What effect does the mise-en-scene of Mad Max Fury Road and George Miller's cinematography and editing style have on the audience and the film itself and how is it done?

The film scene I have chosen to analyse is a scene from Mad Max Fury Road. This film came out May 15th 2015 and is directed by George Miller who had already previously directed the three previous Mad Max films. The film is set in an apocalyptic world where civilisation has collapsed and the land has been taken over by furious warlords. The reasons I chose this film was because from start to finish the film is visually spectacular. The staging and effects (which are mostly practical. This results in the film looking much more realistic and grounded) are something that I have never seen done in a movie in quite such a beautiful way ever before. The film scene I have chosen from Mad Max Fury Road is a segment from the final chase which focuses on a large scale car chase between the main protagonists Max and Furiosa (Tom Hardy and Charlize Theron) the film’s main antagonist Immortan Joe and his followers. I chose this scene because while it is a great climax for the film's story, the scene itself is also an aesthetic treat for the eyes and a great example of ‘chaos cinema’ which has a great effect on both the film and the audience (which is what I will be exploring).

The elements of my chosen Mad Max Fury Road scene I have chosen to analyse is the cinematography and mise-en-scene. I have chosen to analyse this because I believe this film has one of the most unique cinematography (and editing) styles ever seen in film, which includes a disorientating group of extremely fast cuts that can be so frenetic you will miss it if you blink. This film scene has also been edited in a way which can have a great effect of making the audience feel uncomfortable but at the same time making sure they have the best viewing experience possible. An example of all of these factors can be seen right at the beginning of my chosen scene. In the scene we get a sequence of the film’s main character attempting to crash her truck into the back of one of the antagonists other vehicles. In this one four second sequence we get a total of five different frames and cuts all of which are zooming shots. This amount of cuts and frames in such a short space of time can have a great effect of increasing the tension, and with the zooming there too (which can have great effects such as empowering performance and the scene itself), a roller-coaster effect will be created. This technique of speeding up short sections of action is seen throughout my chosen scene and it does exactly what Miller would have wanted it to do right from the start, which is to disorientate the audience but amaze them at the same time. In fact this film’s cinematography and editing style is actually so unique Miller said that he didn’t think anyone would be able capable of editing Mad Max Fury Road.

One of the great things about the cinematography (and editing) of this scene is that although there is so much going on in each individual frame (which would only stay on screen for a very short space of time) director George Miller and cinematographer John Seale still managed to make sure we the audience consumed and took in all the important features of each individual frame. But how was it done? Well I noticed when these great action sequences are taking place the most important feature of the shot (e.g. a character) is always centre frame. George Miller and John Seal would have staged the frame in this way because centre framing allows our eyes to follow all the main action and take in the most important parts of the frame without having to move our eyes. For example in the scene I have chosen there is a section of shots which cut between characters Furiosa, Max and Nux, during these frames the individual character is always centre frame. This is something director George Miller describes as “Speed reading movies” – our eyes picking out the most important bits of the frame. And it is very useful for a film such as Mad Max Fury Road which has as many as 2,700 cuts, the centre framing allows our eyes to always be in the right position at the right time.
But what if something is moving in the frame? Well this is the director and cinematographer using eye tracing and motion to control the focus of our eyes. For example in my chosen scene we get a wide shot of Max being attached to the top of a pole, this pole is swinging from the bottom right to the bottom left of the frame, this is directing our eyes to the main point of the next frame. So our eyes will follow Max from the bottom right to the bottom left across the screen, getting our eyes ready in the correct position for the main point of the next frame - which will take place in the bottom left of the screen.

Mad Max’s mise-en-scene and especially in this scene does a great job and representing the films world. The vehicles of this scene all give off a very apocalyptic feel. The way they have been designed by the production team makes them look as though they are all made up of different types of previously destroyed cars, which comes together to give them a rather intimidating and monstrous appearance which is a really large representation of the apocalyptic and broken world of Mad Max Fury Road. The setting of my chosen scene is a very large lifeless dystopian desert. This very vast setting gives the audience a sense of no escape for the characters. The desert setting itself is made up of a rich orange and brown but dry collection of sand and dirt and a crisp bright blue sky. Although this aesthetic setting does an exceptional job at representing the films world and story it also does an exceptional job at keeping the focus much more on the characters and vehicles which results in the overall aiding of the action scenes and increasing their presence on the screen. The colours of this dystopian desert create a pure contrast with the colours of most of the action sequences. For example we get frame of a large orange explosion descending from the back of a truck and on the left a man in a bright red suit playing a fire blowing guitar. The colours of the bright orange explosions, the bright red suit and the fire from the fire blowing guitar really stand out in a vibrant way when compared to the films desert surroundings. This gives these action sequence a new dose of life and makes them even more visually outstanding for the audience.

The figure expression and movement is also another key part of the mise-en-scene of Mad Max Fury Road. The figure expression of a character of any film gives a real insight into their personality and emotions and in the case of Mad Max Fury Road the world around them too. The performances of this scene that I believe gives us the biggest insight into the story and characters and creates the greatest emotional effect is the performances of the actors playing Immortan Joe’s followers. The way the followers act in this action scene, makes us as the audience question their sanity and the story itself. They all jump from car to car with what looks to be no fear and so much ruthlessness. Instead of walking they leap and crawl and when they do walk it doesn’t look very human like, it is much more animalistic. This is also so shown in their facial expressions and their physical appearance, all the followers are topless and are covered in white paint, and they all look very similar in appearance which makes them almost look like minions or slaves, which can scare or unnerve the audience. These appearances also help develop the other characters in the scene, for example Furiosa has none of the cultural white paint applied to her, this represents her and the other characters cultural separation and this separation between a hero and their culture is a traditional hero stereotype. The speech codes of the followers also represent how humanity have almost gone in reverse with their Shakespearean style speech and their strong religious mind-set. It is these performances and factors that really represent the true nature of the films story, these followers and unique style of body codes and speech represent what has happened to humanity and how they have lost their way, sense of society and sanity. This really creates a much more of an emotional effect for the audience and can enhance both the interpretation of the story and setting of the movie.
Another setting of this film which is included in my scene is the car of Mad Max and Furiosa. This one small car contains approximately seven people and the way it is filmed by George Miller gives the frames which take place in the car a very claustrophobic feel. With the use of close up shots and George Miller staging the characters in the car a certain way which results in not much space being left in the frame, a very cramped and claustrophobic feeling is created for the viewer which may also make them feel a bit more uncomfortable and increase the tension.

So after a full analysis of my chosen Mad Max Fury Road scene, I can now identify a range of techniques director George Miller has used to enhance the films story and style while also creating a great emotional effect for the audience and giving them the best viewing experience possible. These techniques include a great use of centre framing and use of motion to control our eyes, which helps the audience experience everything in the frame the best way possible. George Miller has also made great use of colour and setting throughout this scene, with the very plain dirt brown and crisp bright blue sky setting being used to make the action sequences and characters stand out in a more visually outstanding way. George Miller also uses close up shots and a great use of choreography to give the film scene a large sense of claustrophobia, which at the same time can make the audience feel uncomfortable and increase the tension. And through the followers’ dialogue (which he wrote) and their body movement a better interpretation of the story and setting is created for the audience. And finally with the use of great editing and cinematography George Miller and cinematographer John Seael make great use fast cuts and the power of a zoom to disorientate the audience, but while also showing off the mad kind of world Mad Max Fury Road is set in through camera movement and technique which is rather a rather “mad” thing to do. But by the end of the scene, this all comes together to create an incredible spectacle of a film scene while improving the way the story is told, which overall has large emotional effects (from tension to claustrophobia) on anyone watching it.