

## Science Fiction Films of the Eighties: *Fin de Siècle* Before Its Time

John Beard

Talking about the future automatically dooms one to failure of one kind or another. Even if a prediction comes true, many will doubt it until the event itself occurs, and the very best predictions often fall short when compared to the actual reality of thirty or forty years later. Perhaps Céline was thinking of this poor track record when he wrote, "Those who talk about the future are scoundrels. It is the present that matters. To evoke one's posterity is to make a speech to maggots" (Beck 828). However, another kind of future exists besides a historical probability: not the future as a prediction (what *will* happen) but the future as play (what is fun to imagine *might* happen).

After all, we human beings operate not only with a historical past as our guide but with possible futures planted somewhat firmly in our minds. This "future" is only a hypothetical construct—an imaginary window through which we see ourselves many, many years from now—but such a "future" can seem almost as comfortably real to us, at times, as the actual facts of the past. Each individual grows accustomed to seeing this "future" in a particular way. Certainly, our versions of the historical past are also constantly edited, re-sorted, or forgotten; they change with age until the facts of history become somewhat different from the past as *we* wish to remember it. Just so, our hypothetical "futures" undergo progressive renovations and sudden revisions of their own. Futures change.

Quite naturally, science fiction films, which often shoulder the responsibility of presenting possible futures, have traditionally reflected and even helped promote some of these changes. American audiences, especially, have appropriated the future as their own, and Americans seem comfortable there. Evidently, the conquest of a New World, the establishment of a revolutionary new government followed by expansion across a great continent, and the eventual exploration of space have all encouraged a proprietary view toward the future. There is an assumption that the United States *will* be a part of it all. Almost as if it were a demo-

cratic birthright, roughly equivalent to free speech and the right to vote, many Americans think they own the future (or at least they used to), and American films have certainly promoted favorite imaginary futures from time to time.

Still, many cinematic glimpses of tomorrow from the 1980s are quite different from those of previous decades. From 1980 to 1990, the imaginary vision of the future that dominated American film turned almost universally dark, broken, and decaying—and audiences *loved* it.

When science fiction films are examined one year at a time, these changes may not appear very dramatic; they become evolutionary—not revolutionary, but if one skips ten years and looks at them, then skips ten again, important shifts appear. For example, consider the futuristic movies of the Fifties. As any science fiction fan sifts through his or her list of “cult classics,” two similarities appear, no matter what the film might be. It could be *Destination Moon* (1950), *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), or *Forbidden Planet* (1956), but the look would be streamlined and the plot would emphasize the very mixed blessings of advanced technology. As critic Marc Mancini points out, smooth, featureless rockets or sleek silver saucers reveal little about the new science that empowers them but a lot about the art directors who designed them for the movies. Such spaceships were conceived by illustrators who had no other means of visualizing tomorrow’s machines today except as extensions of that era’s own marvels: the jet plane and the atomic generator. Most futuristic visions from the Fifties, according to Mancini, have become legend or joke, not fact, because “movies are, like all artifacts of prophecy, deeply rooted in the soil of their times” (12). A true Space Age was just beginning, but movies about the future already had to project beyond it, and audiences grew comfortable with the look until the “real thing” came along.

*Forbidden Planet* makes a good example. Many years in the future, mankind has finally perfected faster-than-light travel and journeys to distant planets for colonization and research. The film opens with a shot of a large flying-saucer-type spaceship which is propelled by the harnessed energy of a nuclear reaction, and it lands on the “forbidden planet” while buoyed by a beam of light. This science works like a magic charm. However, such sophistication is tarnished when two enormous (and clunky) staircases descend from the craft so these future astronauts can deplane. They have landed in order to rescue the stranded scientist Dr. Morbius and his daughter, as well as the other members of a colony that has been isolated there for years. The good doctor has not been idle; his discovery of the technology left behind by the ancient Krell civilization once native to that planet has enabled him to increase his mental capaci-

ties and borrow a few of their lesser marvels: like Robbie the Robot, an obedient jack-of-all-trades. The Krell must have been supreme scientists but, unfortunately, awful psychologists. They developed machinery that would enable them to immediately translate their thoughts into physical reality, but when they unleashed the power of their conscious minds, they unwittingly unleashed their primitive and destructive ids as well, and they were destroyed. In just the same manner, Morbius unknowingly destroys the other members of his colony and almost destroys the visiting astronauts when his secret resentment toward them is manifested in an id-monster that seeks to drive them away from his forbidden planet. Thus, Krell science proves to be too much of a good thing. Mankind must evolve even further, evidently, before such marvels may be controlled.

Movie audiences of the Fifties enjoyed several variations of tomorrow, but the imaginary future in which most felt at home was usually up in the air, or rather up in the skies or in outer space. Smooth rockets and saucers demonstrate the extrapolated development of jet planes and aerospace technology, and cowboy-explorer America is once again conquering a strange new frontier. There were warnings and limits to what this science could or should do, especially about the possibility of nuclear horrors, but few doubted its power. This new science promised an almost magical future, including new angels *and* demons.

The more complicated technology of the Sixties and early Seventies demanded quite a different look. The actual rockets launched by NASA only faintly resembled those streamlined beauties of the Fifties, and flying saucers became jokes. In an age of real satellites and space labs, a time when man finally set foot on the moon, it seemed that our imaginary "future" must contain ever larger and more powerful versions of these present-day marvels. Movie audiences were seeing and touching technology as it developed within the everyday structure of their lives, and a real computer revolution simultaneously expanded and complicated our visual imaginations. Quite simply, a more sophisticated, forward-looking audience demanded a more realistic and detailed future.

By the early Seventies, the future-of-popular-choice was often represented by the huge and detailed starship that dwarfs the old rocket in both size and particulars, slowly filling the screen from top to bottom as it lumbers into our consciousness. One immediately recalls the great warships of *Star Wars* (1977) or the huge greenhouse ships of *Silent Running* (1971), but before these came to be, Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) had to exist. Once on the silver screens of America, *2001* quickly became the model for future films about the future—encouraging realistic detail and extensive use of what appeared

to be almost working models of machinery that could outdo even the actual complexity of a real machine revolution. Once again, as in the Fifties, science is presented as a mixed blessing, and the technologically complex but sterile (and somehow threatening) white-on-white environment of the HAL-controlled spaceship in *2001* offers the familiar warning that too much of a good thing can be frightening.

Still, audiences loved the look of this technology. *2001* was the future made real for us, and all the movies that followed had to contend with it. The future had changed. Computers, space science, and astronauts were more familiar to us, and we demanded a certain verisimilitude and exactness from these films. Computers may threaten our control and aliens intervene, but hope still seems to lurk around the corner as the "star-child" embryo fills the screen at the end. Why, then, do the films of the future made during the Eighties want to change these rules? Two particular films help define the nature of this change: John Carpenter's *Escape from New York* (1981) and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982). Both present a bleak future where cities and people are decadent and decaying, where hope is a precious commodity best saved for other times or forgotten altogether—nothing good is waiting around the corner.

In *Escape from New York*, New York City of the near future has been turned into a walled maximum security prison where only the most incorrigible criminals and violently insane are exiled to life sentences without parole. No one ever gets out. However, since the President, by chance, has crashed within this prison, the authorities bargain with an incoming prisoner named Snake Plissken (Kurt Russell) to retrieve the President in return for a full pardon, and Snake flies in under cover of darkness to begin his quest.

Once the action moves inside prison New York, the audience is introduced to a blasted and blighted cityscape that looks as though a war has been fought and lost on every block. Once-great skyscrapers—now gutted and lightless—look over incredibly cluttered streets where fires burn out of control and scattered inhabitants stand ready for instant violence. Snake must literally descend into Hell to retrieve the President from this urban nightmare. He does eventually escape with his prize in tow, but he also destroys the cassette the President carries, an audiotape which is supposed to contain the last hope of avoiding some impending war. The images that remain afterward are ultimately more powerful than the story itself. Viewers feel as if they have seen a bit of the future, and it is a Wasteland.

*Blade Runner* moves us to the west coast of America and presents a future Los Angeles of about thirty years from now. Unlike Carpenter's

prison of New York, Los Angeles is not dead yet, but it is diseased and dying, full of bad growths and strange mixtures of old and new technology. Recently-retired "blade runner" (i.e., android killer) Deckard (Harrison Ford) is forced out of retirement to hunt down four escaped Replicants—artificially created humanoids who are much stronger and potentially smarter than humans, but programmed with only a four-year life span. These four have returned to earth illegally to seek a cure for their mortality. Deckard must sift through gritty street scenes as he trails them across the bowels of this choking future city, successfully executing three before the fourth one unexpectedly saves his life and then dies.

Although reviewers often faulted aspects of the script and the acting, many praised *Blade Runner* for its look. In fact, as Pauline Kael points out, the city itself steals the show:

The congested-megalopolis sets are extraordinary, and they're lovingly, perhaps obsessively, detailed; this is the future as a black market, made up of scrambled sordid aspects of the past—Chinatown, the Casbah, and Times Square, with an enormous and mesmerizing ad for Coca-Cola, and Art Deco neon signs everywhere, in a blur of languages. ("Baby" 83)

A few enormous pyramids containing the rich and powerful rise above the murkiness of groundlevel existence, but on the street the future is confusing, dark, and claustrophobic. All white, middle-class residents seem to have moved elsewhere, leaving behind an ethnic miasma of divergent sights and sounds composed of "poor, hustling Asians and assorted foreigners, who are made to seem not quite degenerate, perhaps, but oddly subhuman. They're all selling, dealing, struggling to get along; they never look up..." ("Baby" 94).

Director Ridley Scott has explained that he was seeking some look that produced a "sense of overload." He wanted to put an audience into a city of the tangible future, a city "which is in a state of overkill, of snarled-up energy" (Kennedy 68). Most of the new technology (where it exists) must be added on or layered over the old, so buildings and machinery mix old and new to create a strange and somewhat threatening vision of future techno-junk. For example, instead of renovating old buildings from the inside out, air, water and light are pumped from the outside in through conduits and tubes which snake up the sides of decaying structures. Imagine a flickering computer console and other electronic components sitting in a haunted house, water dripping from the ceiling and wind whistling at the windows. Syd Mead, one of the conceptualists employed by Scott to develop this look, calls it "retrofitted utilization," where technology cannot replace the old but must be slowly

added onto it instead, the old constantly being refitted with some of the new (Mancini 13). Harlan Kennedy calls it "Scrap-Heap Futurism" (65), while Kael labels it "retro-future" (84), but all refer to this same strange mix of old and new.

*Escape from New York* and *Blade Runner* present a soon-to-be future where the sins of the present have come home to roost. These cities of the future have not escaped the current problems of pollution, violent crime, and apathy, nor have they tried to meet these issues head on. Instead, these once vibrant and growing cities have slumped into decay and death, sagging under their own weight, and the average resident seems to be both victim and cause. The immediate future appears to be either Wasteland or Junkheap, and survivors must make do with less.

Perhaps the ideal example of this trend toward a junk future is not an American film at all, but George Miller's *The Road Warrior* (1982), as well as the later *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome* (1985). These Australian films did much more than propel Mel Gibson to international prominence; their success in America helped solidify Scrap-Heap Futurism as *the* way to view the future. Miller's art director, Graham Walker, produced the now famous images associated with these films. Trapped in a post-apocalyptic tomorrow, Max (the eternal loner) wanders a real Wasteland in search of fuel for his retro-fitted auto, encountering many savages on motorbikes but only scattered remnants of civilization or functional technology. Everyday objects still exist, but they have been put to radically different uses. Football shoulder pads become armor, kitchen utensils become weapons, and an automobile fender is a watering trough for animals. In broad daylight on a baked desert, Miller dramatically presents the same dead-end future that Scott details so chillingly in the mist and darkness of midnight (Kennedy 65).

This is not to say that futures weren't threatening before the Eighties. Indeed, ever since the atomic bomb became an accepted reality, all our possible futures have contained an element of danger (mutated ants, alien slime, body snatchers, etc.). However, Robert Sandels points out that future-oriented societies (like ours) must struggle to invent new futures when atomic destruction forces them to consider the end of the future (150). Most of these earlier warnings were quite harsh, as if to say, "You will either learn from this lesson or perish." For example, in *The Omega Man* (1971), society has been destroyed by plague, but the lone survivor (Charleton Heston) has the immune factor in his blood. Hunted by a fatalistic cult of plague-blighted and dying humanity, Heston is finally killed and his blood spilled for naught—a Christ figure that never redeems.

Again, in *Soylent Green* (1973), future humanity seems doomed, forced to feed upon itself in a constant search for new food sources in an

over-populated world. The impossible overcrowding in the streets is handled by bulldozers and dump trucks, and only the very rich have space enough to live or enough food to eat. Heston, once again, plays hero—a police detective who must move through the various levels of this failed society to eventually discover the fatal cannibalistic secret of “soylent green,” a new commercial food source secretly developed from the protein harvested from dead humans. Here, as in several films of the Seventies and earlier (*Silent Running*, *Rollerball*, etc.), the warning is obvious: mend your evil ways in the present or face retribution in the near future. Such films take an audience to the brink of apocalypse in order to frighten us back to sanity.

In contrast to these futures of dissuasion, however, the imaginative vision of the future in the films of the Eighties was not a warning. They asked to be taken as fact. As one critic puts it, audiences were asked to treat “this grimy, retrograde future as a given—a foregone conclusion, which we’re not meant to question. The presumption is that man is now fully realized as a spoiler of the earth” (Kael “Baby” 83). Such futures were based on extrapolation of present trends, and our worst fears were often realized in film. Bad news is all the news that’s fit to print, and directors did not ask audiences to *prevent* this future from happening. Instead, here *is* the future, like it or not...and now for the rest of the story.

Films like *Escape from New York* and *Blade Runner* represent the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Besides James Cameron’s *The Terminator* (1984)—which also presents a bombed-out future but one where humanity is driven to the edge of destruction by flesh-clothed killing machines—consider this same trend toward a similar future in movie after movie of lesser quality. These films lack the creativity of design or the budget to match the look of a *Blade Runner*, but cheaper versions of apocalyptic futures and junk technology attest to the popularity and commonality of all such futures in the audience’s imagination. Films such as *Spacehunter: Adventures in the Forbidden Zone* (1984), *Metalstorm: The Destruction of Jarred Syn* (1984), *Def-Con 4* (1986), *Trancers* (1986), and *Cyborg* (1989) all use the same punk wardrobe and realistic-seeming junked science of the more expensive films. Mismatched warrior clothing, retro-fitted weapons, casual violence, and a general aimlessness are associated with characters who are dominated by post-apocalyptic bitterness as they wander about on seemingly hopeless quests through bloated future cities or shattered Wastelands. Lacking the polish and flash of a *Road Warrior*, these lesser works must make do with stock formulas of a future which an Eighties audience evidently came to accept and enjoy.

Why this joy? It is unlikely that most Americans suddenly turned fatalistic about the future during the Eighties and masochistically chose to contemplate a private dance with death. No, audiences really enjoyed these films. They *chose*—in the form of repeated ticket sales and popular acclaim—to accept this bleak and grimy tomorrow as their imaginary future home. At least in their imaginations, as play, the audience felt comfortable accepting this as entertainment, a source of enjoyment, but what made it fun?

Of course, there is always the “I-told-you-so” payoff. It may seem a grim satisfaction, although satisfying nevertheless, to see mankind at its worst—even worse than now. As Pauline Kael would have it, a good portion of the audience is more than a little “pleased by this view of a medieval future—satisfied in a slightly vengeful way” (“Psycho” 84). It is almost as if we are thinking, “I just knew they would screw it up. Of *course* this is the future, if the future depends on the fools who are now in power. They thought they were so smart, but look at what’s happened. *I knew it!*”

Also, the energy of decay displayed in these films can have a certain appeal. After all, something has to first be alive in order to decay and die, and some of the swarming cities of this possible future, choked and poisoned as they are, still twist, stink, and burp like live things. The possibility of re-birth lurks within the death throes of any such future civilization, and audiences evidently preferred this to a casual acceptance of things-as-they-are. Even when residents are down on the very idea of the city and what it may become, they can still enjoy “the punk fantasies about how swollen it is, how blighted and yet horribly alive” (Kael “Psycho” 84).

Indeed, an odd vein of optimism exists under the guise of seeming nihilism in these films, similar in its appeal to the energy of punk rock at its best; reminding us of the original impetus for the punk movement during the early Eighties. John Lewis explains, in the *Journal of Popular Culture*, that “punk was the celebration of resignation...anomie as artistic impulse,” and it promoted an unusual brand of “aggressive egalitarianism” where everyone is the same because of the fact that everyone is worthless (90). According to Lewis, punk surfaced “as one last desperate attempt for white, urban, lower middle-class youths to dramatically express their distaste for a society that had long since expressed its disinterest in them” (87). Mohawk haircuts, pierced noses, cheeks and breasts, and ripped clothing were outward signs of such internalized rejection. The point was to disgust mainstream culture—to give it something that it couldn’t commercialize and consume. By the late Eighties, however, the initial raw edge of this rebellion had long



since disappeared, ironically but fatally absorbed into popular fashion and then forgotten, but it left audiences with something of a taste for the ugly underside of western culture.

In an imaginary Scrap-Heap future, at least this underside is finally out in the open, and most of the old traditions are discredited or destroyed. *All* rules are broken, so it must be time for new rules. The emphasis is now placed on the individual, not the group, and each individual (whether it is Max in the desert or Snake in New York) must reinvent the world without the overt control provided by the veneer of "civilization." Such rebellion can be hopeful. *The Terminator* promises a future where humans, if they do survive, won't get fooled again into depending on machines to do their thinking or their warring for them. *Escape from New York* gives us Snake Plissken who puts personal survival first, ahead of God and country, but this particular imaginary country and its vengeful God seem particularly deserving of destruction. Most members of the audience would probably trade Plissken for the President and his whole Cabinet. Likewise, *Blade Runner* posits human beings being taught lessons in humanity by androids, but who is Deckard to question the source as long as the lesson is valid? Audiences may have enjoyed this retro-future because of the implied rebellion in it.

Also, in a visual medium like film, never overlook the power of style. The popular "punk" style of clothing and even the watered-down, co-opted and commercialized "punk" music of the Eighties closely corresponded to the atmosphere of movies like *Escape from New York* or *Blade Runner*. Movies of apocalypse and urban decline, therefore, became politically correct and stylishly in vogue. Deckard's raincoat and cropped hair, the Terminator's motorcycle jacket and fatal shades, and Snake Plissken's black latex and Army surplus are as much at home in rock videos as in the imaginary future. And how can Tina Turner's songs be divorced from *Thunderdome* or the Vangelis background separated from *Blade Runner*? The musical support further emphasizes an important stylistic connection. World War III may have come and gone, the City may be in its final stages of choking decline, and perhaps machines are going to rule the world, but—damn—don't we *look* good? Right on the cutting edge of cool.

Beyond style and rebellion and irony, however, all of these films also present a future where humans still exist. Science fiction films of the past were occasionally utopian, more likely cautionary, often stopping at the brink of apocalypse—never extending much beyond to see what, if anything, may be on the other side. That is, after all, one aspect of apocalypse—nothing is left. During the Eighties, however, the unthinkable became ever more thinkable, and audiences seemed willing

to accept visions of life *after* the fall, more futures after the death of our present future. In some fashion, absolute destruction seemed less absolute. Perhaps the world is not quite as fragile as we once feared. The problems that characters encounter in these artfully constructed cinematic futures are immense, but humanity still exists to contemplate them. True, much of life as we know it has been swept away or buried under loads of decay, but enough of human nature remains with which to identify.

Compared to the very real fear of *no* future at all, a dismal prospect more than hinted by dreams of nuclear nightmare, these films hold out to audiences new futures that contain some humor and occasional glimpses of continuation. Humans die, but they don't die out. It does not seem to frighten audiences as much that big mistakes might be made; they already have been made, but we still endure.

Finally, perhaps the most hopeful idea to come from these films concerns our attitudes towards science itself. Not so very long ago, science fiction films presented science as a marvelous, magical toy. It could and sometimes did perform all kinds of miracles for us, but average individuals never really controlled science. Sometimes scientists were in control of it, but the demon was just as likely to turn on Faust as it was to grant his requests. Like magicians, scientists might hand us mere mortals a lucky talisman (like a cure for polio) or tell us one of their simpler spells (how to use a word processor), but whenever we were given a truly powerful or sophisticated bit of their magic (like nuclear energy), it seemed always beyond our control to know how or when to use it.

In films, science frustrated us. Often it represented a pure power, not evil or benevolent in itself, but capable of doing great good or truly terrible evil in the right hands. Thus, whenever directors attempted to picture the uses of science in the future, they often treated it like unexplainable magic and represented it as an elemental power of the universe—a power often manifested in light: future landscapes used to be bathed in it and machinery often exuded it. These fictional alien machines and devices appeared as models of simplicity worked out in elegant designs that revealed none of their internal complexities. Perhaps such future technology *had* parts—tubes, wires, crystals, something—but these were beside the point. Science fiction films and their characters were not supposed to tamper with these things' innards; they were simply there to be used, like magic lamps. Characters touched them and were delivered a miracle.

Consider the many examples of supposedly advanced science from the future as they appeared in the science fiction films of the Sixties and Seventies. What does it usually look like? For myself, I have difficulty

imagining any device more sophisticated than the black obelisks which appear in *2001*, and they have no working parts whatsoever! Likewise, whenever I review old *Star Trek* episodes (from the television series), I can always tell which technology is more advanced because it appears in the form of a magic pyramid, or sphere, or square or some other geometric shape that flickers or beams pure energy which can scatter matter to atoms, or transform atoms into forms—whatever you will—and all at the blink of an eye. These machines may be activated by touch, or sound, or thought, but nothing so mundane as a switch or dial will do, and the simple elegance of their “advanced” design easily puts them out of our reach.

However, in the science fiction films of the future which appeared in the Eighties, technology seems to have a much more practical purpose, and it is usually far from elegant in its design. In fact, exposed circuits pop and spark, conduits drip loose cables and lubricating fluids, and machines often break down or need to be reformed into newer (although junkier) versions. The technology is accessible. In fact, in many of the post-apocalyptic films, technology is subject to greasy hands, patching, mechanical manipulation and innovation on a daily, if not hourly, basis. Machines are certainly *not* magic. They may be necessary for one’s luxury or even crucial to immediate survival, but characters know something about how these machines work and when they will fail. In most cases, the machine, no matter how miraculous it may occasionally appear, cannot replace the human mind that maintains it. Instead, these future machines are like animals that must be bullied or teased into performing for men, but man knows he cannot depend on them.

Truly, the future science portrayed in these films does not seem quite as threatening as one might expect. *We*, in the audience, seem not as threatened by it. It is not so much that we now understand the technology with which we must deal in all aspects of our daily lives (we mostly do not), but people today seem to have a little stronger belief in their own ability to improvise and adapt to it. I do not understand how a word processor works, but I can use one to type this sentence, and if the machinery fails, I can fall back on my old Underwood typewriter—or even a pencil. Good old common sense might just prevail, and today’s junk might actually turn out to be a gold mine during some future decade.

In a way, Scrap-Heap Futurism does battle nihilism. Audiences like to see a spirit of improvisation at work, the cat landing on its feet no matter how high it has been thrown for a loop. Perhaps it represents a nostalgia for some lost frontier spunk, or it may just be another sign of rebellion against the conformity promoted by rampant consumerism, but

it seems a healthy development. The multi-layered buildings and choking streets of *Blade Runner* and the junkyard city of *Thunderdome* share the same basic appeal. Rats and junkyard dogs may not strike one as very appealing icons, but both represent the grudging respect Americans have traditionally awarded mongrel determination—the bulldog grip that holds on and won't let go.

All this fascination with and enjoyment of a dark and decaying future is not totally negative. Directors and audiences alike have now had the opportunity to vicariously work out several problems in these films. Science as magic is an idea that probably should be discredited, and perhaps the energy of decay needs to be exploited. Many now feel that some radical changes must be embraced in order to give birth to any possible future that can "save" us from ourselves, if, indeed, we do need saving. The violence found in post-apocalyptic movies has also been over-analyzed by critics. The films of the Eighties took such violence as a given—brain candy for this generation of viewers. Once past this fictionalized violence, the real issues appear.

Audiences can now imagine themselves past the Apocalypse, living in a world of change and confusion, but still alive and kicking for years to come. That punk future seems alive with possibilities (if also vaguely threatening) and much to be desired when compared to the imaginative poverty offered, unfortunately, by much of contemporary culture. Perhaps American audiences have already had their brush with *fin-de-siècle* despair and disappointment. We had our end-of-the-century confrontation at the movies during the Eighties. Now the Nineties seem a new beginning, and our dreams about the future will have to change once more. If an apocalyptic future is not quite as likely, then what will take its place? Are audiences ready to move out of that Wasteland—along with Max—into newer and more hopeful worlds? Ask yourself that question again in thirty years.

### *Works Cited*

- Beck, Emily Marion, ed. *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*. 15th and 125 editions. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980.
- Blade Runner*. Dir. Ridley Scott. With Harrison Ford and Rutger Hauer. Warner Bros., 1982.
- Escape from New York*. Dir. John Carpenter. With Kurt Russell and Lee Van Cleef. Avco Embassy, 1981.
- Forbidden Planet*. Dir. Fred McLeon Wilcox. With Walter Pidgeon and Anne Francis. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1956.

- Kael, Pauline. "Baby the Rain Must Fall." Rev. of *Blade Runner*. *The New Yorker* 58 (12 July 1982): 82-85.
- . "The City Gone Psycho." Rev. of *Batman*. *The New Yorker* 10 July 1989: 83-84.
- Kennedy, Harlan. "21st Century Nervous Breakdown." Rev. of *Blade Runner*. *Film Comment* July-Aug. 1982: 64-69.
- Lewis, Jon. "Punks in L.A.: It's Kiss or Kill." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 20 (Summer 1988): 87-97.
- Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*. Dir. George Miller. With Mel Gibson and Tina Turner. Warner Bros., 1985.
- Mancini, Marc. "The Future Isn't What it Used to Be." *Film Comment* May-June 1985: 11-15.
- The Omega Man*. Dir. Boris Sagal. With Charleton Heston and Anthony Zerbe. Warner Bros., 1971.
- The Road Warrior*. Dir. George Miller. With Mel Gibson and Bruce Spence. Kennedy-Miller Entertainment, 1981.
- Sandels, Robert. "UFOs, Science Fiction and the Postwar Utopia." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 20 (Summer 1986): 141-51.
- Soylent Green*. Dir. Richard Fleischer. With Charleton Heston and Edward G. Robinson. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1973.
- The Terminator*. Dir. James Cameron. With Arnold Schwarzenegger and Linda Hamilton. Orion/Hemdale/Pacific Western, 1984.
- 2001: A Space Odyssey*. Dir. Stanley Kubrick. With Gary Lockwood and Keir Dullea. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1968.

**John Beard** is Director of Freshman Composition and Associate Professor of English at Coastal Carolina University in Conway, South Carolina. He teaches courses in twentieth-century American literature and contemporary fiction.