

Styled In Time: The Poly-Temporal Post-Apocalyptic Adventures of the *Mad Max* Film Series

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To steal a phrase from Richard Lanham^[1], when we watch movies for the first time, we tend to look through them into narrative rather than at them for meaning. To look at them, to pay attention to their surface, to their aesthetic details, usually takes multiple viewings. The siren call of narrative progression is just that hard to resist. When we watch movies multiple times, however, we can start seeing the ways that abstract concepts like temporality function within them. We also begin to see the different ways that our own acts of vision interact with what flickers by on the screen. Laura Mulvey pioneered this second meaning in seeing with her groundbreaking "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."^[2] Her article forced scholars to revise how we read film texts. She made us see the ways that the female form has been objectified by classical Hollywood cinema styles. She pulls focus back to *at* vision to reveal hidden meanings in *through* narrative. Using her groundbreaking text as a foundation for my own readings, I was able to look again at how the figures in George Miller's *Mad Max* film series function beyond the simple storylines in which they are involved. Re-envisioning Max's body shows us how it, and the ways it is styled across the series, actually tells time in these post-apocalyptic texts.

Just as Mulvey's work has been central to my seeing these films, so too has Teresa Heffernan's work with the post-apocalyptic been in understanding what I see. In her book, *Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Twentieth-Century Novel*,^[3] Heffernan examines some of the ways that the post-apocalyptic is a result of and response to postmodernism. More to the point, she posits that postmodernism itself grativates toward the post-apocalyptic, just as modernism moves toward the apocalyptic in the classical Greek sense. Modernism built its faith on the apocalyptic notion that "the end will offer up revelation";^[4] postmodernism is the result of that faith misguided. Likewise, the post-apocalyptic is the stylistic expression of that disillusionment. I further that argument here, demonstrating how the genre explores the death of History and capital-T Truth through highly stylized temporality.

What I have noticed, after rewatching the *Max* movies in response to Mulvey and Heffernan, is that Miller has created an intricately compounded temporality. Each film contains a distinct chronology within it; they could all function as individual narratives divorced from the others. When taken as a whole, though, the series creates another timeline that incorporates the chrono-realities of the individual films into complex whole. It is only through taking another look at the Style of these texts that we can begin to see how time plays out across them. Given that critics working with the *Max* movies focus overwhelmingly on the narratives of the films and how Max Rockatansky is constructed as Hero (or anti-hero as it were), I think it especially important that someone focus attention at the screen rather than through it, away from the story of the films and onto their Style, because their stylized temporalities complicate viewing audiences's relationship with the movies and with the post-apocalyptic itself.

The apocalyptic, for critics like Hegel, was about the "end" of history, that all progress trends toward one final goal of civilization. Upon reaching that goal, the revelation of Truth at the heart of apocalypse, civilization reaches its terminus: the story has been told in full, ie History as the expression of Progress. The post-apocalyptic is, then, the story of life after Truth. It is, in many ways, the expression of the death of Progress. The *Mad Max* series takes us through the death-rattles of Truth and into the Wastelands of the unknown that trail behind Progress' wake. As Heffernan states, Max lives "in a time after the apocalypse, after [a] faith in a radically new world, of revelation, of unveiling."^[5] The films and their accompanying comics, however, also seem to engage with the modernist notion of apocalyptic history, understanding "loss as existing alongside the historical archive, further complicating the desire to unveil"^[6] via the figures of the History Men and Women. These figures are the keepers of culture and of lore. They remember the past and reveal it to new generations. Their stories are the folklore of the Wastelands, built upon cyclical patterns of recognition and remembrance very different from the Arthur Eddington's Arrow of Time view of history.^[7]

Our first example of a History Man appears through the opening narration of the second film.^[8] He preserves the story of Max as a folkloric, as opposed to historic, figure. Savannah Nix carries on this tradition at the end of the third film, continuing The Tell of Max for another community.^[9] This storyteller role is officially formalized in the comics series accompanying the fourth film.^[10] A History Man guides the varrious narratives through a framestory and confirms that Miss Giddy, from the fourth film, is also a History Woman.^[11] Their full-body tattoos act as folklore bookmarks, the "wordburgers" covering their flesh reminding the storytellers of lore to be preserved and passed on. But their stories are not reification of modernist History; they are not narrative plots but rather cyclical rememberings. They challenge even postmodernist despair that sees "apocalypse as the story of renewal and redemption displaced by the post-apocalypse, where the catastrophe has happened but there is no resurrection, no revelation. Bereft of the idea of the end as direction, truth, and foundation, [critics like Adorno and Baudrillard instead would claim] we have reached the end of the end."^[12] The cycles of The Knowing, the bouncing stream of one wordburger to another in The Tell, resists the linear push of progress and history that lead to the end of the old world for *Max*. Elements of history are retained as their original contexts are shed. The apocalyptic sense that events and cultures build onto each other in a steady line toward a revelatory end is replaced by the notion that things repeat and come back. As the History Man reminds us, in *Max*'s world, storms are always on the horizon because they have always been on the horizon.^[13]

This eternal returning, replete with Nietzschean laughter in the face of familiar-if-different storms, contrasts with the linear cinematic plots found in the *Max* series. It is a contrast, however, that highlights the connections, parallels, and contact points between an apocalyptic passage of time and a post-apocalyptic interpretation of time. One does not exist without the other in George Miller and company's vision of the world to come. Much like Heffernan notes of Derrida's discussion of The Post, Miller unites the contained-by open-ended storytelling/memories of his History Men and Women in narratives open "to all possible directions, none of which can claim the right to the end" while also being inextricably bonded to Max as through-line.^[14] Together, Max and the History People create a sense of temporality in the *Max* series that unites both the apocalyptic and the post-apocalyptic, Modern and Postmodern, historic and folkloric. The storytellers can explore any given wordburger on any occasion and re-create entire civilizations, but it is Max's body that carries the literal marks

of those civilizations.

The internal logics of the first film, *Mad Max*, [15] establish the temporality of the filmed narrative as relatively close to the real world temporality of Miller's filming time. The opening titles claim that the movie takes place "a few years from now." [16] The movie's set and character design [17] also, and perhaps more effectively, relay this sense of a not particularly distant future. As the costuming in this film is less ostentatiously highlighted than in the other films, much more closely resembling the trends of 1979's filming time than the set design's slowly decaying Australian Gothic does, I will focus first on the buildings and landscapes represented in *Mad Max* before backtracking into the importance of costume Style. In fact, it is this set design that most quickly and efficiently suggests the sort of low-level apocalyptic backstory of the first *Max* movie while the impact of character design is exponentially amplified in its sequels.

Landscapes act as shorthand in this first film, showing rather than telling about the ways the world has changed "a few years from now." The vistas Max and his fellow characters travel through are green and vibrant, if dusty. He and his wife drive down a still verdant coast. The land of Australia is alive, though the empty spaces and unkempt buildings suggest that the society constructed on that land may be no longer thriving. It is a landscape easily recognizable to *Mad Max*'s late 20th-century audiences. What are less familiar are those unkempt remnants of human civilization dotting the seemingly endless roads in this movie. The few people in this sparsely populated country still live in and use the buildings from a time before whatever conflict occurred actually happened, even if the movie never specifies why the near future looks so bleak; those people just cannot maintain or no longer care anymore to bother with all of those old places. One key film set in *Mad Max*, the Hall of Justice, is literally falling apart. Walls have collapsed, fittings have rusted out, and dirt and trash cover pretty much everything still standing. What makes the set design really stand out, though, is how little attention the characters pay to this decay. They treat their surroundings as perfectly normal, and the time lapse suggested by that normalcy sells the initial timeline posited by the title sequence. Audiences in 1979 could reasonably believe that this was a world not so very distant from their own.

This brings us back around to character design. Much as the film characters' disregard for the crumbling landscapes signals to audiences "this is not your time," so too does the general costume design. The ancillary characters (like Jessie, May, the lawyers) and the featured extras (like townspeople and various drivers along the highways) are all styled in fashions lifted directly from more realism-based genres of late 20th-century film. The heroes, though, (and, to a lesser extent here, the villains) signal that *Mad Max* is both a piece of speculative genre work and one that shifts temporality ahead of its audience's chronology.

The members of the Main Force Patrol wear uniforms/costumes that are more highly stylized, and more highly sexualized, than traditional police attire. Their skin-tight black leather pants and close fitting baby blue t-shirts visually align these characters with real-world trends popular in the gay leather scenes of the late 20th-century. Much has already been made of this particular depiction of masculine sexuality. [18] What has been overlooked in the broader *Max* scholarship about the homoerotics of the MFP's styling, however, are the ways that such style functions temporally. Specifically, the uniforms help establish the internal chrono-reality of *Mad Max* by visually suggesting that the markers of a small sub-culture in the late 1970's have become so passé as to pass into the mainstream and become literally institutionalized. What was once risqué is "now" the domain of government. While *Mad Max*'s original audiences could not have been privy, audiences watching the movie nearly 40 years later can, through hindsight, see how the counter-culture trends on display in the movie were to become mainstreamed in popular culture as "real" time progressed. The prescience displayed by Miller and Griffin in creating the futural-potential uniforms is astounding. They not only recognized which fashion trends would take root in the broader Western culture, they also positioned those same trends as the co-opted cultural artifacts that they would become during the space between *Max*'s filming and *Max*'s filmed future. Those uniforms, *Max*'s in particular, also function to establish a temporal link between the *Max* films themselves. While our first full shot of him in the movies is of his naked (save for a strategically draped towel) body displayed as whole and unscarred [19], the leathers *Max* wears throughout the rest of the series are figuratively, and in some cases literally, a heavily marked second skin for him. Their soft gloss black surfaces provide a palette for the scars, shreds, and tears that will come to inscribe his figure. As his second skin fractures apart, *Max*'s body becomes the calendar for marking the passage of time within each individual film and through the series as a whole.

In *Mad Max*, his body transitions from smooth and nubile to stressed and fractured: his broken arm signaled by the torn leather of his sleeve, his shattered thigh heralded by a tourniquet (white cloth against black leather, both stained red with blood). These wounds follow *Max* to *The Road Warrior*. The opening sequence of the second film begins with an image of a visibly broken and bruised *Max* standing atop a hillcrest. Though we later realize that this image, chronologically, comes from the conclusion of the second film's plot, *Max*'s body still bears the scars of the wounds suffered at the end of the first. His leg is girded in a metal brace; his arm is bare from where the motorcycle tire had ripped the leather away. Now, though, *Max*, "battered and smashed," is "a shell of a man, a burnout desolate man, a man haunted by the demons of his past" according to the narrator of *Road Warrior*. [20] Cut off at the bicep of his right arm and worn down on the fingertips of both hands, his second skin is missing some vital pieces. Those absences bring the two films together.

With bruises and cuts and wrinkles across his face, *Max* has also aged far more than the two years that passed between film release-dates would imply. Mel Gibson's face shows some wear and tear to match his character: more wrinkled and more wind burnt. *Max* and *Mel* have abandoned the baby-smooth cheeks of *Mad Max*; they now have significant beard scruff accompanying the white streak creeping in at their temple. More importantly, *Max*'s bruised, aged face complicates both the internal temporality of *Road Warrior* and this film's place within the larger series chronology. His accelerated aging distances the character temporally from his audiences. Just as his costuming signaled to viewers that *Mad Max* takes place in a near off future, *Max*'s broken yet markedly familiar body sets *Road Warrior* into a slightly more distant time, but a future even more divorced from audience viewing temporality. [21]

Max's body has aged impossibly for "real time" viewers; he looks much older than when we last saw him, a visual cue that sells the sense in *Road Warrior* that the state of the world has gotten worse since we last checked in on it. An ambiguously significant amount of time has elapsed since we last found *Max* behind the wheel of his super-charged *Interceptor*. Though if *Max*'s flesh acts as our calendar for tracking "when-ness" in the movies, it is his costume that once again signals just how very removed that when is from the "now" of viewing audiences, as well as the "then" of *Mad Max*. His costume, and those of the new characters surrounding him, ages in time with the plot while simultaneously drifting further and further away from recognizably "real world" fashions. Unlike the first film, however, the contrasts between costuming and the new normal of the characters he meets are now what unsettle chronology. Fashions, it would seem, have left *Max* behind.

In *Road Warrior* as in *Mad Max*, our hero's character design is visually positioned between two groups.

Previously, the townspeople he protected were dressed as similarly to viewing audience contemporary trends as Miller and Griffin could surmise. The "townspeople" in *Road Warrior*, however, dress markedly differently than "real" audiences. As numerous critics have remarked, the flowing fabrics and desert-ready palette of beiges and whites earned the denizens of the refinery the nicknames of "Gucci Arabs" during production. They wear a hodgepodge of found clothing items that simulate styles from before catastrophe struck but that no longer look contemporary with audiences. These figures would certainly stand out if transported to Sydney circa 1981.

They would pass more easily than *Road Warrior's* villains would, however. If Toecutter's gang in *Mad Max* was marked by their somewhat exaggerated fashion flamboyance, then Lord Humungus's cohorts drag the BDSM themes latent in the first movie into the bright light of day for the second. Though many of this gang drive vehicles still recognizable as pre-apocalyptic, only a tiny minority of them actually wear costumes even resembling clothes much less clothes contemporary to viewing temporality or *Mad Max's*. As a harsher and more overtly eroticized counterpart to the Gucci Arab townspeople, many of the villains wear black leather and metal studs. They accessorize with plumage at once reminiscent of and yet utterly divorced of cultural contexts from Roman centurions and American Indians.[22] These are warriors from an entirely new world.

And yet, Max's character design has more in common with these punk vandals than with the gas-hoarding townspeople. If his black leather second skin covers more of his flesh than theirs does, it is only just, and the jerry-rigged brace supporting his broken leg shares a cold steel patina with Lord Humungus' mask. These visual puns are especially ironic given that Max's costuming (including his car) is our only consistent link between the *Road Warrior* world that is and the *Mad Max* post-apocalyptic world that was. Were it not for Max's costume, *Road Warrior* could be viewed as an entirely distinct, stand-alone film. The apocalypse has changed (gotten worse somehow); the cast of characters has changed; even the pace of the movie has changed dramatically[23]. The only visual link uniting the two movies is Max, and now, in this new world and time, his costume aligns him with the villains instead of the supposed good guys. Within the narrative of *Road Warrior*, Max initially attempts to distance himself further from the Gucci Arabs. Papagallo tries to offer Max a place in their community, in their future, but he rejects the offer in favor of his own perpetual present alone on the road. However, Max's encounter with Humungus' gang, when they re-break his body and destroy his car, forces him to bridge that self-created gap and realize that he is inherently aligned with the vestigial remnants of his dying civilization. He decides that stasis is not possible in this post-apocalyptic landscape. Time either pushes deeper into a communal (sexually reproductive) future or disintegrates into an unreachable past (where destroyed cars and slowly degenerating bodies are all that bear witness). That image of a battered Max, which opens *Road Warrior*, the one that the movie reveals actually comes narratively from the end of the film's story, exposes Max's choice about Time. His injuries and their effects on his costume show that he chose to safeguard that communal future even if there was no place for him in its community.

Beyond Thunderdome opens with Max living with the consequences of that choice. Alone in the nuclear[24] desert of what was Australia, Max drives a wagon powered by camels rather than a car pulled by 450 proverbial horses. Crucially, though, Max's face is not the first familiar visage we encounter in this third movie. In fact, when we see the face of Jedidiah the Gyro Captain[25], the lanky rascal is joined by his spitting image of a son. We encounter the recognizably familiar character and are reminded of the choices and sacrifices made by Max in *Road Warrior*. His choice to protect the fleeing community (then led by Jedidiah) pays dividends in this third film. Ironically, those dividends immediately highjack Max's wagon and abandon him in the desert. When we do finally see Max's face after that ambush, *Beyond Thunderdome* again visually references *Road Warrior*. Echoing the opening shot of the second film, Miller and co-director George Ogilvie[26] track back up a hill. Instead of pulling focus on a still, standing Max, the camera waits as the hero races toward it. The directors then push into a close-up as Max uncovers his shrouded face. The shot reconfigures *Road Warrior's* opening, but here Max is remade as more than just a posed action figure. These visual tags linking *Beyond Thunderdome* back to *Road Warrior* are important; the world of the third film is so vastly different from those developed in the rest of the series as to seem almost unrecognizable as part of that series. Neither Max nor Jedidiah ever acknowledge openly their shared history in *Road Warrior*, and *Beyond Thunderdome* severs nearly all narrative ties with the world of *Mad Max*. [27] The only links joining the world of *Beyond Thunderdome* to those of *Mad Max* and *Road Warrior* are the opening sequence and certain styling cues.

What those styling cues tell us about *Beyond Thunderdome* is that several years have elapsed, and the bad guys won out. If fashion trends can be trusted, that is. No structures of a pre-apocalyptic civilization remain. In their place exists Bartertown; and the townspeople here dress as if Lord Humungus has become their arbiter of taste. The leather and feathers of *Road Warrior's* gang are everywhere and on everyone in *Beyond Thunderdome's* version of a city. Not every character in the film follows Humungus's implicit lead, though. The children of the oasis have created their own society, and they clothe themselves in animal skins (and a lot of mud, if their hairstyles are any indication)[28]. Pointedly, though, both of these groups are styled such that neither could pass for normal according to viewing audiences or even with the people of the just-a-little-post-apocalyptic society in *Mad Max*. No, there are only four characters in *Beyond Thunderdome* who wear clothes with ties to a time before Bartertown: Max, Jedidiah and his son, and Master (though Master only puts on his tweed suit after Max and the children rescue him from Bartertown's pig-filled Underworld). [29] Almost nothing of a world that viewing audiences could call their own remains to be seen in *Beyond Thunderdome*. These four characters provide the only tenuous connections between a "real" temporality and the one in the movie.

Again, Max's figure is the most important. Just as *Road Warrior* preserved his wounds from *Mad Max*, so too does *Beyond Thunderdome* carry over those he receives in the second film into the third. The eye injury he sustains in his fight with Wez shows up in *Beyond Thunderdome*: Max's right pupil is over-dilated throughout the film, even if we can really only glimpse it in a few shots. More significantly, though, the changes to Max costume from movie number two to movie number three carry over and complicate the timelines. The protagonist now wears a long, black tunic in addition to his leathers. The tunic and turban are visual puns on the Gucci Arabs of *Road Warrior*. Max may not have joined their community, but he has taken on some of their fashion choices. The hopeful optimism embodied in those townspeople now finds a place on Max's body as well by way of his new amalgamated costume.

That optimism disappears, however, in the fourth iteration of the *Mad Max* saga. *Mad Max: Fury Road* [30] opens with a narration by Rockatansky that immediately complicates the chronology of the series. "My name is Max. My world is fire and blood," intones new actor Tom Hardy.[31] The dialogue continues with Max telling us that he used to be a cop. With this single line, the films finally specifically address the reality of the first movie and its connections to and through subsequent films. But this is not Mel Gibson; this is not the same voice or body upon which time has been previously coded. We have not even seen him yet, but we know this Max and this *Max* will challenge our assumptions and expectations.

George Miller has described *Fury Road* as another episode in Max's story. The director resists labels like reboot

or sequel; instead, he favors viewing *Fury Road* as a continuation of a story that had been rattling around in his head for years. When pushed, the director has said the events of *Fury Road* take place sometime after those of *Beyond Thunderdome* but that even he is not sure of the exact chronology.^[32] While some fans of the series have clamored for more specificity or continuity, I argue that the vagueness in Miller's mind matches suit with the unstable chrono-reality established when Hardy speaks Max's name and former profession. *Fury Road* engages with this unstable identity immediately. After the production-company logos signal the start of the film (logos styled in the rusted metal visuals and revving car engine sounds now considered icons of the series), a pre-narrative interstitial names Hardy as Max Rockatansky and Charlize Theron as Imperator Furiosa. After the narration and montage that re-establishes the movie's post-apocalyptic bona fides, the actual title card interstitial proclaims *Mad Max* in huge letters, shiny and chrome, *Fury Road* seared across the middle of the screen with molten steel. The interplay between these two interstitial frames also plays a role in simultaneously destabilizing and re-stabilizing the chrono-reality of *Fury Road*. It essentially justifies the casting of the two lead actors: Hardy's place as Max is visually cemented by the echo of the character's name written over the frames, while the significance of Theron's role is stressed by the pun between her character's name and the film's subtitle. This is a new filmic reality but one meant to be instantly familiar.

Leaving aside small nods to moments from the earlier films, some more winking (malfunctioning shotguns) than others (a character playing with what is arguably Max's music box), *Fury Road* continues the Styling trends that helped to mark chrono-reality across characters' bodies. What's more, the Style of this installment in the *Max* world also lays the rhetorical groundwork for future visits that expand and complicate the chrono-reality of the entire series. Before barreling into that supposed future, however, let's spend more time tracing out *Fury Road*'s chrono-reality. Just as with the original three, this movie marks its calendar on Max's body. Unlike the previous films, *Fury Road* literalizes the calendar. Early in the film, after being captured in the Wasteland by a raiding party of Warboys, Max is taken to The Organic Mechanic for processing. As his long hair and beard are shorn (the remnants of which gathered together by a tiny Warpup in an echo of the kids in *Thunderdome*), Organic tattoos Max's vital statistics on the road warrior's back. The tattoo claims, among other things^[33], that Max is captured on Day 12,045^[34]. It is a blink and you miss it shot, but it is a vital one. This explicitly establishes that 33 years have passed since The Fall, or the nuclear wars that the children of *Thunderdome* more colorfully term The Pocylypse. Max's perpetual youth is an impossibility that even that tattoo's assertion of his "full life" status cannot justify. Hardy's Max is a magical impossibility, which is just as well given the magical impossibility of Max's chrono-realities. "Day 12045" could be easily dismissed, especially since it is so easily missed on the screen, but it is more than just a clever production detail. Taking the original release dates for all of the movies into consideration, 12,045 days places *Fury Road* 30 years on from *Thunderdome* and the Pocylypse a couple of years before *Thunderdome*. In other words, Max's tattoo aligns the chrono-realities of all four films with the real world release dates of the series. The passage of time in the plot of the movies matches the passage of time between the release of the movies. The calendar created by these marks on Max's body may have been an accident, but it is a remarkably productive accident if so.

Though less literal than the tattoo, the other ways in which Max's body are styled in *Fury Road* also maintain and extend the series' chrono-reality continuity. His costume carries over features established across the series: he still wears the single-sleeved MFP jacket and leather pants (now with large mending seams, the luster of the new leather completely worn away by time and use); he still uses a make-shift brace on his leg (even smaller and more discreet than those in *Thunderdome* and *Road Warrior* to suggest at least some level of healing in the leg); he starts the film with long hair and a black cowl (in an echo of the character's entrance in *Thunderdome*). This costume continuity cements Hardy's Max's relationship to Gibson's. More interestingly, however, these costume details also help link Max and *Fury Road* to the new co-lead character, Furiosa. Her on-screen introduction is as much a visually punning echo of Max as her name is of the title. Our first glimpse of Furiosa almost tricks us into believing it's Max's body on screen. Following Max's brief escape from the Warboys, prompted by his desire to avoid being branded with the logo of the post-apocalyptic imperial warlord, Immortan Joe, the camera pulls back from an extreme close-up on just such a brand. As the camera tracks away, the back of a shaved head comes into focus, then a shoulder pad very much like Max's, only to end finally on a medium close-up as the figure turns, flashing a glimpse of a woman's face instead of Max's expected visage. Furiosa is thus immediately signaled out as a road warrior, visually marked as Max's equal female counterpart.

As such, her body also carries the weight of Max's stylized chrono-realities. Her costuming suggests the histories of the peoples she has encountered. Her presence, via that visual echo, extends the reach of Max's chrono-reality beyond Max's body. Furiosa wears around her waist Immortan Joe's death's head emblem^[35] and paints her forehead and scalp black to mark her rank in Joe's army. And while her black leather pants also share the color scheme of those Warboys, the fine detailing on them sets her apart from their purely utilitarian uniforms. The pants and brown leather girdle securing her mechanical arm she wears ultimately link her stylistically more to the Vuvalini, though we can only realize this in hindsight. At first glance, though, the differences between Furiosa's uniform and the painted flesh/black cargo pants of the Warboys both set her apart as a character worth paying attention to and hint at the possible backstories explaining how this road warrior has come to the same place as our original anti-hero.

Furiosa's costume reminds us of the pockets of culture continuing beyond the limits of Joe's empire. The Vuvalini, in a way, act like Almost History Women, preserving a sense of culture visually that maintains bonds to both catastrophic History and the new post-apocalyptic way of the world. The warm browns of their leathers, the delicate if dusty floral patterns on their vehicles, the creatively repurposed utility of their accessories, not to mention the apparent age worn proudly on their faces, bind them to civilization that was. Those bindings, though, are flexible enough to adapt to the demands of the Wasteland. Their Style carries the memory of the past alongside the purpose of their present. It suggests a chrono-reality akin to the History Men and Women's tattoos: the past is always present, always available, and will influence the future through the ways its interpretation has been incorporated into the now. They wear the cyclical folklore that the History Men and Women reenact.

This is in stark opposition to Joe's Style. The linen shrouds he forces on the Wives and drapes over his own decaying body suggest nothing if not death. His Style is obsessed with the end: the end of life, the end of the world, the end of History. Visually, this aligns him and his army of Warboys with Lord Humungus and Aunt Entity's hordes just as strongly as the narrative imperatives of battling Max mark them all out as villains. Their Styles suggest an obsession with the linear concept of temporality marked out as apocalyptic. Their costuming strips away visual references to past styles, builds new aesthetic models on top of dead ones, re-purposing them into brutal new forms. They retain none of the sense of memory that the History People or the Vuvalini do. Perhaps that is why the *Max* series sees them all fall: their visually coded obsession with power, progress, and history renders them all, ultimately, unfit for the post-apocalyptic Wastelands.

That is the big tell of these movies, that only the viewing audience can see the ways that they interact and the implications of their temporalities. The stand-alone narratives of each movie resolve into pessimism. Max ends each story alone and physically broken. Other people get to fly off and live lives in community. Max's future is sad, sore, and lonely. Taken as a whole, though, a whole where we can watch the subtleties of style play out across Max's costumed body, viewers can see the possibility of hope in the future. In multiple futures. A fully-grown Feral Kid tells us on his deathbed that the Great Northern Tribe ripens to fruition after *Road Warrior*; Savannah Nix leads a family of refugees in blown-out Sydney and recites the Knowing of their history every night following *Beyond Thunderdome*; Furiosa and The Wives lead The Wretched up into the Citadel and out of The Waste in *Fury Road*. These new communities don't just recreate the civilization that lead to apocalypse, though. Each society that Max's sacrifices help plant grow around his story, around their shared lore. When viewed as a whole, the temporality Miller creates suggests that the future will be historiographic but only at the expense of the flesh of the hero who survives the birth of the postmodern.

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- [3] Heffernan, Teresa. *Post-Apocalyptic Culture: Modernism, Postmodernism, and the Twentieth-Century Novel*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008.
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- [5] Heffernan 2008, 6
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- [7] Eddington, Arthur Stanley. *The Nature of the Physical World*. Cambridge, UK: Macmillan. 1928.
- [8] *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior*. DVD. Directed by George Miller. 1981.
- [9] *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*. DVD. Directed by George Miller and George Ogilvie. 1985.
- [10] Miller, George, Nico Lathouris, Mark Sexton, Tristan Jones, Tommy Lee Edwards. *Mad Max: Fury Road: Furiosa*. no.1. Vertigo, June 2015.
- [11] Miller, Lathouris, et al., *Mad Max: Fury Road: Furiosa* 2015
- [12] Heffernan 2008, 11
- [13] Miller, Lathouris, et al., *Mad Max: Fury Road: Nux & Immortan Joe* 2015
- [14] Heffernan 2008, 13
- [15] *Mad Max*. DVD. Directed by George Miller. 1979.
- [16] Miller, *Mad Max* 1979
- [17] *Mad Max* art direction by Jon Dowding, costume design by Clare Griffin; *Road Warrior* art direction by Graham "Grace" Walker, costume design by Norma Moriceau; *Beyond Thunderdome* art direction by Anni Browning, costume design by Norma Moriceau; *Fury Road* art direction by Shira Hockman and Jacinta Leong, costume design by Jenny Beavan.
- [18] See the following:

- Fitting, Peter. "COUNT ME OUT/IN: Post-Apocalyptic Visions in Recent Science Fiction Film." *Cineaction*, 88 no. 11 (1987): 42-51

- Sharrett, Christopher. "Myth, Male Fantasy, and Simulacra in *Mad Max* and *The Road Warrior*." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1985): 80-91.

[19] Max is visually introduced in segmented close-ups to begin with. During the Nightrider chase sequence, we are never given a full body shot of Max; rather we see his feet, his hands, his eyes, his torso. He is comprised of parts that only come together after the chase has ended and he has returned home to Jessie.

[20] Miller, *Mad Max 2: The Road Warrior* 1981

[21] The series will continue to play with Max's on-screen age, using a new actor in the role who will then appear markedly younger than the temporal progression of the series' narrative would suggest. I will return to this point shortly.

[22] The plundering of imagery from classical and non-Western cultures will return more strongly in the fourth film and its comics, as Immortan Joe builds his cult/army out the bones of Roman history and Norse mythology but with no real regard for what those referents meant to earlier cultures.

[23] *Mad Max* is languorous and spans many weeks of narrative time, often with very little actually happening. *Road Warrior* is jet-paced in comparison. Just a couple of days pass over the course of the entire second film (though the opening narration does reference pre-apocalyptic events as well as the adult life of the Feral Kid to create an overall timeline that eclipses those created by the narratives of the other three films).

[24] Between *Road Warrior* and *Beyond Thunderdome*, the nature of the apocalyptic event changes again. According to the initial Bartertown scenes in *Thunderdome*, the event that destroyed Western civilization was explicitly nuclear. A busker tries to sell Max irradiated water, and he calls out the ruse by using his own personal Geiger counter to test it. The montage sequence that opens *Road Warrior* never mentions nuclear war, just traditional warfare over access to fossil fuels leading to the crumbling of the international oil trade. Some viewers have suggested that this difference stems from a sort of ret-conning of the Max story to fit a pre-existing idea about a band of children growing up along in a post-apocalyptic world. The implication is that someone thought Max would make an interesting contrast to a group of quasi-domesticated kids and thus Miller and Ogilvie overlay their extant hero into a new world. The comic books released alongside *Fury Road* provide a bit of detail into these shifting apocalypses, but not even they explicitly define the nature of who killed the world and how.

[25] The character is given an explicit name in the opening credits of *Thunderdome*. In *Road Warrior*, he is only referred to as the Gyro Captain. In deference to the chronologies of both films (and the series as a whole), I am going to refer to him as Jedidiah the Gyro Captain initially and then just Jedidiah in subsequent mentions.

[26] According to some reports, Ogilvie was hired to work with the actors on their character performances to free up Miller's time to focus on the stunts and action sequences, the implication being that Ogilvie was brought on to work on the story after Miller lost interest following the death of Byron Kennedy, his friend and producer. I have not been able to verify these rumors beyond their existence on various fan sites dedicated to the films, but that they exist is interesting given how utterly bizarre and disconnected from *Mad Max* and *Road Warrior Beyond Thunderdome* feels.

[27] When Aunty Entity asks Max what he was before, he mentions being a cop. The movie quickly moves on from this tossed off and casual line of dialog to allow Aunty a monologue about creating herself anew out of the ruins of the world that was. The implication is that Aunty's act of self-fashioning is much more important than Max's links back to the world pre-Pocyclypse. For an interesting take on Aunty and *Beyond Thunderdome* in terms of race, class, and character motivations, see:

- Williams, Paul. *Race, Ethnicity, and Nuclear War: Representations of Nuclear Weapons and Post-Apocalyptic Worlds*. Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press. 2011.

[28] The children raise fascinating temporal questions that deserve their own focus yet tie into the greater chrono-reality of the series continued in *Fury Road* and the comics. First among them is how long have these kids been on their own exactly? Their language has devolved into a new dialect of Australian English, and not even the eldest have any firm memory of life before the Pocyclypse. What's more, there is an implication that at least some of these children are second-generation oasis-dwellers. A very pregnant young woman is one of the group that sets out for Tomorrow-Morrow Land. How many others have been born to this wholly new society? And, if this group has been able to develop in such isolation and for so long to become what it is, how old does this imply that Max is in *Thunderdome*? Finally, how long exactly has it been since the events of *Mad Max*? Max still wears his leathers from the original story, but an entire society of children has been born (and given birth itself) since he last has a chance to go shopping. *Fury Road* introduces a possible answer to this timeline that I will address shortly.

[29] Master initially appears riding on the shoulders of Blaster wearing black leather pants and black leather straps across his chest. His costume is in keeping with the aesthetics of Bartertown. When the children rescue him, though, and they flee in the converted train car that we learn had been his home, he sheds his post-apocalyptic clothes in favor of a tweed suit that would have blended into mid-20th-century fashions quite handily. It is as if the rescue has allowed him to leave the temporality of Bartertown's savage society and return to a time before the world went to hell. His change is subtle and only glancingly noticed by the camera. None of the other characters remark on it beyond the children's fascination with the pre-apocalyptic objects inside his train-house. Neither Max nor Jedidiah (nor the man Pig Killer whom they pick up along the way) comment on Master's costume change.

[30] *Mad Max: Fury Road*. Film. Directed by George Miller, 2015.

[31] Miller, *Mad Max: Fury Road* 2015

[32] Davis, Erik. "Interview: George Miller Answers All Your Big *Mad Max: Fury Road* Questions." Fandango. May 14, 2015.

[33] Miller, *Mad Max: Fury Road* 2015

The full text of the tattoo reads: "Day 12045 ht 10 hands 180 lbs/ No Name/ No Lumps No Bumps Full Life Clear/ Two good eyes No Busted Limbs/ Piss OK Genitals Intact/ Multiple Scars Heals Fast/ O-Negative HIGH-OCTANE/ UNIVERSAL DONOR/ lone Road Warrior Rundown/ on the Powder Lakes V8/ No Guzzoline No

Supplies/ ISOLATE PSYCHOTIC/ Keep Muzzled...". Both "V8" and "OK" are circled in the tattoo. The "O-Negative HIGH-OCTANE" and "UNIVERSAL DONOR" passages are both separated from the rest of the text by thick lines above and below each phrase.

[34] Time is charted specifically in days in *Fury Road*. Furiosa will later report that her childhood abduction happened approximately 7,000 days prior. This focus on days, rather than weeks or months or years, emphasizes the importance of and constant struggle for survival this long after the Pocylypse. Life has become so hard that time is no longer conceived of in large chunks but only in single days slowly added to other single days.

[35] On Joe, this emblem acts much like a decorative codpiece or sporran, dangling over his genitals, highlighting his narcissism and hyper-masculine insecurities. His son Rictus also wears one, though his is made from baby-doll heads. Furiosa's functions more like an insignia of rank, though it does highlight her androgynous appearance through comparison with the father/son pair's more obvious cries for attention.



Author bio:

Laurie Norris is a PhD candidate in English at the University of Georgia. She focuses on the rhetoric of style in popular culture, with particular attention given to television, movies, and comic books. She is currently working with the aesthetics of so-called Prestige Television and the implications of what that which we deem prestigious reveals about contemporary America.

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