.

It is significant how Bong contrasts the sterile prison section, which seems to represent institutional efficiency because of its bright, neutral colour palette and its containment of prisoners inside sliding stainless steel drawers, with the lush riches of the Greenhouse Section. The section serves as a reminder of all that humanity has lost with the employment of the CW-7 aerosol, and even the outside world itself. We see this in the exchange between Nam and his daughter Yona:

NAMGOONG Touch it. You've never felt it before?

Namgoong hands the soil to Yona who is unimpressed and displeased. She looks carefully into the clump and notices something tiny moving in it: a small worm.

YONA Yeah, well, it's gross.

NAMGOONG You grew up in this train so you don't know. Dad used to tread on real soil all the time.

YONA Why would you walk on this gross stuff?

NAMGOONG C'mon, it's good stuff. The earth is covered with soil.

YONA (not paying attention) Like hell. It's all snow and ice.

NAMGOONG (looking outside the window) Below snow and ice is soil. Everywhere you go." (29)

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<sup>6</sup> The idea of natural balance and the "Malthusian nightmare" also comes up in the classic science-fiction film *Silent Running* (1972) in a similar manner as *Snowpiercer*, both in the 2013 film and the 1986 graphic novel.

Even something as banal as the soil of the Earth is a concept unfamiliar to those who had the unfortunate fate to be born as “train babies.” The artificial, sterile, mechanical landscape of



Figure 10: *Snowpiercer* (2013), (01:04:16)

the train is all they know. It echoes the scene where Edgar looks through a window for the first time, except Yona carries no reverence for the outside world; she is simply disgusted with it. It is too foreign, unfamiliar, and alien. However, the presence of

the Greenhouse emphasises the idea that humanity always needs a connection to nature, however artificially designed this may become. People consume nature to stay alive; humanity is a part of nature and nature is a part of humanity. While trapped inside the Ark, when one remembers the icy wastes outside, this seems at once a hopeful but terrifying realization.

Their journey through the Greenhouse section ends with Curtis and the rebels partaking in the bi-yearly sushi feast. As Mason explains:

MASON You people are very lucky. This is served only twice in a year, in March and September.

TANYA Why? Not enough fish?

MASON “Enough” is the wrong criteria. Balance. You see, this aquarium is a closed ecological system. The number of individual units must be controlled very precisely to maintain the proper sustainable balance. (30)

Notwithstanding the despicable fact that the first-class passengers enjoy luxury food products while Curtis and his people literally have to cannibalise each other in order to survive, this is

the first time that the controlled balance of closed ecosystems is mentioned explicitly. This serves as foreshadowing for the eventual reveal of the calculated encouragement of Tail Section rebellions by Wilford at the end; everything within the Ark is subject to the System,



Figure 11: *Snowpiercer* (2013), (01:07:29)

and the System must be carefully balanced for everything to extract the full potential out of one's "preordained position" (18).

From the Greenhouse, the focus moves on to the School section, where the complete indoctrination of the inhabitants of the train is fully explored. From the calm natural world of the Greenhouse, the audience suddenly enters a brightly lit, colourful elementary school-style classroom. Curtis and the rebels overtly stand out against the ominously cheery atmosphere, cleanliness and organisation of the classroom. They are clad in dark rags, grimy, desperate. However, the classroom atmosphere quickly becomes more ominous when the extent of Wilford's propaganda machine is revealed through the behaviour of the faceless schoolchildren; the synchronised gestures and catchphrases the children perform on command show how deeply both the class structure and Wilford's place at the top of the hierarchy are enforced in the *Snowpiercer* society. For example, when the teacher explains the Revolt of the Seven by examining the Frozen Seven, one of the children points out that the Seven "froze and died" (70). In that scene, the frozen corpses of the Seven are used as a didactic tool to ingrain the effects of leaving the train in the brains of the next generation:

TEACHER (excited) So, everyone! If we ever go outside the train?

CHILDREN We'd freeze and die!

TEACHER If the engine stops running?

CHILDREN We'd all die!

TEACHER Who takes care of the Sacred Engine?

CHILDREN Sir Wilford!

TEACHER Because all life is here - aboard the train, within the great embrace of Sir Wilford. And nothing can live outside the train. (70)

Wilford is their saviour; nothing he created can be flawed. Through these simple chants, the children are indoctrinated into internalising Wilford's justification for the system he has built within the Ark. However, there still is a genuine threat from the outside world; this is what complicates the issue of indoctrination slightly because technically, they are locked inside of the train for a good reason; leaving the train means a certain death. The outside will be explored in the next section.

#### The Wasteland: Outside the Ark

Unlike the scorching desertscape of *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *Snowpiercer's* wasteland is one of endless ice. Buried in the ice are the scars of human civilization, as the script illustrates with these descriptions of the landscapes that the train travels past every year: "The train races through the frozen snow plain. Then, a long-abandoned train station in a small town can be seen – on a platform are piles of corpses, frozen to death in the middle of a fierce struggle to get on the train to survive" (37). These frozen corpses are a yearly reminder of how precarious their situation is. After all, these people froze to death while they were fighting each other to enter the train. The cold air can freeze them within seconds, and, as Andrew's (Andy's father's) punishment shows, it freezes the human body severely enough to cause immediate, complete necrosis. Survival is not an option, which is stressed by scenes like when Wilford's hitman shoots several bullets through a window in the classroom, and the guards around him all scramble to plug the holes with children's clay. This ever-present reminder of this imminent threat to the lives of everyone who inhabits *Snowpiercer* shows

that in contrast to *Mad Max: Fury Road*, this wasteland does not play with evocations of (a) a spiritual journey; there is just death.<sup>7</sup>

The ice is not just deadly; it also seems like it has caused every freezing of time itself. The outside world has not changed apart from the ice that has descended upon it. As the script describes the landscape visible through a window: “The long-frozen landscape of the small town rushes past — overturned cars frozen in place, helicopters suspended where they crashed. A doomsday landscape preserved in the exact state of their final moments, flickers past without end...” (37). The world, abandoned out of necessity by everyone on the Ark, is literally frozen in time. This, however, also presents an underlying possibility of the “thawing” of time, of change, of a new world buried under all the ice; after winter comes spring. This is reinforced in the journey of Nam’s (the engineer) character; he has been observing the frozen corpses of the rebellious Seven in order to track the fall of snow and the different kinds of snow. This is ultimately how he realizes the temperatures are rising. By tracking the different kinds of snow and ice, he realizes that the time has come to break out of the Ark, and that

survival might be possible outside of the Ark. The contrast between the



Figure 12: *Snowpiercer* (2013), (01:11:29)

desolation of the ice

wasteland and the simultaneous hope that it provides will be explored more in the next section, Apocalypse.

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<sup>7</sup> See Doris Lessing's *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* (1982) for another example of this kind of complete freezing over of a planet, and its effects on the societies affected by this disaster.

## Apocalypse

Like *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *Snowpiercer*'s apocalypse takes place before the events of the story. However, like in *Fury Road*, *Snowpiercer* weaves in snippets of reactions to the apocalypse at the start of the movie. Before even the title card appears, the audience of *Snowpiercer* (2013) is confronted by the societal and political turmoil surrounding and after



Figure 13: *Snowpiercer* (1982), (26)

the release of the aerosol CW-7. As one of the news reporter voice-overs describes:

REPORTER (CONT'D) We are witnessing the very, the very, the very avalanche of a new dawn. Today will forever be known as the beginning of the end - the end of our long crisis; the end of our suffering and our fear; the end of the tyranny of global warming!

Goodbye, global warming. (1)

“Old world people” (people born before the release of CW-7 and life on the Ark) were

genuinely convinced it was an effective way

to combat environmental degradation. Their extinction event, described in the original graphic novel as “the white death,”<sup>8</sup> was welcomed. In the graphic novel, the cold is more akin to a nuclear winter: “the bomb [that] destroyed the climate...back then they reassured us the climate weapon was fully operational” (81-82), while in the film, the cause is articulated. Not the threat of war, but an attempt to solve global warming causes world governments to

<sup>8</sup> This can be interpreted as an intertextual reference to Edgar Allan Poe's *Masque of the Red Death* (1842). In the story, a rich aristocrat, Prince Prospero, locks himself and his friends up in a castle while a plague (the “Red Death”) ravages the rest of his lands. The story describes how a man disguised as “The Red Death” moves through the seven rooms in the Prince's abbey. Prospero eventually dies when confronting this stranger, but it is revealed that the costume the stranger is wearing is empty (presumably, this stranger is Death itself).

agree on releasing this aerosol. Their decision is not remembered favourably amongst the people who inhabit the Ark 17 years later:

YLFA Old World people were frigging morons who got turned into popsicles!

TEACHER Well, sort of. Mr. Wilford knew that CW-7 would freeze the world. So what did the prophetic Mr. Wilford invent to protect the chosen from that calamity?

CHILDREN (in a chorus) THE ENGINE!

The propaganda Wilford has (presumably) included in the curriculum facilitates a convenient social forgetting concerning the reason originally driving the disastrous event: in the Ark, there is no global warming, and there is (little) over-consumption. Most “train babies” have not even seen soil, which foregrounds the extent to which they have literally lost their



Figure 14: *Snowpiercer* (2013), 00:35:50

connection to the Earth as a planet entirely. All they know is the mechanical environment of the Ark. The scars of civilisation are visible anytime a character

looks out of a window; buildings, (air)ports, train stations and cities are all still there, buried under a layer of ice. The landscape forms a permanent reminder of all that was lost with the release of CW-7 and reinforces a vision of Wilford as a prophetic Messiah. Every survivor has to live constantly with the ever-present dread at the realisation that if something were to happen to either their direct environment (e.g. a window breaking) or the entire train itself, they are going to die.

Thus, the real apocalyptic dread in this film does not come from the destructive fabricated weather event, but from the very survival of this tragedy: Wilford's horrid new society that rose from the ashes from the old. This post-apocalyptic society is horrific because it exists. In the graphic novel, there is no real organized revolt, just one man from the train section moving to the front; the choice to make Curtis' rebellion another one of Wilford's meticulously planned events in order to keep the "closed ecosystem" in the train in balance emphasizes how control has permeated the fabric of Wilford's regime. From the very first introduction to Wilford's government, they are portrayed as measuring and cataloguing children, dehumanising the Tail to the point where guards mechanically follow orders (for example, in Andrew's punishment) and obsessing over order and individuals adhering to their "proper place" within this hierarchy. The people without the means to buy themselves a first or second-class ticket are confined to "the rolling ghettos" (29), and the imagery used for the Tail only strengthens this evocation of not just twentieth-century Jewish ghettos, but also concentration camps. Once in a while one of them gets brought to the front or to one of the



Figure 15: *Snowpiercer* (2013), 00:11:50

production cars to perform labour for the higher classes (i.e. the violinist from the very beginning of the film), without any form of

compensation. As Proloff, the

graphic novel protagonist, says: "If Hell does exist, then it's located back there" (96).

What makes Bong's vision of the apocalypse, its fractured aftermath, and the strict hierarchy that rises from the ashes so effective here is how he plays into what Stephen King

defines as the “phobic pressure points.” In *Snowpiercer* (2013), the “fairy-tale fears” seems to be the fear of being “frozen” in a perpetual cycle of preserving what remains of their old world order, in addition to scientific reports about a possible new ice age and about geo-engineering gone wrong. The train travels along one track for one year. The only “season” left is an eternal winter; the convoy is not just separated from the earth itself, but also from the natural cycle of the seasons passing. Within the train, people are compartmentalized on the basis of their social status and class in the old world, and there is very little to no social mobility visible in the film. This preservation is echoed in the revelation that Curtis’ rebellion is just one of many “repeated culling[s]” (McCarthy 73); what seems like an authentic call for revolution turns out to be just another product of Wilford’s design. The grim reality of surviving an apocalypse is the reason behind the climate trauma the characters in *Snowpiercer* exhibit. Climate trauma has come to be used to refer to the “wounding” that climate disasters enact on (human) bodies as well as entire ecologies (Richardson 1). It is, as Richardson notes, “traumatically affecting”, meaning it is harmful “not simply or solely to the everyday stuff of biological life but to the very constitution of experience and expression” (1).

In contrast to *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), in *Snowpiercer* (2013), (climate) pre-trauma is less relevant because of the sudden manifestation of the catastrophe, although one could argue that the pre-trauma consists of having to wait passively for world fear of experiencing the trauma of the radical destructive events that signify “not only the end of human lifeworlds but also the end of the meaningfulness of the concept of world itself: the world as a knowable, containable, definable entity can no longer cohere” (Richardson 3). This conscious experience of the end of the world causes resentment. We can see this resentment in the propaganda released by Wilford; calling Old World People “frigging morons” seems to translate the current perception of the previous generations. As Andersen

and Nielsen explain, “Implicitly, the system [in *Snowpiercer*] show signs of what Stephen M. Gardiner has called ‘intergenerational warfare,’ in which one generation consumes or manages resources in a manner that disadvantages subsequent generations (93)” (623). Curtis and his group of rebels are not only fighting a war with Wilford’s rigidly hierarchical regime, but also against the fate their ancestors doomed them to, in order to offer a better future for children like Timmy, Andy and Yona.

### Society In *Snowpiercer* 2013: Biopolitics

The previous analyses of Wilford’s society on the Ark above included his degree of rigidity and control. In this sense, Wilford’s ideal society dovetails with Foucault’s idea of biopolitics. Biopolitics is primarily concerned with the regulation of the body. According to Foucault, biopolitics focuses on “the power to foster life – or disallow it to the point of death ... Its task is to take charge of life that needs a continuous regulatory and corrective mechanism” (Foucault 144, qtd. in Ojakangas 6). This is visible in *Snowpiercer* (2013) in, for example, the treatment of the Tail section children by the train government. In fact, the treatment of the Tail Section as a whole lines up with Foucauldian ideas of biopolitics. As Andersen and Nielsen explain: “... biopolitics is coupled from the beginning to a Malthusian kind of nightmare where a lack of control of the living conditions of the mass will bring destruction into the collective<sup>9</sup>” (617). The film is steeped in examples of this line of thinking, from the manner in which the train is compartmentalised, to the way living resources are controlled aboard the Ark. As Wilford himself says: “We don’t have time for true natural selection - we would all starve waiting for that. The next best solution is to have individual units kill off other individual units. This is what I call manmade natural selection”(96).

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<sup>9</sup> An earlier example of an SF film which engages with a similar idea is the 1973 *Soylent Green*, an adaptation of Harry Harrison’s 1966 novel *Make Room! Make Room!*.

Wilford's biopolitical mindset is most apparent when it comes to his treatment of the Tail section. As Andersen and Nielsen explain:

From the beginning, it is clear that the biopolitical regime of the front-section regulates every aspect of life aboard the train, from arranging living quarters to providing food to continuing the preoccupation with population size through repeated head-counts of the lower classes. (621)

Even though it is reasonable to assume that Wilford exerts a certain measure of control over everybody on board, the film emphasizes the regulation of the Tail section. This is a significant departure from the original graphic novel, in which the Tail section is left to its devices after the government nails the doors shut. In *Snowpiercer* (2013), there is a constant focus on “continuous regulatory and corrective mechanism[s].” The audience is immediately confronted with the extent of commodification during the headcount in one of the first scenes



Figure 16: *Snowpiercer* (2013), 00:13:44

of the film; all the people in the Tail are counted, all information is carefully recorded and relayed before they receive food rations. In addition to this, the dehumanisation of this

biopolitical landscape is illustrated when one of the guards asks if there is an violinist in the section: “we just need your hands” (5).

By focusing on individual body parts instead of the holistic whole of the individual, Bong reinforces how in the tail section, and to a lesser extent the whole Ark, people are not seen “as individuals, but rather as biopolitical units in need of management” (Andersen and

Nielsen 622). A notable example of this is the scene in which Claude (Wilford's personal assistant) conducts a medical examination of all the children. As Anderson and Nielsen explain, "The act of measuring each child to see if it qualifies to be taken from the tail section negates the personhood of the children and instead places them within the economics of the regime" (623).

Attendance is mandatory; hidden children are pulled from behind their mother's skirts and dragged back to the front. Here, they are meticulously measured by Claude; even though her yellow coat is the first drop of colour we see from the film, it signals danger to the inhabitants

of the Tail section. They know some children are taken and never come back; they know Claude picks them. This underlines the structural dehumanisation Wilford's government employs; at the end it is revealed Wilford literally uses the children to replace "extinct" machine parts; the



Figure 17: *Snowpiercer* (2013), 1:51:01

children have become lifeless in his eyes, akin to resources like cogs in a machine.

This focus of the Tail section population as "biopolitical units" (Andersen and Nielsen 622) is emphasized even further by Mason's speech, after Andrew's arm is frozen off as a punishment for throwing a shoe at her when Wilford's guards take his son Andy. The shoe is placed on his head while guards methodically and clinically apply a salve to his arm to make the amputation of the necrotic tissue easier. Mason goes on to remind everyone that the people aboard this train "occupy preordained, particular position" (18); meanwhile she moves

her hands with the exact gestures the stolen children have to perform in order to keep “this locomotive we call home” (17) running. Mason performing these gestures while simultaneously stressing the words “preordained, particular position” shows just how much she views the Tail section as tools; as sources of children usable for the replacement of extinct parts, or as these extinct parts themselves. She ends her speech with the words “be a shoe” (18); once again her comparison to inanimate objects seeks to inform the audience how little Mason views the “Tailies” as human. This attitude of dehumanisation eventually culminates in her outburst after Curtis’ rebels advance to the first passage:

“You people, who if not for the benevolent Wilford, would have frozen solid 18 years ago today! You people, who have sucked on the generous tit of Wilford for food and shelter! And now... You pathetic stowaways, you repay his kindness with violent hooliganism? ...precisely 74% of you shall die!” (48)

Before the thought of rebellion could even occur to Curtis, Wilford’s government had already calculated exactly how much of the Tail section should be culled (evoking images of mountains of dead poultry victims of the bird flu culled to keep the population “healthy”) in order to keep their closed ecosystem in balance. This ultimately leads to the Tail section massacre, in which “precisely 74%” are shot in their own homes by weapons previously thought to be completely extinct.

#### Economy: *Snowpiercer* and Necrofuturism

As explained in the introduction, Canavan’s concept of “necrofuturism” concerns an “unhappy economic and ecological future that will emerge out of current trends...necrofuturism resigns us to a coming disaster we can anticipate but not prevent” (3). This is a part of the prominent thematic subtext in *Snowpiercer* from the beginning: the voice-overs of elated reporters in the beginning applauding a “solution to global warming” sounds like real-life, twenty-first-century wish-fulfilment. Methods like solar geoengineering actually exist and they often involve experimenting with aerosol release to cool the planet

(Deutsche Welle); Bong used the concept as a catalyst for a very real possible consequence of using these types of solutions, namely permanent planet-wide environmental degradation. As Canavan explains: “Necrofuturism premediates the unhappy economic and ecological future that will emerge out of current trends, but not in a register that suggests or nurtures alternatives; rather, necrofuturism resigns us to a coming disaster we can anticipate but not prevent” (3). As mentioned before, the disaster in *Snowpiercer* (2013) is not merely the CW-7 release event that froze the world, but also (or, rather) the experience of living through that event, and the subsequent lives under Wilford’s strict regime.

The core of *Snowpiercer*’s critique of necrofuturity is the depiction of necrocapitalism as “a deliberately constructed thing, rather than a law of nature” (Canavan 1); the survivors of the CW-7 could have rebuild their world in a myriad of ways, yet the old, capitalist, neoliberal ways took over. Maybe this is because of the Ark’s creator, Wilford, who clearly models the benevolent (technocratic) dictator role providing luxury for the higher classes, while Tail people are held in low regard for “[having] sucked on the generous tit of Wilford for food and shelter!” (Mason 48), even though the survival of the train depends on not just the bodies of their children, but also their own bodies (as seen in the figure of Paul, who replaces an “extinct” part too). In Wilford’s own words: “Thank goodness the Tail Section has manufactured a steady supply of kids” (106). As Canavan says:

*Snowpiercer*’s allergisation of the bleak prospects of late capitalism pushes us to recognize the necrofuture not as a historical inevitability or as an arbitrary law of nature but as a deliberately designed atrocity machine: someone laid the tracks, someone built the train, someone is even now driving the cars and stoking the engine (3).

The measure of design involved in *Snowpiercer*’s “atrocity machine” (Canavan 3) is especially illustrated at the end, when Curtis finally meets Wilford and the despot reveals to

him how all Tail section rebellions (including Curtis' own, dubbed the "Great Curtis Rebellion") have been designed by him to keep the population "in balance": WILFORD (CONT'D): From time to time, we need to stir the pot. Historically, my pot stirrings have taken the form of uprisings. The Revolt of the Seven. The MacGregor Riots... The Great Curtis Revolution! (96).

This "sense of designedness" (Canavan 23) is echoed in Wilford's attempt to transfer his biopower to Curtis. Wilford acts like both him and Gilliam have been training, designing, Curtis to take over Wilford's station all his life. This is why he was allowed to stay alive, to lead a group so far to the Engine, and this is why Gilliam has to die for betraying Wilford, but Curtis is allowed to stay alive. After the film came out, online communities joked how *Snowpiercer* (2013) is a post-apocalyptic Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, but this ignores the measure of absolute control Wilford does not only exercises over the population within the Ark, but with the help of Gilliam, he exercises directly over Curtis himself. All the key

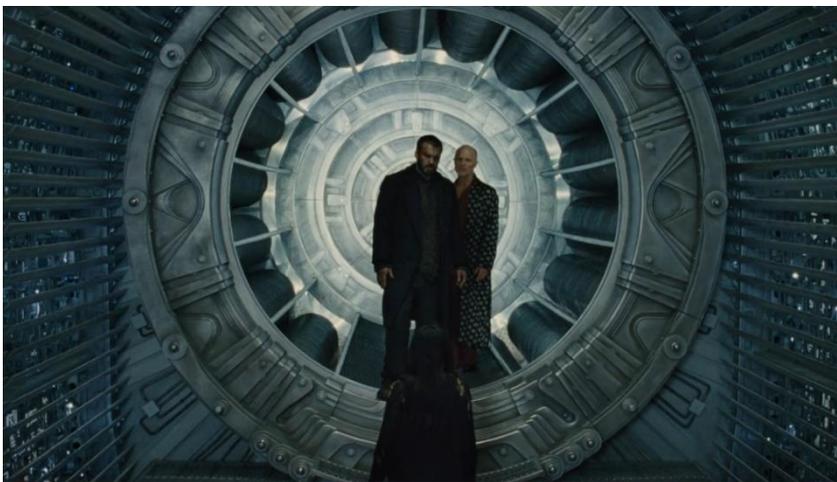


Figure 18: *Snowpiercer* (2013), 1:50:38

actions "Curtis' Rebellion" has taken up to this point has been informed by both Wilford's secret messages and Gilliam firm guidance; necrofuturism is "a horror that has been deliberately designed for us and which is

being actively managed by the powerful" (Canavan 23). This is why, at the end of the film, "the only genuine choice left available to us is Namgoong's: the radical refusal of our scheduled route." The only way to lift the "curse of necrofuturity" (Canavan 21) is to construct an alternative future that imagines a new way of life outside of "liberal capitalism's

doomed structures of power” (Canavan 21). Thus, *Snowpiercer* proposes that the only way in which we can remove the systematic causes of climate change is by destroying them. I will discuss the impact and message of the film in more detail in the conclusion of this work.

## Conclusion

This thesis has shown the extent to which *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) and *Snowpiercer* (2013) give intentional warnings to their audiences about climate change through showing the effects of environmental degradation and natural disasters on the landscape, socio-economic structures of these films, their conception of guilty parties and the proposed solutions to the issues these proposed guilty actors have caused. In order to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the topic, I will now review the central arguments and findings presented in this thesis. The subsequent sections will highlight the main arguments presented in this thesis, ordered by the same structure used in the analytical chapters.

### Landscape

#### Mad Max: Fury Road

The landscape section of the first chapter shows how deserts have become symbolic for the destructive consequences of anthropogenic climate change; approximately one-third of the Earth is directly threatened by desertification. In *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), the desert is a representation of the ravaging effects of climate change and environmental degradation. This is a contrast with the mystical allure of the desert, which is often associated with spiritual journeys in literature. In *Mad Max: Fury Road*, the characters' spiritual desert journey is subverted as they realize they are unable to physically cross the salt plains, after they discover the Green Place has died. Instead, their growth and agency come from turning back and confronting their challenges to create a better future where they originated.

In addition to this, the desert dehumanizes its inhabitants. Both the desert bandits and the people living at the foot of the Citadel blend with the landscape, reflecting the merging of people and environment. This merging signifies the disproportionate impact of climate

change and environmental degradation on the impoverished populations of the global south. The struggle for survival becomes the predominant focus, leading to a loss of empathy and reduction of life to basic needs.

The desert wasteland depicted in the film is not simply a barren desert but also a polluted world. The absence of plant life and limited animal presence indicate the devastating effects of radiation poisoning resulting from the thermonuclear conflict. The roads in the desert are portrayed as veins, enabling the survival economy between the Citadel, Bullet Farm, and Gas Town. However, the tangled roads also evoke a sense of disorientation and depersonalization.

Overall, the wasteland setting in *Fury Road* symbolizes the intersection of extreme environmental conditions, exploitation, trauma, and deprivation. It reflects the consequences of anthropogenic ecological changes and depicts the dystopian social structures that arise from the control of resources, enforced by violence. The film serves as an emblem of the Anthropocene, representing irreversible changes to the planet's geography caused by human actions. In addition to this, through the desert setting, *Fury Road* evokes images of the Global South, an area which is disproportionately affected by climate change and environmental degradation. Thus, Miller highlights the interplay between systems that exploit the environment and systems that exploit humanity, in order to address current systematic destruction outside of the film, like humanity's over-reliance on fossil fuel and subsequent environmental degradation.

## Snowpiercer

In the landscape section of the chapter on *Snowpiercer*, the train's landscape is divided into sections, including the Tail, the Prison, the Greenhouse, and the School Section. The Tail section is the first part of the train seen in the film and is characterized by darkness, overcrowding, and a lack of windows. It is inspired by the living conditions in poor areas of Hong Kong. The inhabitants of the Tail section have transformed the train cars into liveable spaces using makeshift furniture and structures. Despite the harsh living conditions, they demonstrate resourcefulness and survival instincts. Moving forward through different carriages, the film transitions to the Prison section, which is brighter and cleaner than the Tail section. The contrast in lighting and color palette reflects the difference in control and dehumanization between the sections. The prisoners are kept in small cages or stainless steel drawers, highlighting Wilford's regime and the class divide.

As the rebels progress through the train, they encounter the Greenhouse section, which is filled with vegetation and represents a closed ecological system. The cleanliness and balance in this section reflect the importance of nature and the need for a connection to it. The Greenhouse serves as a reminder of what humanity has lost and the desperate conditions outside the train. After this comes the School section, which is a brightly lit, organized classroom where the indoctrination of the train's inhabitants is explored. The children are taught to idolize Wilford and believe that life outside the train is impossible. They are conditioned to accept the system and the class structure.

All this stands in contrast to the world outside the train, the landscape is a frozen wasteland covered in ice. The frozen corpses of people who fought to enter the train serve as a reminder of the constant threat and the harsh conditions. The outside world is frozen in time, preserving the remnants of human civilization. The landscape in *Snowpiercer* explores

contemporary anxieties around fighting climate change; after all, the underlying cause for the icy wasteland (and thus, the justification for the existence of Wilford's Ark) is a failed attempt at combating global warming through geo-engineering. Overall, the landscape in *Snowpiercer* reflects the class divisions, control, indoctrination, and the struggle for survival after a devastating natural disaster that changed their world forever.

## Apocalypse

### Mad Max: Fury Road

The "Apocalypse" section of the chapter on *Mad Max: Fury Road* highlights the dystopian elements represented by the post-apocalyptic desert wasteland and the oppressive rule of Immortan Joe's Citadel. The scarcity of resources, harsh social-economic hierarchy, and severe radiation poisoning contribute to a bleak existence for the inhabitants. In addition to this, the section also decodes how the apocalypse in the film was not solely caused by weapons and violence but rather resulted from the rapid exploitation of the Earth and its resources. The forces responsible for this devastation are identified as hypermasculinity, capitalist resource exploitation, and authoritarian control. This was further explored in the section on Society and Economy.

In contrast to the dystopian setting, the Green Place symbolizes a utopian ideal throughout the narrative. It is depicted as a haven of abundant nature and a place of hope for the characters, particularly the wives and Furiosa. The Green Place represents an escape from captivity, redemption, and a sustainable future. The women of the Vuvalini, who reside in the Green Place, advocate for agriculture and a culture of cultivation, contrasting with the violent culture perpetuated by Immortan Joe's clans. However, the Green Place's existence is later revealed to have been eradicated, leaving behind a sense of environmental nostalgia and the realization that no safe paradise remains. This realization prompts Max and the group to turn back towards the Citadel, acknowledging the need to confront and address the issues in their

immediate environment rather than chasing escapist fantasies. Overall, the cyclical nature of the film highlights humanity's shift towards addressing real-world problems rather than seeking imagined utopias, while underscoring the transformative impact of actions taken within one's immediate surroundings.

*Fury Road* clearly places the blame with the rigid, patriarchal society Immortan Joe has created, in addition to the rapid commodification of vulnerable populations like Milkers and War Boys/Pups, and necro-capitalism. The success of these systems is built on the desperation of the population following the nuclear event that “killed the world,” events that are all based on real-life equivalents; as stated earlier, oil and water conflicts have already happened, and are still happening all over the world. In addition to this, there are real-world parallels to be found in *Fury Road*'s depiction of exploitation and necro-capitalism. Because the post-apocalyptic society is so grounded in the real world outside of the cinema, Miller's post-apocalyptic society shows audiences a poignant warning of what could happen.

### Snowpiercer

*Snowpiercer* (2013) presents a post-apocalyptic world where the release of the aerosol CW-7, intended to combat global warming, instead freezes the planet and leads to the near extinction of humanity. In the Apocalypse section of the second chapter, it is explained how the film's true horror lies in the oppressive society that emerges on the Ark. The train is divided into social classes, with the privileged occupying the front and the oppressed confined to the tail section. Wilford, the creator of the train, maintains control through dehumanization, strict hierarchy, and meticulous planning. This is highlighted by the dehumanizing conditions in the Tail section, reminiscent of historical ghettos and concentration camps, as well as the reveal that the rebellion led by the protagonist, Curtis, is

revealed to be part of Wilford's orchestrated design to maintain control. This reveals the extent of control permeating Wilford's regime and the lack of social mobility within the train.

In addition to this, the concept of climate trauma is explored, demonstrating how the characters suffer from the constant fear of survival within the limited environment of the train. The perpetually frozen world and the separation from natural cycles accentuate their plight. Moreover, intergenerational warfare is examined, with the rebellion representing a struggle against the fate imposed by previous generations. Curtis and his group aim to create a better future for subsequent generations, challenging the oppressive regime and the societal structures that have disadvantaged them.

*Snowpiercer* emphasizing themes of control, hierarchy, trauma, and the fight for a better future. Through analysis of the apocalyptic release of CW-7, and its aftermath, it confronts the audience with the terror of living under Wilford's post-apocalyptic, technocratic regime. In contrast to *Mad Max: Fury Road*, there is a significant absence of utopian imagery in *Snowpiercer*, except at the ending. The ending shows audiences Nam's judgement about Wilford's over-designed society that reinforces old-world models of exploitation, and simultaneously, Curtis arguably wasted quest of trying to reform this society; all attempts at change are futile, unless one is prepared for the complete destruction of the existing way of life. Thus, the film prompts reflection on issues of power, social inequality, and intergenerational responsibility in a world literally frozen in time and space.

## Society and Economy

### Mad Max: Fury Road

In *Mad Max: Fury Road*, the economic structure mirrors the consequences of current systems and lifestyles. Immortan Joe convinces people to view themselves as resources and commodities. The lack of property and basic human rights leaves humanity in a state of

conflict and competition. The characters in the film, particularly the Wives, struggle with the commodification mindset, but eventually, they reject it. By recognizing their inherent worth as human beings and forming positive relationships, they overthrow Immortan Joe and make vital resources available to everyone.

Another aspect explored in the film is the role of cars and the combustion engine. The film depicts a future where cars and oil play a crucial role in ecomobility, the way human bodies navigate the Earth's ecosystems. Cars become a symbol of humanity and a means of survival in the apocalyptic wasteland. The merging of humans with machines, as exemplified by Furiosa and her mechanical arm, highlights the dependence on cars and the fluidity between human and machine. Cars are not just vehicles for movement but also drivers of action and character development in the film. The characters' journeys and goals are intertwined with the movement facilitated by cars.

There are many parallels between the commodification of human bodies, and the car-dependence depicted in the film. For example, there is a tension in *Fury Road* between the glorified extreme car-stuns and combat on the screen, and the constant implicit messaging about the cost of “guzzoline” on their environment; after all, the earth has “gone sour,” and clinging to these fossil fuels will only exacerbate this degradation of the environment and the soil. This tension is echoed in car culture in Western countries; even though awareness of the cost of fossil fuels on the environment is widespread, cars are still perceived as a status symbol. This is referenced through *Fury Road*'s SUVs, which are lavishly upgraded for showy combat and to communicate the status of the owner of the vehicle.

Overall, *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) illustrates the necrofuturistic view of a society shaped by destructive capitalism, commodification of human beings, and a heavy reliance on

cars and oil. The film raises questions about our current systems and lifestyles, urging the audience to reconsider their values and take action.

### Snowpiercer

In the Economy and Society section of the second analytical chapter, the themes of biopolitics and necrofuturism in *Snowpiercer* (2013) are explored. The society depicted in the film aligns with Foucault's notion of biopolitics, particularly in the treatment of the Tail section, where individuals are treated as biopolitical units in need of management. The Tail section, representing the lower classes, is subjected to continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms. The government controls various aspects of their lives, such as living conditions, food distribution, and population control. They consistently dehumanise the Tail section by treating them as commodities and resources rather than individuals.

Wilford's government measures and assesses the children in the Tail section, again, treating them as economic resources rather than individuals with rights. The economy section of the chapter explained how the film criticises its own internal system of necrocapitalism, as a deliberate construction that perpetuates capitalist and neoliberal practices even in a post-apocalyptic world. The survivors of the global disaster could have rebuilt society differently, but the old economic systems prevail. Wilford, as the creator of the train society, represents the benevolent dictator who provides luxury for the upper classes while exploiting and devaluing the Tail section. The survival of the train relies on the labour and bodies of the Tail section, who are viewed as dependent on Wilford's generosity.

The film emphasizes the deliberate design and control behind the society's atrocity machine. Wilford orchestrates rebellions to maintain population balance and exercises control over Curtis, the leader of a rebellion against the oppressive regime. The concept of necrofuturism in the film highlights the horror deliberately designed and actively managed by

those in power. As stated before, the true warning of *Snowpiercer* cannot be found in the devastating apocalyptic event of the release of CW-7, but in the struggle to survive in the society built by Wilford in its aftermath. The conclusion suggests that the only way to escape the curse of necrofuturism is to imagine and construct an alternative future that challenges the structures of power in liberal capitalism by destroying the “old-world” way of life. Thus, the film encourages a radical refusal of the predetermined path and envisions a new way of life outside the doomed structures of power.

All these elements together are separate parts of the same warning uttered by Miller and Boon in these movies; if society continues existing in the way it does now, eventually the earth will look like *this*. By unpacking the nuanced portrayal of climate change in popular modern science fiction blockbusters in each analytical chapter through the landscape, concepts of apocalypse and utopia, and societal and economic dynamics in their post-apocalyptic society, the effectiveness of this

As mentioned in the Economy section of Chapter I: *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), the society in the film is shaped around Miller’s imagined life in “the endlessly rehearsed landscape of death and disaster that dominates contemporary visions of the coming decades” (Canavan 3). Everything in the film highlights this pessimistic vision and aims to illustrate this vision; from the endless desert wasteland with its threat of radiation poisoning and the pain Furiosa feels when it is announced the Green Place is long dead, to the half-feral state in which Max, and the Wretched of the Citadel, exist in, which stresses how much of humanity one has to give up to even have a chance at surviving in this world. The literal commodification of human bodies as blood bags, Breeders and Milkers, in addition to the film’s explicit focus on cars and oil show that Miller explicitly points towards “capitalism’s [continued] unsustainable and immoral practices even as those practices become more and

more destructive and self-defeating” (Canavan 1) as a cause for the water and oil wars which serve as a precursor to the nuclear disaster which “killed the world” we see in *Mad Max: Fury Road*.

Considering one of the inspirations for the film was Melbourne’s oil strike, these causes are directly linked to our modern day society outside of the cinema. This is why “Who killed the world” is the central question of the world in *Mad Max: Fury Road*, and according to Miller, it was all of us. Even though Nux chants “We are not to blame,” Miller frames this as a moment of reflection for the audience: even though separate individuals are not to blame for the state of the world, this does not mean there is not a “collective responsibility” (Eckenhoff 99) to at least attempt to right the wrongs of the previous generation(s). We too, should turn away when realising that our idealised eco-paradise does not exist, and turn back to where we came from, in order to improve our world in real tangible ways, like the Milkers releasing the water from the Citadel at the end of the movie.

The film presents a more radical solution than Miller’s *Mad Max: Fury Road*; instead of allusions to personal responsibility and agency, *Snowpiercer* argues that the only true way in which we can battle climate change is by either abandoning or destroying our current systems of capitalist exploitation. As Canavan summarises:

“The point of the film is not to work out the inner logic of some possible future but rather to disrupt our guilty comfort and our comforting guilt about the actually-existing system we all know is terrible but think we cannot oppose” (20).

This is why it is imperative the train is destroyed at the end of the film, in order to illustrate it is in fact possible to (radically) oppose a system that seems all-encompassing, ubiquitous and eternal. This is why the landscape of *Snowpiercer* is a frozen wasteland; it is waiting to (be) thawed. As Bong himself explains

“[Nam] just wanted to blow up one train car. It’s the avalanche that kills everyone else. It’s the revenge of nature, if you will. Also, avalanches are most prevalent in March or April, when the snow is slightly softer, just like in Nam’s dialogue. That’s when avalanches happen, usually” (Abrahams). Everyone who contributed to the old system, from engineering it like Nam to unwilling participation through literal cannibalism by Curtis, has to die in order for a real possibility for a new world. In the analytical chapter of *Snowpiercer* itself it is explained how all the elements of the landscape, the view on the foundational apocalyptic event itself after 18 years, and the societal and economic structures reinforce the systemic exploitation of subjugation to Wilford. This subjugation itself has become a conditional for survival in this world, and Nam ultimately frees everyone by destroying it. *Snowpiercer* forces its audience to not just think of climate change in terms of environmental degradation, but also resource distribution and, as Miller calls it, “architectures of power.”

Instances of audiences not decoding the environmental messages of both films have been examined briefly by this thesis. Future research into encoding of environmentalist messages in contemporary popular science fiction could include researching to which extent audiences decode the message(s) of these types of films in the way that they have been encoded, through for example, quantitative reception analysis research, since the fact that general audiences originally did not exactly decode the messages might point towards the possibility that eco-cinema only reaches the audiences which are already convinced of a necessity for action to save the environment.

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