

The Apocalypse is Masculine – Masculinities in Crisis in Survivalist Film

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Abstract

A continued concern amongst humanities scholars and artists is our fascination with the apocalyptic. While belief in revelation may be less common now than in the past, Frank Kermode observes that 'the paradigms of apocalypse continue to lie under our ways of making sense in the world'.

This paper is a typology of masculinity in popular apocalyptic texts and a series of exercises in 'thinking beyond', aimed at proposing alternative visions of gender and considering post-apocalyptic subjectivity, it identifies texts that express a masculine desire termed 'apocalyptic nostalgia', including *Man V Wild*, *Fight Club*, *First Blood* and *The Road*. Through examining protagonists whose apocalyptic survivalism involves a performance of 'traditional' masculine characteristics such as stoicism, physical strength, Christian morality and skills associated with outdoor living, I argue that these texts demonstrate ways in which apocalyptic desire operates to reinstate the authority of social constructions such as race, gender and religion.

Keywords:

Apocalypse, gender, masculinity, film, nostalgia, survivalism, Foucault, heterotopia.

Title Image: Production still taken from *Deliverance*, (dir. Boorman , 1972).

The Apocalypse is Masculine – Masculinities in Crisis in Survivalist Film

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This paper examines representations of survivalism in film and television through an investigation of narratives depicting protagonists who survive or prepare to survive a coming catastrophe, whether economic, environmental or social by "breaking away from society and becoming self sufficient" (Lamy, 1996 p.14). Survivalism as a movement is here defined as a specific reaction to the perceived unsustainability of the social order and the imminence of its collapse. As such, it is my contention that survivalism is apocalyptic and belongs to a tradition of apocalypticism founded on social insecurity that, as Norman Cohn has noted in his study of millenarian uprisings in middle-ages Europe, attract populations or groups "involved in a problematic transition into the modern world" (Cohn, 1970 p.285). While Cohn is referring specifically to geographically marginalised and developing societies, this paper extends his observation to include smaller social groups, such as the white males who are most attracted to the survivalist movement and who are often the subject of the much written about crisis in masculinity, a crisis characterised by transitioning identities, changing social expectations and challenges to perceived standards (Brainbridge, 2005, Lamy, 1996, McCullough, 2005).

While they are not all overtly apocalyptic, the survivalist stories in *Deliverance*, *Fight Club*, *The Road*, and *Man V Wild* all contain a nostalgic, apocalyptic wish, that is, a perverse desire for catastrophe, judgement and renewal, particularly in regards to the category of masculinity or what 'makes' a man. The other film discussed, *Jindabyne* poses the crisis of masculinity itself as part of an apocalyptic discourse of loss and renewal.

All these texts also present the category of 'nature' as intrinsically related to masculinity, either as a space into which the survivalist can retreat in order to enact masculine practices, or as an imperilled category, mirroring the condition of masculine crisis through it's vulnerability in the present moment.

Through creating a typology of male, survivalist protagonists, and examining the particular challenges they must meet, I seek to identify this apocalyptic wish in survivalist films and make the argument that apocalyptic nostalgia is evoked in an attempt to reinstate the authority of social constructions such as race, gender and

religion. This is not to say that the examples looked at here are necessarily racist, sexist or theistic, but rather that they perform the nostalgic workings of identity formation in regards to the category of masculinity and the social structures that underpin it through their presentation of white, male protagonists whose survivalist challenge is also a challenge to display 'traditional' masculine characteristics such as stoicism, physical strength, Christian morality and skills associated with outdoor living.

Apocalyptic threat, or the apocalyptic imagination operates in these texts as the inevitable, motivating context for the restoration of specific, gendered standards. This threat is also seen as part of a process of restoration of a natural order. Where the masculinities upheld through this process are revealed as impossible performances, as in the case of *Fight Club*, *First Blood* and *Jindabyne* the apocalyptic crisis is ironized as being a crisis for masculinity, in which an old world-order for men must end but revelation of a new world is either withheld or as yet unclear. Posing the entire category of masculinity in apocalyptic terms, in *The End of Masculinity*, sociologist John McInnes warns -

Focussing on masculinity has the danger that it heads us into an apparently radical but in practice individualized and conservative cul de sac, which reinforces the contemporary preoccupation with the self at the expense of the social context (McInnes, 1998, p.57).

In this article however, masculinity is understood as an inherent *part of* the social context, regardless of perceived biological or other difference between men and women, or of the contested status of gender as a category. Defined and delineable forms of masculinity exist as part of the foundational myths on which identities (male and female, heterosexual and queer) are structured. Masculinity, as a set of ideas, standards and social performances is both socially constructed and instrumental in shaping the way we make sense of the social environment. Masculinity and femininity, presented in a binary relationship, are also essential in the continuing social project of the 'heterosexualisation of desire', which Judith Butler discusses in *Gender Trouble* and which is pertinent to many of the films discussed here, which, while depicting homosocial or homoerotic practices, simultaneously present heterosexuality as the only legitimate sexual orientation and link this to

standards for masculinity and further, to the ability to survive a catastrophe (Butler, 1990 p.24; Sedgwick, 1985).

If we accept Butler's assertion that gender is performative, that it enacts what it describes, then masculinity along with femininity can be understood as sets of tropes, styles and attitudes enacted by and upon bodies (Butler, 1990). Following this, if masculinity is performed in crisis, it is in crisis (for performers and audience). Further, a performance of masculinity in crisis is an expression of the always already in crisis category of gender itself.¹ The films examined here are therefore read as expressions of masculinity in crisis.

In these survivalist narratives 'who is doing the performing' is of particular importance. Protagonists are predominantly white men, as are their directors and writers.² Unlike women, queer people, people of colour, the elderly, children and other groups who may feel united through the experience of oppression, white men have more to lose in the acknowledgement of the 'trouble' with gender. However, the experience of being male is not homogeneous. Repressive regulation against men that may contribute to a sense of crisis is most apparent in regards to elderly, gay and coloured men who "are used to living with crisis-like conditions of persecution; it is a normative part of their history that has shaped their identity politics." (Ross, 1992 p.218) These are not the demographics represented in the survivalist texts examined here, which portray masculinity in a state of crisis. Observing the absence of coloured, gay and elderly male bodies from these texts, we may follow on by assuming that the declaration of crisis they form is made in relation to a historical context of stability in which acceptable living conditions, basic rights and certain privileges have already been attained.

In order to describe a crisis in masculinity, two problematic fictions are usually evoked. The first is that a rational, centred 'self', assumed to be white and male, existed in the enlightenment and throughout modernity and the second being that this figure has become unstable in the last half century. These assertions rely on an assumption of historical continuity by the subject, between himself, "those who have come before" and future generations (Brittain, 1991 pp .99-100). Of course, this stable, universal subject has been undermined in the postmodern moment. This undermining can in turn be posited as a large part of the conditions of crisis.

Bainbridge and Yates provide an alternative framework for considering crisis of masculinity using psychoanalytical trauma theory.

In postmodernism, a new awareness of the losses bound up with old fictions of masculinity gives rise to a sense of trauma. As Freudian approaches to trauma suggest, memory is always reshaped through fantasy. The fantasy underpinning the hegemonic formation of masculinity, then, seems to be lost within postmodernism, and it is this loss that provides the first moment of trauma (Brainbridge, 2005, p.303).

Apocalyptic nostalgia then, seeks to restore the fantasy through remembering an unproblematic, stable, universal masculinity that will be revealed as an essential truth through a narrative of catastrophic challenge. Trauma is not caused through the action of the apocalyptic plot but exists a priori as the condition which gives rise to apocalyptic nostalgia.

Precisely because of the privileged position of the white male in western culture, what occurs when this category is portrayed to be in crisis in the media and in popular culture can become a part of dominant discourse. The popularity of *Fight Club* and other white, male, Yuppy in Crisis narratives such as *American Psycho*, *Deliverance*, *Donnie Darko*, *American Beauty*, *Barton Fink*, *Happiness*, *Fearless* and *Crazy Stupid Love* to name a few, speaks to the fact that, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has observed, it is not just men that consume and produce masculinity (Sedgwick, 1995).

As part of this active production of masculinities, I have identified two tropes for survivalist protagonists - the 'Tough Guy Outsider' and the 'Yuppy in Crisis'. Together they form part of a typology of apocalyptic masculinity in survivalist narratives.³ This typology, though not an exhaustive list of character types, provides useful categories for the comparison of texts, and for unpacking the way that masculinity is deployed strategically in different contexts and in the service of different conclusions.

For instance, the Yuppy in Crisis is commonly presented as a symbol of repression, but, as is the case in *Fight Club*, an implication is made that within this feminized, inauthentic self, there exists another, liberated, masculine self, the Tough Guy Outsider, which is repressed in the service of corporate culture and post-

feminist 'metro'sexuality. It is the tough, masculine, authentic self, which apocalyptic nostalgia expects will be revealed by the survivor in the face of catastrophe.

The tension between the Tough Guy Outsider (John Rambo in *First Blood*, Bear Grylls in *Man v Wild*, Tyler Durden in *Fight Club*) who will survive trauma and hardship and even instigate apocalyptic events and the Yuppy In Crisis . The narrator in *Fight Club*, Ed and Bobby in *Deliverance* is the field of play for the perverse desire characterised by apocalyptic nostalgia.

This is perhaps best illustrated by the narrative of *Fight Club*, a central claim of which is that the repression of masculinity (characterised by aggression, fraternity and historical purpose) in the service of office-based employment and domestic sociality has damaged a 'whole generation of men'. The way to survive this damage then becomes the ritualistic enactments of male violence, first through organised fight clubs, where groups of men meet in secret locations to beat each other up, and then through the mobilisation of terroristic acts against the U.S. corporate sector (Fincher, 1999).

In *Fight Club* both character tropes are represented within one protagonist; the split subject of Jack the Narrator, a repressed consumer and office worker and Tyler Durden, his radical alter ego a dualism which alerts "the spectator to the schizoid status of contemporary masculinity" and its context of trauma (Brainbridge, 2005 p.307). Through various tricks this split self is, at first, not obvious to the audience or the protagonist-narrator. On its revelation, the Tough Guy Outsider self tells his Yuppy in Crisis counterpart,

All the ways you wish you were, that's me. I look like you wish you looked. I fuck like you, want to fuck. I am smart and capable and most importantly I am free in all the ways you are not (Fincher, 1999).

Here, the Tough Guy Outsider reveals himself as the id, the repressed libidinal desire of the Yuppy In Crisis superego⁴. Jack compromises his masculinity in the service of consumer culture. Tough Guy Outsider Durden's challenge is to the Yuppy in Crisis then, is to escape vapid, valueless consumer lives and access another kind of masculinity, to be a survivor rather than a doomed, obsolescent 'product' (McCullough, 2005 p.44). View clip: <https://vimeo.com/52984306> .

Both *Deliverance* and *Fight Club* link survivalist principals with a sense of 'authentic' maleness, accessed through the performance of a specific type of masculinity in the face of threat. To highlight the embodied, active fight for the survival of this masculine self, *Fight Club* associates this challenge with historical struggles, when Durden proclaims, "the war we fight is a spiritual war. The great depression is our lives." View Fight Club <https://vimeo.com/52822723>

Here, the film exploits romantic historical portrayals of war and catastrophe (predominantly those found in other films) as well as the seductive tenets of survivalism by representing the (masculine) psyche as a battlefield, a scarcity ravaged wasteland reflecting the trauma that the urban environment inflicts on nature as well as that which the dictates of consumerism inflict on the masculine psyche. The challenge then is to 'man up' and battle psychological challenges with the same sense of purpose and rigour as the men of history are understood to have showed in the face of 'real' economic crisis and war.

As Brainbridge and Yates have noted in their analysis of historically based action/fantasy films, "by turning to the foundational moments in the Western civilization, such films ground the new masculine sensibilities in the archaic bedrock of symbolic systems"(Brainbridge, 2005, p.311). This is also true of the apocalyptic narrative, which works to restore order through a symbolic system of judgement, tribulation, and revelation.

Unfortunately, what is lost in this representation of masculinity fighting for survival in a time of tribulation, is a dialogue between generations of men in which trauma associated with war as well as different understandings of masculinity can be articulated as well as any input from men of different cultures and sexual orientations and women.

Man V Wild

In a 'web exclusive video' with a title better suited to bluer shades of vicariously thrilling internet entertainment, 'Vulnerable and Demoralised' adventurer and 'Tough Guy Outsider', Bear Grylls applies his survivalist know-how to the perilous territory of an unnamed jungle.

As he ploughs through the thick foliage he lists the threats encountered - low light, torrential rain, pounding waterfalls, falling wood from "trees as big as skyscrapers", rivers transformed into "raging torrents".

In Bear Gryll's television, show *Man Vs. Wild*, (part of a spate of popular survivalist programs *Survivorman*, *Survivor*, *The Crocodile Hunter*), the doctrine of preparedness is promoted continually. Through the presentation of various dangers alongside ingenious precautionary methods (a hot day in the desert may require Bear to wear his tee-shirt as a urine soaked hat, the possibility of starvation in every episode necessitates eating something which seems inedible), the viewer is left with the impression that an adventurer such as Bear can survive in any harsh and inhospitable environment because of his training, his capability, his endurance and physical fitness, all qualities associated with masculinity.

In *Man v Wild*, nature is both awe inspiring and conquerable - if the man who seeks to conquer is an apocalypse-ready survivor prepared to exist outside the false comforts of cities and civilisation. The show's narration, in second person, suggests an attempt to draw the viewer into the situation. It poses the constant challenge - could *you* do what Bear does, could *you* survive?

A constant and contradictory deployment of the concepts of 'nature' and 'natural' is a characteristic of survivalist narratives. While in *Fight Club*, nature is eclipsed by the urban space, depicted as repressive, tattooed with absurdities in the form of advertising and traversed only in airplanes and road vehicles, in *The Road* nature is polluted and corrupt, constituting a traumatised subject of its own, which mirrors the trauma of the male protagonists, the wondering Man and Boy.

In *Jindabyne*, the natural space of the river is associated with hidden violence, through the discovery of the murdered girl and through an association with indigenous history and colonial violence in Australia. In *Man V Wild*, *First Blood* and *Deliverance* however, nature is a less complicated terrain, depicted as wild, untameable, a place only the strongest men can survive and the ultimate test for masculinity.

The separation of man from nature has been conceptualised in narrative terms by religious texts such as the Christian Bible. In the biblical creation story,

while God creates both man and nature, they are not the same thing. This is reinforced when transgressive desire alienates man from God and 'nature', as represented in man's banishment from the Garden of Eden in *Genesis* (Bible Gateway, 2012).

Science both attempts to contain and be contained within a 'natural order' and this natural order become essential in the currency of scientific claims. As Andrew Ross observes, "dominant ideas, whether in science or theology, are legitimated and enforced at any time by presenting them as part of the natural order of things" (Ross, 1991 p.232). At the same time however, man's mastery over nature is both applauded and shown to be a dangerous illusion by the differently cast narratives (ecological, political etc) of progress as a forward momentum away from savagery and ill-health on the one hand, or environmentally appropriate practises on the other, and toward cities and technology or unsustainability and catastrophe (Guggenheim, 2006, Emmerich, 2004).

In our continued relations (alienated though they / we may be) with nature we are driven to apply mythologies, metaphors and systems derived from our understanding of the workings of our own civilisation back onto the 'natural' world. We deify and personify nature in order to situate ourselves outside the natural, whilst still recognising ourselves as a part of the natural (Ross, 1991 p.275).

In the John Hillcoat's 2009 film adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* - in which a man and his son trek through a post-apocalyptic traumatised environment to find the coast - the personification and deification of nature is crucial to building a biblical understanding of catastrophe and the deployment of apocalyptic nostalgia for reinforcing standards of masculinity.

In the world of *The Road*, humanity has ignored morality by committing crimes against nature (cannibalism, for example, but also previously, greed in the form of environmental misconducts, presumably such as deforestation, unsustainable industrial practice etc) and as a consequence, has been punished.

View clip: *The Road* (2009) <https://vimeo.com/52822721>

The proper practice of masculinity then, as exemplified by the protagonist, given the universalising name 'Man' is one that focuses not on what can be procured

for the present, but rather on creating a legacy for the future, embodied by the Boy. The man teaches the boy survival skills as well as establishing moral paradigms for his son in which they are the "good guys" who are "carrying the fire". Here, 'good' masculinity and morality are framed as the only categories of certainty that a father can and should teach his son in a world filled with 'bad guys' (my emphasis). At the horrific end point of capitalism, the good man seeks to restore order to the boy's chaotic world by retelling "old stories of courage and justice".

The inference here is that the good guys will not only survive in the traumatised, post apocalyptic waste land, but will be responsible enough to see the recovery of the natural environment which they require for sustenance.

On the other hand, in *First Blood*, the story of a veteran, reliving the experience of war trauma while being hunted by local law enforcement in a small town and in *Deliverance*, which focuses on a men's canoeing trip gone terribly wrong, nature is the space into which the individual retreats in order to survive outside of a civilisation which is described as corrupted by the dictates of consumerism⁵.

In survivalist narratives contradictions in the conception of nature as simultaneously a punitive and rewarding force, a set of laws, a place of origin or home, a force of restitution of a natural order, a possession to be protected and a resource to master, proliferate. Though, while treatments might differ according to specific narratives, there is a common notion, worked through with apocalyptic nostalgia, that nature is continuous where as we are not. It follows then that, if gendered ideas such as authentic masculinity can be verified as being natural, they too will survive while the inauthentic corruptions of their ideal perish.

The Tough Guy Outsider and Wild Heterotopia

At the beginning of *First Blood*, John Rambo is a drifter, wandering through America in search of his old platoon buddy from the Vietnam War. Mistaken for a 'hippy' by a county sheriff, presumably because of his long, feminine hair, Rambo is arrested and subjected to inhumane treatment at the hands of law enforcement, which triggers memories of his time as a prisoner of war in Vietnam.

Running on instinct, John Rambo escapes and takes shelter in the wilderness surrounding the town. It is here, within the borders of 'nature' that most of the action takes place as local law enforcement and the paramilitary attempt to catch Rambo, a man who has trained to survive, to 'ignore pain and weather' and to kill. Rambo's status as a veteran highlights the ways that the state uses masculine ideals and the male body to strengthen its military. The narrative of the film suggests that outside the context of war, this same body and ideology can find no place in the modern civilised America for which he fought (Kotcheff, 1982). First Blood clip: <https://vimeo.com/52822726>

It is just as well then that the Tough Guy Outsider's skills render the wilderness, a space generally considered outside of civilisation, as a space of habitation. Just by demonstrating the possibility of survival in 'uninhabitable' landscapes, these protagonists form a critique on the division of man from nature and reorder the wilderness as a heterotopia in which all the constructed needs and values of consumer society are shown to be illusory. Foucault's basic definition of a heterotopia is a real place, which is also a counter site, "A kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted" (Foucault, 1967).

In survivalist narratives featuring a tough guy outsider, the wilderness - typically a designated space which is either as yet undeveloped, inappropriate for development because of the terrain or protected as a natural resource like a state park or reserve - is a heterotopia, reconfigured by the survivalist as a space which, like civilisation, obeys a set of rules and is 'as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged' as society is 'messy and ill-constructed' (Foucault, 1967). Heterotopias, Foucault tells us, have a system of opening and closing. For the wilderness as heterotopia, this system is present in the hunting and recreational season of reserves. In survivalist narratives however, opening is granted year round through the survivalist's access to specific knowledge and skills.

In *First Blood*, law enforcement, even with their superior technology, cannot penetrate the wilderness that John Rambo navigates with skilled ease. This highlights an anxiety at the heart of masculinity in crisis as expressed in survivalist narratives: Whose inability is of more concern, the inability of John Rambo to find a place in society, or the inability of the rest of us to survive in our 'natural' state?

The wilderness in the survivalist narrative is of the category that Michel Foucault names 'crisis heterotopia'. Present mainly in the 'so called primitive societies'.

There are privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women etc. (Foucault, 1967)

We can add men experiencing a crisis in masculinity such as those portrayed in *Deliverance* and *Jindabyne* to this list. In both these films, groups of men embark on hunting or fishing trips as a kind of masculine performance, during which characteristics such as physical strength, heterosexuality and survival skills are valued highly.⁶

Foucault argues that in society today these crisis heterotopias are disappearing and being replaced by prisons and psychiatric hospitals, "what we might call heterotopias of deviation"⁷ (Foucault, 1967). In *First Blood*, John Rambo refuses to be placed into one of these spaces, returning instead to nature in the form of the wilderness, a space outside the dictates of civilisation, reserved for an enactment of masculinity in crisis. The river in *Deliverance* is another such crisis heterotopia, one that performs its own endangered status - the men are taking their canoe trip down the river as their last chance to explore this wilderness before the area is dammed up (Boorman, 1972) . So too, the river in *Jindabyne* is a space for 'secret men's business' in which nationalistic and gendered identities are both enforced and destabilised.

It is within these crisis heterotopias that men can enact various performances of masculinity and uncover meanings that reinforce what is presented as their weakened sense of identity. For example, in *Deliverance* the office worker Ed learns to trust instincts that had been dormant in his daily life and in *First Blood* John Rambo, despite being unable to find a job and sanctioned social role, outsmarts heavily armed military and police personnel by using his survival training.

If heterotopias of crisis are disappearing as physical spaces in most cultures, it is perhaps not surprising then that there is so much enactment of crisis occurring in that other, most ubiquitous and post-modern of heterotopias, the cinema, one of the great pleasures of which "is precisely that it offers a space in which ambiguities of identities and desires are played out", and which by its nature as a real physical space can be visited by groups and individuals (Tasker, 1993 p.17). Survivalist narratives, in the cinema, books and magazines, as well as in our imaginations, can stand in as heterotopias of crisis and, in relationship with their audience, encourage thought and discussion about issues surrounding masculinity, which may not find a common forum elsewhere.

In the apocalyptic narrative of *Deliverance*, tough guy outsider Lewis is a kind of messiah of masculinity, providing a model that the other men must live up to in order to gain mastery both over a human enemy and nature. He is also reacting to what he understands as a crisis in masculinity. He works on his fitness and strength and practices survivalist skills to compensate for what he sees as the sedentary life of modern man. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g9LVRHigxiE>

As in *Fight Club* and *Man V Wild*, in *Deliverance* the Tough Guy Outsider character represents a direct challenge to their 'less masculine' friends and by extension to the audience/reader. In the James Dickey novel, *Deliverance*, from which the film was adapted, Lewis expresses his apocalyptic nostalgia overtly as he openly wishes for a nuclear holocaust, which would definitively test his merits as a survivor.

'At times, I get the feeling that I can't wait. Life is so fucked-up right now, and so complicated, that I wouldn't mind if it came down, right quick, to the bare survival or who was ready to survive. You might say I've got the whole survival craze, the real bug. And to tell the truth I don't think most other people have. They might cry and tear their hair and be ready for some short hysterical violence or other, but I think most of them wouldn't be too unhappy to give down and get it over with' (Dickey, 1970 pp.43-44).

For Tough Guy Outsider - Lewis, the life and death imperatives of a looming post apocalyptic order are the antidote to 'fucked-up' life, and the now 'complicated' category of masculinity is redeemed in a competitive hierarchy of who 'can't wait' and who 'might cry'.

In the logic of crisis, the opportunity to prove his worth in the former category is so important to Lewis that it overshadows the less appealing aspects of nuclear holocaust.

There is a biblical binary inherent in much survivalist logic, wherein, if the ability to get 'back to nature' represents man's redemption, damnation is represented by the city and the godless world of consumer capitalism, a modern version of Sodom and Gomorrah. The survivalist then, is presented as embodying a more authentic, natural, almost messianic masculinity, able to access the space of nature to which man essentially belongs and which is prefigured by the biblical Eden story and reinforced by its antitype; apocalypse. (Bible Gateway, 2012)

Woman is predominantly excluded from the survivalist narrative. There is an explicit example of this in the film *Jindabyne* in which, when one of the younger members of the all-male fishing expedition remarks that he must show his girlfriend the valley, he is chided by the tough guy outsider leader, Stewart, "No. No, no, no. No women allowed." (Lawrence, 2006) [View clip \(6\): https://vimeo.com/52823328](https://vimeo.com/52823328)

To prove, and later complicate this exclusion, the only woman who has access to the river is a murdered aboriginal woman. The men's determination not to let this woman interfere with their fishing trip is later considered violence and racism. The political question of whether the group of men would have stepped over the body of a boy, or a white woman, to fish undisturbed is posed and left unanswered in the film. The murdered woman's heritage also draws our attention to the different meanings and functions that the wilderness, in this case, the Australian bush, has for different groups and cultures. While the narrative of *Jindabyne* explores various conceptions of masculinity and survival, the apocalyptic subtext is revealed through its inclusion of indigenous conceptions of land.

The colonial declaration of Australia as a Terra Nullius, that is, no-man's land is a symbolic apocalypse that ends one world and forcibly instates a new one. Nature then, in this context the Australian bush, is simultaneously a stolen space, a space which hides violence, both symbolically through it's declaration as Terra Nullius and literally, as in the case of the murdered girl. This polyvalence is steadfastly ignored by the members of the fishing party. "Apparently there are secret places up in those mountains," one of the men's girlfriend's tells them.

"That's right," says one of the fishing party, "secret men's business", homogenising the term 'men' to include him and his white fishing buddies and ignoring the indigenous men whose sacred sites have become available for recreational use by all since colonization. View clip: Jindabyne (7) <https://vimeo.com/52824391>

As in many examples of the action genre, in *Deliverance* man's "weakness, vulnerability is expressed through the mobilisation of traits associated with femininity, most particularly a softness or lack of definition which might allow the body to be fatally penetrated." (Tasker, 1993 p.17) This is made explicit when fat, cynical Bobby is raped. Here a 'law of nature' is imposed in which the strong prey on the weak, vulnerability is an invitation for assault and inauthentic, suburban masculinity, that is to say, masculinity in crisis, is violently feminized. The suggestion is perhaps also that in a world composed entirely of men, the weak *become* women, in women's sexually subordinate positions.

Following Lacanian psychoanalytic thought, Judith Butler has noted how the phallus derives its power against the penetrated other. In the men-only world of *Deliverance*, both Bobby's rape and Ed's escape from rape affirm not only the power of the phallus but the importance and natural status of phallic competition in order to survive and preserve identity, which is, in this instance described as authentically or essentially masculine (Butler, 1990 p.59) .

In *Jindabyne* (2006), the men's desecration of the murdered girl's body, however unintentional it may have been, aligns them with the white, male rapist and murderer, certainly one of the bad guys. When Tough Guy Outsider Stewart returns from his fishing trip, his wife, the film's female protagonist, confronts him with his failure to be 'a good man'. When Stewart does not apologise to the murdered girl's family, she accuses him of being 'piss weak'. Later, she turns masculine standards against him. View clip from *Jindabyne* (2006) (8) <https://vimeo.com/52822725>

Stuart's reply reminds us that stable masculinity exists only in terms of binary opposition and reflection of women's lack. Stewart's accusations make his wife suddenly too aware that standards for femininity are as uncompromising and as impossible to live up to as those for masculinity and that it is always easier to say what should not occur categorically, rather than imagine what would, and might *instead*.

The 'Tough Guy Outsider' protagonists of survivalist narratives find no real place to dwell within society and retreat into a compensatory, apocalyptic fantasy imposed on the heterotopia of the wilderness. In some Tough Guy Outsider portraits however, it is the ideal of masculinity itself that is revealed to be the compensatory fantasy. This is the case in *First Blood*, which ends with John Rambo in hysteric tears, reaching out to be comforted, dealing with the specific trauma of having seen his friend die on the battlefield. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qIgVrOy9vM>

This vision of a traumatised masculinity, in which the past can not be a real past but reasserts itself onto the present context, stopping the subject from adapting to or understanding a new situation and with it new modes of behaviour is common in survivalist narratives and is presented alongside apocalyptic nostalgia, which has as it's object, the restoration of clear standards of masculinity. Of the films explored in this article, only *Jindabyne* suggests a flexibility within the performance of masculinity which eventually allows its Tough Guy Outsiders to recognise that they do not need to locate themselves 'outside' a community which includes, excludes and sanctions based on inflexible understandings of gender and race.

Because of its ubiquity, both in the mindset of individuals and in cultural products such as film, the web and print media, the end of the world nihilism of an alienated male professional class, the survivalist aggression of masculinity and apocalyptic nostalgia, which reinscribes traditional values and restores order through binaries of damnation and redemption, threat and survival, needs to be examined. An exploration of apocalyptic, survivalist narratives, portraying masculinity in crisis, can uncover solutions as well as compensatory fantasies, desires and confusions derived from the way we think, perform, apply and expect certain standards in (and of) masculinity. Following the articulation and identification of the factors which lead to a performance of masculinity in crisis, as well as expressions in narrative, developed in these films, the work which remains may be re-imagining new possibilities for masculinity, taking into consideration its basis in myth and politics.

Notes

¹ Part of the subject of Butler's study is pinning down the definition of gender itself as well as its relationship with a biologically determined 'sex'. While this remains part of the contemporary feminist debate, it is not the subject of this article, and therefore we will settle on Butler's definition: "Gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being. (Butler, J. 1990 p. 45)

² *Deliverance* – Novel written by James Dickey, film directed by John Boorman, Screenplay written by Dickey and Boorman.

Fight Club – Novel written by Chuck Palahniuk, film directed by David Fincher, screenplay written by Jim Uhls

Jindabyne – Short story written by Raymond Carver, film directed by Ray Lawrence, screenplay written by Beatrix Christian (noted exception)

First Blood – Novel written by David Morell, film directed by Ted Kotcheff, screenplay by Micheal Kozoll, Sylvester Stalone

³ It is worth noting another typical protagonist, The Stoic Professional (found in *The Road* and in *The Book of Eli*), who does not feature in this article but is no less ubiquitous and pertinent to the perception and portrayal of masculinity in survivalist narratives.

⁴ Durdens claim to 'fuck like you want to fuck' however, contains an irony, in that while Tyler, the id has a sexual relationship with Marla, the film's only female character, Jack is more interested in Tyler's attention, a plot which mirrors the films strategies to at once produce and deny homosexuality within the narrative a practice. For an in depth discussion on this and other strategies for evoking and denying homosexual desire in *Fight Club* see Brookey and Westerfelhaus. It's worth noting that they also state that violence in film often constitutes a socially accepted way to relieve homoerotic tension CREED, B. 1990. Alien and the Monstrous-Feminine. In: KUHN, A. (ed.) *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*. London: Verso.

⁵ Other examples include *The Deer Hunter Hannah*, *Jindabyne*, *Marcy*, *May*, *Martha*, *Marlene*

⁶ Lets also add to this list the films, *Easy Rider*, *Jindabyne*, *City Slickers*, *Stand By Me*, *My Own Private Idaho*, *Bottle Rocket*, *The Assassination of Jesse James*, *A River Runs Through It*, *Grownups*

⁷ In Australia in 2010, males made up 93% of the prison population according to the ABS (<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/4512.0Main%20Features2Mar%202011?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4512.0&issue=Mar%202011&num=&view=>) in 2009, 92% of the U.S. prison population was male. EDELMAN, L. 2004. *No Future: Queer theory and the Death Drive*, Duke University Books.

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