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The Unspoken Gender of Apocalypse: Patriarchal Realism and Ecofeminist Hope in 21st-century Post-apocalyptic Cinema

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1. Introduction: The Elephant in the Room of Apocalypse–Cinematic and Otherwise

We have seen it before in countless films; we hear it in the news every day: the natural world burnt to its ashes, consumed by consumers, violated by violence of manifold kinds—ecological and fratricidal, foreseeably, we are often warned, ultimately suicidal. While *the last of us* entertain viewers and gamers with thrilling apocalyptic sensation in the privacy of homes, supranational institutions promise, in the public realm, often missed, self-imposed deadlines to cut emissions and avoid the worst effects of self-inflicted climate change. A countdown thinking framework in our fictions and day-to-day tirelessly and tiresomely evokes the coming finitude of prevailing socio-economic paradigms in the so-called Anthropocene (Crutzen 2010). Endlessly anticipated—“apocalypse-from-now-on”, as Susan Sontag put it before Fukuyama celebrated “the end of history” in a more congratulating vein (Sontag 1989, Fukuyama 1992)—in the 2020s the end of the world feels like a commonplace, a *room of our own* in which to familiarise ourselves with the piling rubbles provoked by our species—the Anthropos. Yet is that derelict room of apocalypse really *ours*? Whose alternative histories, untold stories and not-yets (Bloch 1959) imagined lie beyond its walls? Whose end, whose world, whose future are we talking about? Which overseen paradigm sustains its foundations, silent beneath the debris of messy capitalism, speaking in the name of the Anthropos to appropriate its future with the bravado that its monopoly on history grants?

According to the title of this volume, the paradigm in crisis is a presumably collapsed Modernity whose failing “sovereign-capitalist-anthropocentric system”, as the call for papers put it, demands new emancipatory political imaginaries. Still, in its vindication for post-apocalyptic agendas liberated from hopeless economised-ecocidal projects, the state of the question is oblivious to what might be called “the elephant in the room of apocalypse”. Passing as the natural order of things—like neoliberal thinking does in ongoing *capitalist realism* (Fisher 2009)—at the heart of overheated apocalyptic speculation lies a patriarchal socio-political system of production which, like capitalism itself, demonstrates its ability to resist successive waves (Rivers 2017) calling for change and relentless self-destructive innovation (Marshall 1982). Preceding *and founding* a neoliberal paradigm that has taken democracy (Brown 2015), co-opted utopia as consumption (Moylan 2006), and downsized collective struggles into individuals’ desire-hunting (Bauman

2007), in the room of apocalypse *patriarchal realism* speaks and acts, imagines and narrates, destroys, and rebuilds in the name of the Anthropos. Colonising our narratives, thinking, art, and power since pre-Biblical times (Woolf 1929, Beauvoir 1949, Hessel 2022, Beard 2017), *patriarchal realism* threatens to colonise 21st-century post-apocalyptic emancipation too through the very concepts and frameworks—Anthropocene; Hominiscent (Serres 2015)—used to criticise the present and call for its transformation. Thus, rather than the end of the Anthropos, apocalypse would imply “the end of man” (Zylinska 2018); while counter-apocalyptic imaginaries would demand ecofeminist paradigms of action able to prevent patriarchal *mansplaining* and *manspreading* into the future.

In the movies, the end hosts scenarios of many kinds, often revisited throughout the years and consistently framed, until recently, within patriarchal narratives and spaces. Be it Christian-infused morally cleansing disasters (*Deluge* 1933, *I am Legend* 2007), bipolar worlds (*Metropolis* 1927, *The War of the Worlds* 1953), nuclear devastation (*On the Beach* 1960, *The War Game* 1966), predatory individualism (*No Blade of Grass* 1970, *The Road* 2009), ecological threats (*Soylent Green* 1973, *The Happening* 2008), technological alienation (*Blade Runner* 1982, *Blade Runner 2049* 2017), or pandemics (*Outbreak* 1995, *28 Weeks Later* 2007), male protagonists of film apocalypse outnumber female and the world crumbling onscreen is, by and large, a man's world (Geena Davis Institute 2020). In the 21st century, the global outreach of cinematic disaster often prompts a systemic evaluation of a cosmopolitan society united by shared risks like climate change (Klein 2014, Beck 2016), but also by new opportunities arising from multicultural global cities (Sassen 1991), diverse oppositional alliances (Moylan and Baccolini 2003), and intersectional social networks (Castells 2012) where ecofeminism gains momentum (Grusin 2017, Arruzza et al. 2019). Loaded with political and moral evaluations (Sontag 1965, Gurr 2015), contemporary cinematic ends today advocate for distinct political solutions—either apartheid-like or eco-cosmopolitan (Martín 2023, 57-75)—and they put forward diverse representations of nature—wild, pastoral, polluted (Garrard 2004; Martín 2020, 179-193)—that approach the future by either replicating the given or demanding, instead, a renewal of methods, perspectives and agents where ecofeminism has a chance (Martín 2021a).

This chapter spotlights the often-unspoken gender of apocalypse, as illustrated in contemporary cinema. The following pages explore how contemporary apocalyptic film narratives, spaces and formal choices depict collapsing patriarchal-capitalist orders and emerging ecofeminist alternatives. Drawing on Levitas's approach to utopia as method (2013) and feminist utopian critique (Sargisson 1996), the film analysis that follows seeks to illuminate how the archaeological criticism of destructive, non-sustainable socio-economic paradigms and modes of being can only prompt inclusive architectural speculation and transformation if emancipated, first, from *patriarchal realism*. Amidst *the sound and the fury* that reigns over our inclination to spectacular disaster (Dixon 2003) and dystopia (Claeys 2017) within risk-founded global imaginaries (Beck 1999), ecofeminist hope awaits in the movies (Martín 2021b) and beyond (Arruzza et al. 2019). It is whispering, to those willing to listen, that life is not “a tale told by an idiot (...) signifying nothing” (*Macbeth* 1623)—as Shakespearian kings, capitalist moguls and belligerent despots put it—but a gift and a responsibility whose carers need to be heard.

2. A Man's World Crumbling Onscreen

In contemporary apocalyptic films, typically it is a man's world crumbling, as Brown and Newsome's song would have it—from the most obvious testosterone-driven film narratives, as those led by Will Smith and Tom Cruise in *I am Legend* and *Oblivion*, to the ones led by softer masculinity eco-fathers like Clive Owen's and Vigo Mortensen's in *Children of Men* and *The Road*. Male scientists, military officers, visionaries or lecturers, all connoisseurs of the world—pre- and post-apocalypse—find cures, kill evil creatures, build safe shelters, and board the right boat in the last minute to save us all or, at least, their own in the four titles above and most well-known apocalyptic films released since the year 2000; including the aforementioned and *28 Days Later* (2002), *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), *28 Weeks Later* (2007), *The Happening* (2008), *2012* (2009), *Snowpiercer* (2013), *World War Z* (2013), *The Maze Runner* (2014), *Edge of Tomorrow* (2014), and *Blade Runner: 2049* (2017), among many others. Little notice is given to the fact that the world burning to ashes is indeed a man's world. While blame for disaster is placed on the Anthropos or an alien source, solutions to be found are still male monopoly, nonetheless.

While driving the narratives, the determination shown when choosing next steps and where to head to usually relies on the masculinity type illustrated. Alpha-male, military survivors in *Oblivion*, *Edge of Tomorrow*, and *I am Legend* stick to routines and clear agendas until their survival plan succeeds. Weapons, military uniforms, fuel-propelled vehicles, and warfare gadgets help them endure zombies and alien species in a post-industrial world in which metal and plastic artefacts are essential to make it through the day; no or little reference made to excessive production and consumption in ecocidal productive systems. Fast-paced edited sequences with abundant cuts and close ups displaying individual reactions to life-threatening risks convey the stimulating rhythm of a world that still provides them with coal to burn, resources to consume, adrenaline to be felt. Even if puzzled at first, they are up to the task, their pre-apocalyptic skills, and modes of being perfectly apt for post-apocalypse. Oblivious to the patriarchal-colonial-capitalist triad that precedes apocalypse, it is business as usual after yet another temporary crisis, either on the same land, or carrying with them colonial stamina into yet unspoilt remote areas like the Christian community in *I am Legend*, and the southern lands in *The Day after Tomorrow* and *2012*.

More hesitant, though, are those male leads whose sexual condition and masculine gender roles are not stressed as a virtue to cherish. Wandering amidst disaster, the disorientation of male characters in *The Happening*, *Children of Men* and *The Road* evoke challenged masculinities and normative forms of power; both personal and environmental decay connected. Apocalypse affects them. Usually fathers in the first place—family responsibilities define them more than their professional curriculum does—they must survive while taking care of others, which implies listening to somebody else's views, being attentive to their needs and wishes, debating solutions and directions. Camerawork reflects their environmental and social ties in two-shots, long and overhead shots that get further from their faces to locate them within a context. Cuts are scarce in comparison to the

adrenaline of the alpha-male apocalypses above. Long shots tie characters and surroundings, all sharing a habitat whose sustainability is in question. More distant from action film aesthetics, slow editing and silence in many sequences points at methods of action distinct from the fast-paced creative destruction of neoliberal progress; encouraging deep reflection rather than boosting adrenaline-driven responses to the end. Their displayed vulnerability evokes changing conceptions of masculinity, informed by the ethics of care and ecocritical awareness, as opposed to the dialectical capital-assisted one-to-one approach to disaster and nature that alpha-male survivors as that in *Oblivion* still vindicate.

Alpha or otherwise, the women around them are most often companions, very rarely a powerful menacing Other-like Patricia Clarkson in *The Maze Runner* and the female machine in *Oblivion*. Female characters in the films above fulfil secondary narrative roles in men's apocalyptic adventures: the visitor that brings a holy message in *I Am Legend* (Alice Braga); the lover to be or partner in survival business that waits day after day for Cruise's return in *Oblivion* (Andrea Riseborough) and *Edge of Tomorrow* (Emily Blunt); the ex-wife that went away after apocalypse in *Children of Men* (Julianne Moore) and *The Road* (Charlize Theron); the wife that stays in *The Happening* (Zooey Deschanel); the wife abandoned coming back to pass on a deadly virus in *28 Weeks Later* (Catherine McCormack); a Minister of a male despot in *Snowpiercer* (Tilda Swinton); and a pregnant migrant, Kee, that brings hope to a dying species in *Children of Men* (Clare-Hope Ashitey). Vehicles for white men's ordeals, aspirations, and discourses—as discussed by critical appraisals of Cuarón's film ending (Ahmed 2010, Trimble 2011, Sparling 2014)—women guide male discoveries, offer redemption, provide male counterparts with inspiration, good old memories, and a shoulder to rest on; but they do not propel the narrative forward. The title of P.D. James's novel puts it bluntly: it is all about *children of men* in a world of men—women part of the *mise-en-scène* of the Anthropos articulated by patriarchal realism.

Focalisation is also predominantly male—the world dying, as seen by men—and destruction is often a spectacle. In the same vein as the male gaze cast upon objectified women in classical Hollywood (Mulvey 1975), in *2012*, *The Day after Tomorrow*, *Oblivion*, *I am Legend* and *World War Z* visual pleasure derives from the observation of an objectified world crumbling down. The Other constructed and seen from a male voyeuristic stance is the world itself in ruins, depopulated, frozen or savage. Destruction, suffering and visual spectacle in such films can be said to operate within a patriarchal understanding of dominion as power—a world-object conquered and colonised by a master whose stamina is heightened in homoerotic visual celebrations of male bodies in action: Smith's and Cruise's muscles sweating while training for the end, thriving in an excellent shape while the world burns to its ashes. On the contrary, apocalyptic adrenaline is absent in eco-fathers' film narratives; no visual pleasure arising from spectacular displays of destruction or sexualised male bodies in *The Road* and *Children of Men*. These are low-key protagonists who are lost and damaged in a damaged world; victims of a Darwinian understanding of life, rather than alpha-male heroes at the top of the food chain. Their look upon things is humbler and more uncertain, conveyed through camera movements and editing choices that picture them as tragic participants rather than masters of the game of apocalypse.

Celebratory or condemnatory, apocalyptic spaces in the movies above tend to show disaster like the National Gallery shows art (Hessel 2022)—from a distinctively male prism attentive to men's deeds, histories, spaces, and desires that is made to pass as universal. If film, as Bruno argues, is a "mobile art of mapping" where the *spectatorial body* of modernity registers memories and emotions attached to place (2002, 223), apocalyptic cinema's "emotional mapping" reproduces patriarchal cartographies in which the social body emerges as a menace to control or shield oneself from, rather than care for and nurture. In epidemic films like *28 Weeks Later* social fragmentation and militarised responses to risk like the "Green Zone", located in London's financial district in the movie, depict apartheid responses to global mayhem based on the same antisocial paradigms that preceded apocalypse. Like Francisco de Goya's *Saturn Devouring His Son* (1819-1823), the infected devour their own kind in a grotesque extrapolation of neoliberalism's ecocidal consumption—depleting the resources of future generations like Andy (Mackintosh Muggleton) and Tammy's (Imogen Poots) in the film, whose father tries to eat them. As the young organ providers in *Never Let Me Go* (2010), these are *children of men* in a parricidal *patriarchal realism* whose power hierarchies and *panopticon*-like surveillance have produced self-disciplined subjects (Foucault 1975) encouraged to normalise their own alienating self-destruction. As in first-person video games, the camera moves vertiginously whenever the infected are around, abrupt pans and tilts copying the terrorised head movements of the character being chased. Unfocused, high-shutter images and camera lens blurring in panic depict the position of a victim of apocalypse. For the siblings in the film, the only possible exit to the zombie apocalypse lies beyond the bunker walls, surveillance, and quarantine zones ultimately ineffective to contain the epidemic. As happens in *Blindness* and *Children of Men*, hope is to be found outside the borders of exhausted maps needing new cartographers rather than new lands to colonise.

Alpha-male survivors, conversely, are not victimised by camerawork and they still cling on, successfully, to militarised surveillance to survive chaos. Infected citizens in *I am Legend* and alien species in *Oblivion* are under the control of Smith's and Cruise's expert snipers. Their privileged homes provide them with everything needed in polished interiors that contrast with traumatised and depopulated outdoor spaces—their connection with social spaces downplayed again, this time through *mise-en-scène*. Even if the world outside is in ruins—like New York's Brooklyn Bridge cut in half in *I am Legend*—alpha-male survivors are able to protect themselves in bunkered comfortable households where they can ignore for a while apocalyptic noise and a menacing social body: a technological mansion suspended high in the air in *Oblivion*; and the elegant terraced house in central New York in *I Am Legend*, with a convenient basement to keep zombies locked in. Indoors, these male survivors entertain themselves with a girlfriend and a loyal dog respectively, after long days of perfectly scheduled apocalyptic resilience. Outdoors, their maps and timetables help them navigate rubble at ease. Military experts, they know where risk hides—the caves aliens and zombies sleep in—and when to attack—enemies fitting in the well-ordered productive logic of a capitalist factory. Apocalypse feels like an escape room game that those disciplined and skilful enough can win; even an opportunity to start from scratch with less competition. These alpha-males are the ones in the central tower of Bentham's *Panopticon* (1791), controlling the deviant subjects that attacked a

well-functioning system. As Cruise's proud protagonist in *Oblivion* looks over a depopulated world from above, in a confident sitting posture, viewers are prompted to believe this strong skilled man can *make America great again*, bringing things back to *normal*. No innovation is needed in how the social space is configured. Threats need to be contained, houses rebuilt, new *cities upon a hill* founded like that idyllic Christian town amidst greenery in the last overhead angelic shot of *I Am Legend*. In these film apocalypses, patriarchal-capitalist realism promises to be resilient—a “risk management” neoliberal skill of self-adaptation to precarious cycles (Bracke 2016). Not willing to let go of the top-of-the-chain *hunter* types (Bauman 2007) they have so far shined in, alpha-male survivors promise to replicate old formulas as many times as needed; like Cruise's genetic replicas in *Oblivion* and his other over-confident Mavericks in the more recent *Top Gun 2: Maverick* (2022) and *Mission: Impossible - Dead Reckoning Part One* (2023).

Way grittier and inhospitable are the spaces disoriented eco-fathers wander in the traumatised cinematic spaces in *The Road* and *Children of Men*. Filmed by hand-held cameras and long shots that put across their vulnerability and disorientation, *mise-en-scène* and characters are tied together aesthetically. Next to Theo in *Children of Men*, the moving, nervous camera shares its protagonist's empathy, affected by a hostile London whose multicultural history is now confined in refugee camps kept apart from militarised “recreational apartheid” (Davis 1990) like St. James's Park. Mortensen's father in *The Road*, son by his side, pushes a rusted trolley along depopulated highways leading nowhere, which allude to the dead-end of self-consuming neoliberal paradigms. Unlike Smith's and Cruise's alpha-males, eco-fathers resemble unprotected *vagabond* types (Bauman 1996) struggling through the social debris of a once hypermobile neoliberal world. Unable to escape chaos in comfortable getaways like those in *Oblivion* and *I Am Legend*, Owen's and Mortensen's protagonists are obliged to always inhabit apocalypse; driven by unpredictable circumstances beyond their control and scheduling efforts. Cinema being “primarily a spatial system” (Shiel 2001, 5), and space a social product that is “a tool of thought and of action (...) a means of control, and hence of domination, of power” (Lefebvre 1991, 26), apocalyptic film spaces without privileged bunkers or militarised cities to escape into document critically the lack of *spatial justice*—“the fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them” (Soja 2009, 2). Apartheid solutions are not possible, neither desirable for eco-fathers; there is no Shangri-La to seek refuge in, colonise or found; no uncanny creatures to eliminate. The answer to the end is a question formulated within *patriarchal realism*; one to be answered by ecological and inclusive forms of agency, as embodied by the children in *The Road* and the Black female migrant in *Children of Men*, facing open sea horizons at the end of both films after its male protagonists die.

3. Ecofeminist Hope amidst the Rubble of Patriarchal Realism

Children of Men and *Snowpiercer* only hand over narrative leading roles to vulnerable female survivors in ending scenes where blank *mise-en-scènes*, devoid of recognisable landmarks, stress that new cartographies must be traced (Martín 2021a). Lacking both a

valid architectural context from which to restart and male connoisseurs to trust the future to, patriarchal capitalism is denied new opportunities—chances now given to vulnerable nature and women that must put on their shoulders the burden of ecocidal progress. Other 21st-century apocalyptic movies do rely on female agents in earlier narrative stages: a widow (Isabelle Huppert) in *Time of the Woolf* (2003); a doctor's wife (Julianne Moore) in *Blindness* (2008); a scientist's daughter (Jessica Chastain) in *Interstellar* (2014); a rebel lieutenant (Charlize Theron) in *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015); two orphaned young sisters (Evan Rachel Woods and Elliot Page) in *Into the Forest* (2015); an unexpected guest (Mia Goth) in *The Survivalist* (2015); a mother (Emily Blunt) and her deaf daughter (Millicent Simmonds) in *A Quiet Place* (2018); and a self-blinded mother of two (Sandra Bullock) in *Bird Box* (2018). Most of them, though, are still introduced in terms of their relation to the men in their lives and/or their obligations as mothers—as if a narrative pretext were needed to account for their non-normative leaderships. In any case, the fact that their social context defines them as vulnerable yet resistant agentic subjects (Butler 2016) articulates post-neoliberal desirable modes of being informed by ecological awareness and care-based relations.

As for these female characters' determination when leading the action, and the films' aesthetic representation of their leadership, vigorously agentic female protagonists who guide many others to salvation cohabit with primarily defensive, introspective performances by rather immobile women stranded in remote and isolated natural spaces. In *Mad Max: Fury Road*, Theron's Furiosa powerfully drives the narrative and a large group of characters to an unexpected narrative elsewhere; thus, subverting the agendas of two male main characters—despot Immortan Joe (Hugh Keays-Byrne) and vagabond Max (Tom Hardy). One arm is enough for her to escape, first, and later confront the totalitarian blueprint of a misogynist, ecocidal dictator that stands for the worst possible version of refusing-to-die patriarchal capitalism. Furiosa manages to take away five abused wives through a sandstorm to reach what used to be a matriarchal “green place”, now as uninhabitable as the desert wasteland she has flown from. Her journey out of apocalypse ultimately involves returning to hell to defeat Joe, liberate the natural resources of the commons, and free imprisoned women and slaves exploited as milk and blood providers. Four decades after the first apocalyptic infertile landscapes of the *Mad Max* movies (1979, 1981), the film series cherishes the possibility of an ecofeminist post-apocalypse made possible by a care-driven leader and intersectional collective efforts carried out by exploited subjects. Still, though putting forward a “politics of the multiple” that is often celebrated in 2010s movies (Martín 2023, 151-166), the film's anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal discourses make it through highly aggressive and disruptive narrative and aesthetic choices aligned with the spectacular sound and fury of creative destruction. Hectic camera work, schizophrenic editing, a deafening sound score and CGI explosions result in visual entertainment attuned with the cruelty of the antihero rather than the heroine's care ethics. Even if taking the protagonist's space, her story is told through a cinematic language still enchanted by fuel-driven adrenaline and spectacular violence; Theron's leadership still imbued with patriarchal conceptions of testosterone-driven power.

Ecofeminist and patriarchal-capitalist drives also coexist in *Interstellar*. Chastain's scientist, Murph, owns the main narrative voice and her agency is depicted as essential for

humanity's survival in outer space, after decades of famine and drought, once Earth's resources are exhausted. However, her testimony and efforts revolve around her beloved father's spatial deeds and agenda; her own lifetime inscribed within his. Dad Cooper (Matthew McConaughey) travels through time and space and sends messages from out there to be deciphered by his smart daughter. Nostalgic for a past when men could still wonder at their place in the stars rather than looking down at the dirt around, Cooper leaves his daughter to find answers for mankind in space, thus making honour to his true nature as an "explorer" and "pioneer", not a "caretaker", as he puts it. In the post-apocalyptic solution he helps found-spatial colonies beyond a polluted Earth covered in dust-the future is neither built on the debris left behind, nor on critical reflection about the ecocidal patriarchal-capitalist paradigm that led our planet to disaster. While Chastain's Murph is, at the end of the film, a dying female leader surrounded by the big family she cared for, Cooper remains a young father, surviving an elderly daughter thanks to relativity. He is another refusing-to-die independent explorer whose focalisation prevails beyond hers within a sci-fi film still charmed by fuel-propelled innovations and American imperialist agendas (a US flag is taken with Cooper's home to space colonies). Like Cruise's replicates in *Oblivion*, *Interstellar's* taglines -"The end of Earth will not be the end of us" and "Go further"-still resonate with the unhesitant bravado and creative-destruction cycles of patriarchal capitalism.

Rather than replicating inherited formulas, female protagonists in films like *Blindness*, *A Quiet Place* and *Bird Box* perform introspective approaches to apocalypse grounded in care ethics and ontological transformation. These films' insistence on failing senses (sight and hearing), and the social sensibilities and cooperative skills being developed to compensate for lost capacities, evoke the silent self-reflection and collective transformation necessary to survive individualist and competitive apocalyptic backdrops. An epidemic governed by violent men and alienating institutional surveillance in *Blindness*, and monstrous violent threats of unknown origin in the other two films evoke an aggressive world needing new social references, norms, and values. In *Blindness*, it is the doctor's wife's empathic vision that saves an intercultural lot-a well-intentioned sightless group able to cooperate through mayhem. Moore's protagonist's solidarity emerges as the true illuminating cure to self-centred desensitised neoliberal relations. Similarly, life-saving maternal bonds in *Bird Box* and *A Quiet Place* offer little ones hope for futures different from the very hostile contexts in which they are forced to grow. Narrative and aesthetic choices align in these films with the protagonists' hard experiences, conveying the anxiety of characters fearing for their lives and those of their loved ones. Even if managing to protect others, bleak horizons remain uncleared at the end. Indoor spaces and everyday care efforts downsize the long-term agenda, spatial epic plans, and heroic explorations in *Interstellar*. Rather than "going further" and dreaming of new colonies to settle down, these female agents of apocalypse prompt spectators to look within and care for those around, their approaches to apocalypse down-to-earth and committed to care-driven community life.

Equally introspective and uncertain about the future, women isolated in remote natural spaces articulate motionless responses to the end, defined by uncertainty rather than answers, in *Time of the Woolf*, *The Survivalist*, and *Into the Forest*. Tranquil cottages,

introverted characters, silence, and slow cinematography represent post-traumatic times to be patiently endured, if lucky; no spectacle or adrenaline to be enjoyed in the end of the world. Other competing survivors, especially male, represent the biggest threat for mothers, daughters, and sisters in these films; while sorority and close family relations are essential to make it until the following day. Growing vegetables, repairing old machinery, and collecting rainwater become essential skills in post-neoliberal post-apocalypses where money is no longer useful. Depending on nature now, protagonists need to readapt to its rules and cycles. In this ecological approach to the end, women's motherhood and maternal duties are stressed; their care responsibilities always assumed by them—even if following rape, as happens in *Into the Forest*, or after the child's fathers are killed in *Time of the Wolf* and *The Survivalist*. Moving into the woods in search of safe places in *Into the Forest*; waiting for a train to take them elsewhere in *Time of the Wolf*; or seeking protection in a military camp run by other women in *The Survivalist*, these mothers face—alone—a future that is not primarily their own, but their children's. They are unwilling protagonists of apocalypses they have not brought about, but they still bear the responsibility of a future that is yet to be narrated; hopefully envisioned through more sustainable and egalitarian paradigms of progress. Unlike the deceased fathers in *The Road* and *Children of Men*, these mothers survive, but they cannot yet plan and lead collective futures ahead, as childless Furiosa does. Like Huppert's mother's naked son standing in front of a fire on a silent railroad, viewers are left to wonder if an ecofeminist post-apocalyptic world envisioned, narrated, and articulated outside patriarchal realism will soon be coming to the screens—finding inspiration in the care that sustains life in private spaces to imagine and nurture public life as well.

4. Conclusion: The End of the World—as We Know It

This chapter has spotlighted the elephant in the room of cinematic apocalypse—*patriarchal realism*—in the deceptively gender-neutral Anthropocene. As argued above, the critical analysis of collapsing patriarchal-capitalist imaginaries and ecofeminist alternatives in 21st-century post-apocalyptic films such as *I Am Legend*, *Interstellar* and *Mad Max: Fury Road* can emancipate utopian architectural speculation from archaeological-ontological evaluation (Levitas 2013) inattentive to the patriarchal foundations of *capitalist realism* (Fisher 2009). Instead of running in circles, like the train in *Snowpiercer*, around the issue of an apocalyptic capitalist-anthropocentric system, a resistant *decoding* (Hall 1980) of contemporary cinematic representations of the end brings to the fore prevailing, often taken for granted, patriarchal ways of *encoding* the world and its end; but also promising alternative ways of *seeing* (Berger 1972) informed by ecofeminist modes of agency. Approaching apocalyptic films as “masquerades under a dystopian appearance whose deeper libidinal excitement, however, is surely Utopian in spirit” (Jameson 1994, 28), an “oppositional gaze” (hooks 2003) is deployed against the *visual pleasures* (Mulvey 1975) of spectacular patriarchal-capitalist creative destruction. The cinematic aesthetics, spaces and narrative agents of apocalyptic *sound and fury* are disassembled for interrogation within film speculative maps rarely articulated from female, Black, Eastern, ecological standpoints. The analysis of prolific apocalyptic film imaginaries ultimately suggests that

what is in crisis is a biased way of seeing the world, its history and future, unaware of the silenced forces sustaining the life of the Anthropos in the everyday; a crumbling, yet resilient, *patriarchal realism* shaped and narrated by material accounts of social development that oversee the work behind, and hope latent in, the life of every single human being raised, every eco-social habitat alive. Though surely not as eye-catching as the *sound and fury* of zombie pandemics, alien threats, space odysseys and gas explosions, the “force of nonviolence” (Butler 2020) performed by care-driven and cooperative, vulnerable, yet resistant, male and female survivors in films like *The Road*, *Children of Men*, *Into the Forest*, and *A Quiet Place* illustrate promising counter-apocalyptic ecofeminist philosophies (Zylinska 2018) awaiting our attention beyond the overtrodden alleys of male creative destruction.

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- 28 Days Later*. Directed by Danny Boyle, Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2002.
- 28 Weeks Later*. Directed by Juan Carlos Fresnadillo, 20th Century Fox, 2007.
- A Quiet Place*. Directed by John Krasinski, Paramount Pictures, 2018.
- Bird Box*. Directed by Susanne Bier, Netflix, 2018.
- Blade Runner*. Directed by Ridley Scott, Warner Bros., 1982.
- Blade Runner 2049*. Directed by Denis Villeneuve, Warner Bros., 2017.
- Blindness*. Directed by Fernando Meirelles, Fox Film do Brasil, 2008.
- Children of Men*. Directed by Alfonso Cuarón, Universal Pictures, 2006.
- Day After Tomorrow, The*. Directed by Roland Emmerich, 20th Century Fox, 2004.
- Deluge*. Directed by Felix E. Feist, RKO Radio Pictures, 1933.
- Edge of Tomorrow*. Directed by Doug Liman, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2014.
- Happening, The*. Directed by M. Night Shyamalan, 20th Century Fox, 2008.
- I am Legend*. Directed by Francis Lawrence, Warner Bros., 2007.
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- Mad Max 2*. Directed by George Miller, Warner Bros., 1981.
- Mad Max: Fury Road*. Directed by George Miller, Warner Bros., 2015.
- Maze Runner, The*. Directed by Wes Ball, 20th Century Fox, 2014.
- Metropolis*. Directed by Fritz Lang, UFA, 1927.
- Mission: Impossible - Dead Reckoning Part One*. Directed by Christopher McQuarrie, Paramount Pictures, 2023.
- Never Let Me Go*. Directed by Mark Romanek, Searchlight Pictures, 2010.
- No Blade of Grass*. Directed by Cornel Wilde, Metro- Goldwyn- Mayer, 1970.
- Oblivion*. Directed by Joseph Kosinski, Universal, 2013.
- Outbreak*. Directed by Wolfgang Petersen, Warner Bros., 1995.
- Road, The*. Directed by John Hillcoat, Dimension Films, 2009.

Snowpiercer. Directed by Bong Joon-ho, CJ Entertainment & The Weinstein Company, 2013.

Soylent Green. Directed by Richard Fleischer, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1973.

Survivalist, The. Directed by Stephen Fingleton, Bulldog Film Distribution, 2015.

Time of the Wolf (Le temps du loup). Directed by Michael Haneke, Les Films du Losange, 2003.

Top Gun 2: Maverick. Directed by Joseph Kosinski, Paramount Pictures, 2022.

War Game, The. Directed by Peter Watkins, BFI, 1966.

War of the Worlds, The. Directed by Byron Haskin, Paramount Pictures, 1953.

World War Z. Directed by Marc Forster, Paramount Pictures, 2013.

Bio

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Notes

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