The Neo-frontier in Contemporary Preparedness Novels

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As the era of globalization and comfort ends, preparedness novels embrace humanity's dystopian future and leap at the chance for societal rejuvenation on more localized terms. The three textual case studies explored here put forward a value system derived from the lives of the pioneers and settlers. The frontier, a classic trope of American mythology, is reimagined as the neo-frontier, a time–space continuum located at the porous divide between civilization and wilderness. While this trope provides an antidote against consumer culture's perceived rootlessness and effeminacy, it also legitimizes problematic attitudes, including racism, sexism and a penchant for top-down hierarchies. By regressing to traditional models, the white man avoids succumbing to the excesses of savagery, for example cannibalism, and places himself outside historic time.

Preparedness novels imagine sociopolitical worst-case scenarios as playgrounds of white masculinity. Whereas the nuclear threat of the Cold War drew on fears that governments fostered among the wider public, today's threats comprise a diffuse set of triggers, ranging from terrorist attacks to global pandemics. Most recently, the outbreak of the COVID-19 drew clumsy responses from central authorities, thereby lending more credibility to doom-mongers who had hazmat suits and gas masks at hand. This said, the fundamental concern of preparedness fiction goes beyond mere disaster prevention, but articulates a general dissatisfaction with contemporary lifestyles. For disenfranchised white men, such bleak future visions are not emblematic of present pain, but represent a roadmap to the recovery of lost privileges.

Preparedness novels do not claim a place in the literary canon, even at its margins, but direct the reader's attention to the utopian appeal of a projected return to premodern modes of living. The cultural imaginary of preparedness has already entered the mainstream in Western societies.[1] In addition to

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[1] In recent years, preparedness scenarios, often infused with fantastic elements, have become prevalent in movie and television productions. Examples include Dan Trachtenberg's *10 Cloverfield Lane* (2016), Kenneth Kainz and Natasha Arthy's *The Rain* (2018), Susanne Bier's *Bird Box* (2018) and John Hyams and Karl Schaefer's *Black Summer* (2019). Furthermore, James DeMonaco's *The Purge* (2013) has spawned into a franchise that now includes five films (2013–20) and a television series (2018–).

nonfiction books and television productions, novels have become instrumental in naturalizing the ideals shared by "preppers" and disseminating them to a worldwide readership.

The focus of this study, consisting of preparedness novels published since the millennium, is limited to three prototypical examples: S. M. Stirling's *Dies the Fire* (2004), James Howard Kunstler's *World Made by Hand* (2008) and James Wesley Rawles's *Patriots* (2009). All put forward visions of a return to preindustrial values that allow Americans to reconnect with the patriarchal world of the Founding Fathers. Although they do not openly endorse race war, the three texts also build on the bleak future envisioned in William Pierce's *The Turner Diaries* (1978), a white-supremacist novel. Their most striking feature is their transition from linear to cyclical time. Building on Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, the present analysis treats such texts as amalgamations of time–space continua that converge in the restoration of folkloristic time. Embedded into the cycles of life and death, and of sowing and harvest, the chronotope of the neo-frontier places the heroic male on the dividing line between civilization and wilderness, thus allowing him to reconnect to a form of masculinity that modern society supposedly denies him.

Previous scholarship has addressed aspects of the cultural imaginary of preparedness novels in two ways: first, in discussing preparedness as a sociological phenomenon, and second, in studies of the post-apocalyptic novel of the Cold War and the present. After reviewing this scholarship, I will trace how the cataclysms are triggered in the novels in question, followed by a portrait of the antagonisms that emerge in transition to a new chronotope. A widespread assumption posits that linear time is associated with patriarchy and repression, while cyclical time relates to a more wholesome way of living. The novels under discussion here imagine quite the opposite. Patriarchy and repression indeed thrive at the cyclical neo-frontier. Once the arrow of time, the mark of modernity,[2] breaks, underprivileged groups, including women and minorities, are put in their place, once again.

PREPAREDNESS: ORIGINS

The mind-set of preparedness corresponds to the belief that a catastrophic disaster or emergency is imminent. Differing from classic wartime scenarios,

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[2] Bruno Latour's seminal work *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 68, traces the idiosyncratic origins of the modern passage of time: "Anthropology is here to remind us: the passage of time can be interpreted in several ways – as a cycle or as decadence, as a fall or as instability, as return or as a continuous presence."

preparedness shows an affinity for dormant threats that escape the attention of our everyday perception. Small-scale measures are recommended for the survival of the population, including stockpiling food, ammunition and combustibles. While it is reasonable to trace the quest for self-sufficiency back to American transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau,[3] the particular focus on existential danger among preppers only emerges during the early days of the Cold War. By then, Western governments had promoted the individual construction of fallout shelters, an incentive which was soon discontinued in the US, but is sustained in Switzerland to this day.[4] Preparedness proper, however, was conceived in the aftermath of the Nixon shock of 1971, when the convertibility of US dollars into gold ended and when the oil crises of 1973 and 1979 made the fragility of American infrastructures apparent.

Alongside Doc Stephens and Bruce D. Clayton, Mel Tappan is often quoted as the most influential voice of the movement's early days.[5] In contrast to the previous unanimity that existed between concerned civilians and the government regarding imminent threats and dangers, Tappan is adamant that the two groups no longer share the same goals: "Either by sinister design or by incredible stupidity, the fools and scoundrels we have elected to represent us in government have debauched our currency, crippled our economy and driven us to bankruptcy."[6] Tappan urges readers to get ready for the imminent collapse of the monetary system and brace for nuclear explosions in urban centres or, alternatively, major earthquakes in California. Such scenarios will inevitably lead to violence, rioting and looting, which in turn could facilitate the government's transformation into a dictatorship. Only independent action, he argues, will attenuate the impact of these scenarios on individuals and their families: "The key to survival preparedness is learning to become, primarily or alternatively, independent of the system."[7] Rather than calling for citizen activism and the formation of sustainable communities, however, Tappan's elaborations are directed to single individuals, only including their other family members. This form of splendid isolation reiterates and radicalizes the individualism of consumer capitalism, replacing shared ideals with a conspiracy mind-set, which has, in the US and beyond, become more

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[3] Emerson's essay on "Self-Reliance" (1841) and Thoreau's *Walden* (1854) both urge their readers to avoid conformity and reconnect to a more natural lifestyle.

[4] See Silvia Berger Ziauddin, "(De)territorializing the Home: The Nuclear Bomb Shelter as a Malleable Site of Passage," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 35, 4 (2017), 674–93.

[5] Anon., "The Founding Fathers of Survivalism," *Survival Spot* (blog), at www.survival-spot.com/survival-blog/the-founding-fathers-of-survivalism, accessed 19 April 2019.

[6] Mel Tappan, *Tappan on Survival* (Boulder, CO: Paladin Press, 1981), 5.   [7] Ibid., 10.

and more predominant over the course of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

Following a prolonged period of peace in Western countries, notably the US, 9/11 was crucial in forging an alarmist mind-set, which allowed preparedness to enter the cultural mainstream; after all, its sociopolitical and cultural ramifications have created a sustained psychological state of emergency among Western populations. This heightened sense of danger was further nurtured by natural disasters, for instance Hurricane Katrina in 2005.[8] Not much later, the financial crisis of 2007–8 shattered people's trust in banking institutions and regulators. With Europe being hit harder economically than North America,[9] the idea of imminent collapse was also embraced across the Atlantic. In recent years, Tappan's list of chaos triggers has been expanded to include climate change and global pandemics.[10] Consequently, preppers have received substantial coverage in the media since the onset of the coronavirus disease 2019.

Given the subjective nature of risk assessment, this extensive list is not surprising, as such calculations are always the product of global judgement, not rational calculation.[11] Nonetheless, this pool of anxieties, including terrorist attacks, financial crises, natural disaster and climate change,[12] creates a paradox. Each scenario requires extremely different coping strategies, yet preparedness handles them as congenial causes that can be mitigated by a set of

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[8] As the winds struck New Orleans and government response fell short of expectations, the affected communities reiterated Tappan's suspicion of "sinister designs" or "incredible stupidity" on the part of official representatives. Allegedly, the city's elite consciously protected rich neighbourhoods at the expense of low-income African Americans. See Jed Horne, "Five Myths about Hurricane Katrina," *Washington Post*, 31 Aug. 2012, at www.washingtonpost. com/opinions/five-myths-about-hurricane-katrina/2012/08/31/003f4064-f147-11e1-a612-3cfc842a6d89_story.html, accessed 29 April 2020.

[9] See Alain Parguez and Slim Thabet, "The Twenty-First Century World Crisis: A Keynes Moment?", *International Journal of Political Economy*, 42, 1 (2013), 26–39, 30.

[10] See current discussions of climate change, including the IPCC's conservative, but still alarming, report published on the occasion of the 2018 UN Climate Change Conference. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, "Global Warming of 1.5 °C: An IPCC Special Report," at https://report.ipcc.ch/sr15/pdf/sr15_spm_final.pdf, accessed 29 April 2020.

[11] See Randall D. Marshall, Richard A. Bryant, Lawrence Amsel, Eun Jung Suh, Joan M. Cook and Yuval Neria, "The Psychology of Ongoing Threat," *American Psychologist*, 62, 4 (2007), 304–16, 307.

[12] This list can be extended *ad nauseam*: Rawles's own self-help book names the following bullet points as reminders that one should start "prepping": hyperinflationary depression; deflationary depression; terrorist nuclear, biological, or chemical warfare; nation-state nuclear, biological, or chemical warfare; a third world war; an oil embargo on the First World nations; martial law; invasion; climate change; major volcanic and/or earthquake events; major asteroid or comet strike. James Wesley Rawles, *How to Survive the End of the World as We Know It: Tactics, Techniques and Technologies for Uncertain Times* (New York: Penguin 2009), 5.

recurring measures. As John Wiseman, a contemporary survivalist, argues, the advantage of stockpiling food and of learning how to handle firearms and build a fortified home is self-explanatory: "If we are all grounded in the basic techniques of survival, and know what to do in an emergency, the world immediately becomes a safer place."[13]

The disjunction between multifactorial risks and unidimensional mitigation measures corresponds with the acronym frequently used in prepper handbooks: TEOTWAWKI stands for "the end of the world as we know it." This formula throws all possible scenarios into one basket and was originally coined at the approach of the new millennium, when Internet forums were filled with discussions of the hypothetical Y2K bug. Instead of disappearing once the year 2000 began without major hiccups, the formula developed into a buzzword for concerned citizens. Just like the other popular acronym WTSHTF ("when the shit hits the fan"), such short forms direct attention away from the roots of a problem. In fact, they represent a hope: that an event will come that finally puts an end to modern comfort and its effeminizing effects on society.

Despite the professed matter-of-fact language of preparedness, its assumptions about the world are highly ideological. Its idiosyncratic blend of libertarianism and primitivism contains strands of evangelicalism and paganism, and imagines a world in which white communities can take pride in their ethnicity. Scholarship on preparedness has already produced several articles addressing this social phenomenon and drawn attention to its incompatibility with liberal cosmopolitan values. Its world vision imagines "post-collapse America being made up of able-bodied individuals who are free of chronic illness and excess weight,"[14] and puts forward "hegemonic masculinity as … an antidote for a crumbling and emasculated society."[15] As a heteronormative discourse, the standpoint of survivalism "requires the bodies of women and children to be under the control of white masculinity."[16] In this sense, Katherine Sugg's criticism of the popular AMC horror drama *The Walking Dead* (2010–19) also applies to the works examined in this essay: it affirms a strong version of liberal sovereign individuality in creating templates of

[13] John Wiseman, *SAS (Special Air Service) Survival Handbook: The Ultimate Guide to Surviving Anywhere* (London: William Collins, 2014), viii.
[14] Allison Kabel and Catherine Chmidling, "Disaster Prepper: Health, Identity, and American Survivalist Culture," *Human Organization*, 73, 3 (2014), 258–66, 264.
[15] Casey Ryan Kelly, "The Man-Pocalypse: *Doomsday Preppers* and the Rituals of Apocalyptic Manhood," *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 36, 2–3 (2016), 95–114, 96.
[16] John Preston, "Prosthetic White Hyper-masculinities and Disaster Education," *Ethnicities*, 10, 3 (2010), 331–43, 340.

self-reliant behaviour.[17] The scholarly focus on the reactionary agenda of pre-paredness may appear gratuitous, but reflects a deep-seated insecurity in dealing with aesthetic products that are just as entertaining as they are prob-lematic. Preparedness happily incorporates viewpoints endorsed by GOP pundits and far-right conspiracy theorists, yet manages to make them palatable for a mainstream audience.

Possibly, the trope of preparedness provides an academically implausible, yet emotionally convincing, answer to white American rootlessness. Beginning in the early 1990s, political scientists pointed out that the surge of "ethno-racial identity or, more broadly, extended clan-based loyalty, has emerged as a matter of great significance for virtually all immigrant groups, regardless of how long they have resided in America."[18] This also affects the white population, which had previously escaped identification as "other." Since white Americans no longer enjoy privileged access to wealth and power, they look for racial iden-tification – only to discover an empty signifier yet to be filled. For some, this spiritual vacuum can be filled by hazy nostalgia for the golden age of the 1950s and 1960s, as seen in contemporary pop music,[19] while others turn to the mythological imaginary of the settlers. The virtuous pioneer, whose life is situated between Edenic agrarianism and heroic expansionism, represents white culture without subscribing to urban decadence. After frontier life "strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin,"[20] he brings enlightened reason to the savages.[21]

POST-APOCALYPTIC FICTION

Preparedness novels are not a stand-alone genre, but draw on the aesthetics and imaginary established by Cold War post-apocalyptic fiction. This rubric includes texts that engage with the nuclear threat in multiple ways; Paul Williams focussed on texts that critically regard nuclear weapons as "white" weapons that now imperil the whole world,[22] and Andrew Hammond on

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[17] See Katherine Sugg, "*The Walking Dead*: Late Liberalism and Masculine Subjection in Apocalypse Fictions," *Journal of American Studies*, 49, 4 (2015), 793–811.

[18] Michael W. Hughey and Arthur J. Vidich, "The New American Pluralism: Racial and Ethnic Sodalities and Their Sociological Implications," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, 6, 2 (1992), 159–80, 166, 164.

[19] See Kare Aronoff, "Lana Del Rey's America," *Dissent*, 64, 4 (2017), 11–15.

[20] See Frederick Jackson Turner, *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner*, ed. John Mack Garagher (New York: Henry Holt, 1999), 31. Subsequent references will be cited in the text as *T*.

[21] See Heike Paul, *The Myths That Made America: An Introduction to American Studies* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2014), 311–52.

[22] See Paul Williams, *Race, Ethnicity and Nuclear War: Representations of Nuclear Weapons and Post-apocalyptic Worlds* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 1–2.

creeping anxiety in the face of atomic fallout.[23] Yet post-apocalyptic fiction also includes texts that avoid postcolonial self-reflection. More recently, Dylan Barth looked at samples that take a more affirmative stance. As a "male fantasy written *by* men and *for* men,"[24] this kind of fiction explores the post-apocalypse as a playground for true masculinity. As a cataclysmic event leads to the breakdown of familiar socioeconomic structures, new living conditions come into being. Amid barter systems and pockets of decentralized enclaves, male protagonists stand out for their physical strength, social cooperation and spiritual tranquillity. Representative texts include Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon* (1959), Robert Heinlein's *Farnham's Freehold* (1964), and Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle's *Lucifer's Hammer* (1978).

With regard to discussions of race, Heinlein's text in particular has attracted much attention. After a thermonuclear war has erased present society, a group of white survivors are enslaved by the land's new rulers, a black elite who practise cannibalism. Here, the trope of cannibalism establishes one of the most persistent motifs in the post-apocalyptic imaginary: in the dystopian future, human society will be divided into those who uphold a minimum of human decency and the rest who regress into a primitive and barbaric form of living. Heinlein's racial encoding of cannibalism is mirrored by white-supremacist fiction of the time, for example William Pierce's *The Turner Diaries* (1978). Providing "the racially conscious Aryan with a manual for how to be in the world,"[25] this diary novel portrays a Manichean battle between virtuous whites and their foes, African and Latino Americans who rape, are corrupt, do drugs and lack discipline. The novel's bottom line puts forward a genocidal argument about an "enemy whose savagery is presented as an innate element of his/her being." As a consequence, "the situation can only be rectified through a policy of extinction."[26] As the white-supremacist Organization unleashes civil war, its members hope that white America can unlearn the credo of liberalism: the assumption that all people are born equal. The whole enterprise has a cleansing effect on the triumphant white males. Feeling increasingly superior regarding their racial heritage, they also develop a more hierarchical understanding of gender relations. While preparedness novels are less overtly racist than Turner's text, they also endorse

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[23] See Andrew Hammond, *Cold War Literature: Writing the Global Conflict* (London, Routledge, 2006), 65–71.

[24] Dylan Barth, *Carry the Fire: Intersections of Apocalypse, Primitivism, and Masculinity in American Literature, 1945–2000* (Milwaukee: ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2013), 24, original emphasis.

[25] M. S. Waltman and M. J. Davis, "How to Be a Proper Racist: Mythic Representations in the Turner Diaries," *Journal of Intergroup Relations*, 32 (2005), 19–39, 28.

[26] Charles Goehring and George N. Nionisopoulos, "Identification by Antithesis: The Turner Diaries as Constitutive Rhetoric," *Southern Communication Journal*, 78, 5 (2013), 269–386, 382.

an ideal of racial segregation. Furthermore, they promote a traditionally gendered household setup: gun-wielding husbands are matched with wives who remain confined to the domestic sphere.

The Turner Diaries represents an outlandish example of post-apocalyptic fiction, where its fanatical protagonists create TEOTWAWKI entirely without the additional help of, say, a spectacular meteor strike. The country once called the United States breaks apart into new territories. The novel's gory descriptions of violence, martyrdom and revenge are indicative of a world in which urban centres have turned into the new frontier: they represent racially impure spaces in need of conquest and colonization on behalf of whites. Although preparedness novels do not share Pierce's thirst for a race war, their geography follows a similar pattern, as patches of friendly territories stand in opposition to those ruled by sinister forces. The model is not the Civil War fought between 1861 and 1865, but the early days of American individualism, when the pioneers settled at the "meeting point between savagery and civilization." As a source of this "perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities" (*T* 32), the indicated historical space continuum ended around 1880, when no more land remained to be colonized. The post-apocalyptic American landscape, however, returns to the mythical frontier with the remaining population descending into savagery. As the stories progress, the chosen ones gradually reclaim land from those who illegitimately occupy it.

Next to post-apocalyptic novels of the Cold War, preparedness novels also bear a relation to the gloomy corpus which Andrew Tate loosely defines as apocalyptic fiction. In his monograph, the core texts are Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003–13) and Suzanne Collins's *Hunger Games* sequence (2008–10). Barth's and Tate's definitions do not entirely overlap, since the latter also includes evangelical best sellers, for example Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins's best-selling *Left Behind* series (1995–2007). This aspect is important for preparedness novels. Although not strictly religious in their worldviews, they also explore the spiritual reawakening of its protagonists. Linking this genre to heightened anxiety levels after 9/11 and a growing awareness of climate change, Tate singles out one particular motif as emblematic: the hiker, who embarks on an exploration of the ruins of civilization. Commonly, the traversed terrain is "not densely populated, but its cracked black-top roads … are positively busy with ambulatory figures: itinerants, drifters and nomads who pace these ruined environments."[27] Apocalyptic fiction usually concludes with the protagonist's discovery of a new abode or the

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[27] Andrew Tate, *Apocalyptic Fiction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 21.

prospect of a new beginning. This is precisely the backdrop against which the heroic feats of preparedness novels also take place.

THE CATACLYSM

As Bruno Latour points out, the arrow of time is just one of many ways time can be perceived. Despite our modern conviction that time passes as if it were really abolishing the past behind it, anthropological research shows that other interpretations are possible: time can be viewed as a process of decadence, a continuous presence or a cycle, to name a few alternatives. Preparedness novels share Latour's scepticism towards the universality of linear time and experiment with transitions into different time–space regimes. In order to develop a better understanding of literary chronotopes, this section will start with a short overview of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept, then move on to how the three preparedness novels stage the sociopolitical reboot.

According to Bakhtin's structuralist approach, the analysis of literary space–time continua facilitates an assessment of the ideological core of a narrative, notably the image of man. Chronotopes can be based on simple plot devices, for example "the encounter," "the road," or "the threshold." In addition, more comprehensive chronotopes link particular genres to specific historical periods and ways of looking at the world. In Greek romance time, for example, the narrative follows a strict set of chronotopical conventions: owing to bad luck, two lovers are separated geographically at the beginning of the novel and are, thanks to a final twist of fate, reunited at the end. In such structural devices, form and content congeal into a unit that governs all aspects of the narration: "They are the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of the narrative are tied and untied."[28] Chronotopes rarely appear in isolation, but are promiscuous and represent individual threads from which the literary text is woven.

Preparedness novels start out with a chronotopical negative: as a cataclysm hits, linear time comes to a standstill. Timekeeping becomes obsolete, alongside the infrastructure that facilitates daily commutes and supply chains. Impractical as it seems at the beginning, the end of consumer capitalism also promises the end of white alienation. While nonfiction preparedness texts list the plethora of possible cataclysms in matter-of-fact bullet points, novels usually pick one or two factors alone. In Rawles's *Patriots*, excessive federal spending lies at the root of America's demise. After the lessons of

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[28] Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 250. Subsequent references will be cited in the text as *B*.

the financial crisis of 2008 are ignored, debt and deficit numbers compound and lead to a stock market crash and a collapsing dollar. Large-scale riots wreak havoc in Detroit, New York City and Los Angeles, where escaped prisoners form wolf packs: "Every major city in the United States was soon gripped in a continual orgy of robbery, murder, looting, rape, and arson."[29] After the looted supermarkets remain empty and cities run out of food, a substantial number of people revert to cannibalism. The human toll of the subsequent influenza pandemic and lawless violence is incidentally estimated at 160 million deaths – that is, half of the American population (*R* 257). Although everyone is affected by social collapse equally, Rawles tells the story of a handful of savvy Chicagoans who took precautions. Under the leadership of Todd Grey, a devout Christian and automatic-weapon aficionado, they retreat to a fortified homestead in the American Northwest. Alongside other armed guerrillas they protect the country from a foreign invasion and rebuild the country in their image.

Other novels cite terrorist attacks as a trigger. James Howard Kunstler's narrative is set in a distant future, long after terrorists have detonated multiple nuclear bombs in American coastal cities. This initial shock, the protagonist recalls, was followed by an oil embargo against the United States and an outbreak of the "Mexican flu." While radically thinned-out population levels allow for the gradual regeneration of the countryside, urban life appears to be a lost cause. As a messenger reports, "New York City is finished[.] It'll take a hundred years to sort things out and get it all going again."[30] Kunstler's novel follows the path of Robert Earle, a former IT consultant, who is elected mayor of a struggling town in upstate New York. Unfortunately, the lethargic townspeople are an easy target for marauders. But as a fundamentalist Christian group arrives, a silver lining appears: they form an alliance against those who exploit the power vacuum.

Preparedness novels other than the three under present analysis also include additional chaos triggers. For example, the cumulative effects of a weak economy paired with terrorist attacks on key infrastructures are demonstrated by Joe Nobody's *Holding Their Own* (2011). The plague, a classic trope of apocalypse since Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), haunts James van Pelt's *Summer of the Apocalypse* (2006) and also forms the background of Felix A. Münter's German-language post-apocalyptic novel *Prepper* (2017). Finally, electromagnetic pulse attacks, brought to prominence during the

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[29] See James Wesley Rawles, *Patriots: A Novel of Survival in the Coming Collapse* (Berkeley, CA: Ulysses Press, 2009), 9. Subsequent references will be cited in the text as *R*.
[30] James Howard Kunstler, *World Made by Hand* (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 142. Subsequent references will be cited in the text as *K*.

Republican debates in 2016,[31] feature prominently in Ray Gorham's *77 Days in September* (2011) and G. Michael Hopf's *The End* (2014).

It would be a stretch, however, to relate this long list of possible triggers to sophisticated scenario thinking, as proposed by military strategists like Herman Kahn.[32] Preparedness novels show little interest in delineating a coherent sequence of disastrous events. The perfunctory treatment of the cataclysms relies on the reader's inclination, if not desire, to imagine the worst. The protagonists are plunged into a new phase, in which the ethical conventions of modern civilization are annulled and replaced by a fight for survival.

The pedestrian treatment of the circumstances leading up to the cataclysm is best demonstrated by Stirling's *Dies the Fire*. While McCarthy's *The Road* uses unspecified causation to transform a realist narrative into an allegory about a finite material world, Stirling references a haphazard white flash as a *deus ex machina* to create premodern living conditions. Instantly, planes crash-land, engines stop working and explosives, such as gun cartridges, fail to detonate. As social hierarchies collapse, Stirling's hard-boiled hero, Mark Havel, a retired Marine, turns from contractor to group leader. In their quest for unoccupied farmland in Oregon, his outfit comes to the rescue of Juniper's community, a former folk singer turned Wiccan priestess. While the origin of the white flash remains in the dark, a character speculates idly,

It could be our fault, something humans did through carelessness or malice. It could be aliens doing the same. Or … it could be something the Otherworld did for our own good … We might have killed the planet, if this hadn't happened. Killed the whole human race, and the plants and the animals too. I don't know, but it's possible.[33]

The text refrains from further elaboration on this hypothesis, instead describing – and celebrating – the increasingly medieval lifestyles of the survivors.

THE BREAKDOWN OF SOCIETY

In contrast to apocalyptic novels like Atwood's sophisticated prose, including *The Handmaid's Tale* (1984) and *Oryx and Crake* (2003), preparedness texts do not indulge in flashbacks. Given their affirmative attitude towards the world *après le déluge*, this is hardly surprising. Recollections of drinking

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[31] Philip Bump, "Republican Warnings about an Electro-magnetic Pulse (EMP) Attack, Explained," *Washington Post*, 15 Jan. 2016, at www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2016/01/15/no-you-dont-really-need-to-worry-about-an-emp-attack/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.f4d0c90bfce7, accessed 16 April 2019.

[32] See Paul Dragos Aligica, "The Challenge of the Future and the Institutionalization of Interdisciplinarity: Notes on Herman Kahn's Legacy," *Futures*, 36, 1 (2004), 67–83.

[33] S. M. Stirling, *Dies the Fire: A Novel of the Change* (New York: Roc Books, 2004), 285. Subsequent references will be cited in the text as *S*.

Gatorade or refrigerated beer (*K* 204) only emerge as brief topics of conversation between the protagonists. They are only inserted to demonstrate how different personalities cope with the change: there are those who get over it and those who despair. The novels have nothing but contempt for the latter cohort. This blatant lack of melancholia indeed represents one of the genre's most astounding features. The emphasis is solely on resilience and adaptation to post-collapse life.

Meticulous accounts of violence figure as a key feature of preparedness novels. They represent a direct effect of the old chronotope's termination, as members of society abruptly realize that the old social contract has become obsolete. In this initial phase, the populations not only rediscover their ethno-racial identity or extended clan-based loyalty, but go a step further: they open fire on outsiders. Previously, armed conflict only occurred in clashes between gangs and the police, or in military operations. At once, a Darwinian struggle for survival is unleashed in suburban neighbourhoods, where worries about mortgages and promotions are replaced by demonstrations of physical strength and craftiness. Only a quick retreat into one's "Bug-Out Cabin" can prevent misery, abuse and premature death. Despite real-world examples of resilient communities who experience near total devastation of their livelihoods without succumbing to self-destruction,[34] preparedness novels unanimously subscribe to a gloomy anthropology that doubts the possibility of cooperation in the face of adversity. Taking inspiration from the frequent misappropriation of Thomas Hobbes's wolf metaphor,[35] these texts invoke the idea of an inner savage who waits to be unleashed in a state of emergency.

In this regard, the texts exhibit a marked difference from traditional examples of survival accounts. The works of Joseph Conrad, for example, present the exploration of primitive behaviour as a one-way road ending in irreversible degeneration.[36] Such qualms rarely appear within the works under present analysis. It is astounding how quickly the protagonists revert to violence without undergoing psychological damage themselves. Once the police fail to maintain order, normal citizens pick up whatever weapons they can lay

[34] See Francesca Fois and Giuseppe Forino, "The Self-Built Ecovillage in L'Aquila, Italy: Community Resilience as a Grassroots Response to Environmental Shock," *Disasters*, 38, 4 (2014), 719–39.

[35] Hobbes only describes the relationship between states as predatory, not the relationship between humans: "To speak impartially, both sayings are very true; that man to man is a kind of God; and that man to man is an arrant wolf. The first is true, if we compare citizens amongst themselves; and the second, if we compare cities." Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive, or The Citizen* (New York: Appleton Century Crofts, 1949), 1.

[36] See John Wylie Griffith, *Joseph Conrad and the Anthropological Dilemma* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 5–8.

hands on and become embroiled in visceral fights. In Stirling's novel, this starts with Juniper, formerly a peaceful folk musician. As marauders attack, she promptly reacts: "*No time to waste on subtlety or warnings*, she thought. Especially not when all her potential opponents were stronger than she was, and would probably enjoy adding rape to theft and murder." She picks up an axe helve and attacks from behind: "the hardwood cracked into the side of [his head], over the temple ... The unpleasant crunching feel of breaking bone shivered back up the axe handle into her hands, and she froze for a moment, knowing that she'd probably killed a man." Once she has saved herself and her friends, she arrives at the conclusion, "*I had to*, she thought. *I* really *had to*" (*S* 22–24, emphasis in the original). Only the forceful use of italics gives away a hint of uneasiness.

Although racial segregation is viewed as commendable in the long run, racially motivated murder is considered an abomination. Once the civilized group around Mark Havel crosses paths with a brutal gang of neo-Nazis, they decide to free the African American man the gang has enslaved. But in order to do so, they must first justify their own use of violence. Since the gang is likely to attack their own people, self-defence seems justified. Mike calmly explains to his companion, a teenager:

"You realize we're going to have to kill them all?"
Eric nodded abruptly, swallowing again; he started to speak, cleared his throat, and then went on: "Yeah, Mike, I do. They'll kill my folks if we don't, won't they? And rape my sisters. And they'll torture that black guy."
"For starters," Havel said. (*S* 101)

Justified violence against such aggressors acts as a baptism that inaugurates entry into the transitional chronotope.

Rawles's *Patriots* is equally fatalistic when it comes to assessing the urban population's propensity to violence. If one is not lucky enough to find a storm drain tunnel that directly leads into the countryside, one must imitate the attackers' ruthlessness. Second thoughts only appear on the margins, for example when another survivor recalls, "the guy ... jumped up at me. I emptied the four rounds left in the magazine into him. The last shot was right into his face. The whole back end of his head exploded. I guess I was on autopilot at that point" (*R* 27). This state of running on "autopilot" is a telling metaphor. Its technical ring deflects attention away from the problematic suspension of everyday ethics, instead designating a "natural" predatory mode that can be switched on and off with little effort. After hitherto innocent citizens turn into murderers, this alleged mechanism allows individuals to focus on survival only. The idea that compassion and morality can be put on standby is an integral aspect of the re-masculinization of society. According to Preston, preparedness masculinity "must reach beyond

traditional corporeality in terms of becoming animalistic … and primitive."[37] Once targeted violence is classified as a distinguishing feature of those willing to survive amid chaos, they no longer risk losing their humanity, but merely affirm their rationality: once you get embroiled in a dangerous situation, there is only one way out.

In *World Made by Hand*, there is at least the hint of an inner struggle. After the protagonist finds himself shooting another man, he experiences a fleeting crisis: "Could we even pretend the law still existed? Or was it something you made up now, as the occasion required?" (*K* 181). But Robert overcomes such doubts once the militant clerics of the New Faith Church provide him with a welcome frame of reference. One of them argues, "Stopping this fiend was the Lord's work" (*K* 190).

The disenchanted anthropology behind such action argues that only violence (perpetrated by the good guys) can save individuals from violence (perpetrated by the bad guys). Although they justify their deeds as mere reactions to attacks by others, such justifications remain noticeably brief. The protagonists are just waiting for the opportunity to see how much further their "autopilot" can take them. As crucial ingredient of the neo-frontier, this stance will be discussed in more detail below.

CANNIBALS AND WARLORDS

As things fall apart, a segment of the population descends into cannibalism. As the ultimate chronotope of an inverted world order, cannibalism readjusts the trajectory of human life. Rather than culminating in marriage, paying off a mortgage or sweet retirement in a Florida condo, the path of life ends in a cooking pot. Cannibals never just chase after cheap protein, but cancel their membership in the community of humans. Preparedness novels revel in the shocking value of such practices: "There were four bodies in the ravine; they'd all been gutted, and had the major cuts – thighs, upper arms, ribs – roughly hacked free and removed" (*S* 228). In another scene, dutiful vigilantes search the belongings of suspicious-looking wanderers and not only discover copies of Mao's *Little Red Book*, but sacks of meat: "Mike had just uncovered a clear plastic bag containing three small human legs and four small human arms" (*R* 101). In each of these scenes, the reaction follows a strict protocol: at least one of the observers throws up, another one kills the cannibal without asking further questions.

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[37] Preston, "Prosthetic White Hyper-masculinities," 338–39.

In contrast to science fiction, where cannibalism is often discussed in practical terms,[38] preparedness novels present it as the zero point to which a collapsed society is heading. Once cannibalism spreads, humanity can gradually go extinct without help from outside – simply by satisfying its hunger. In such trying times, only righteous people can resist the temptation of easy protein. While Western culture assesses cannibalism differently across time,[39] this indignant perspective goes back to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). After escaping the cooking pot himself, Crusoe teaches Friday, a former cannibal, the godlessness of this practice. Should he not comply, Crusoe vows to kill him. Subsequent generations of anthropologists, notably James Frazer, established cannibalism as the hallmark of the primitive mind.[40]

When compared to cannibals, even the unjust rule of self-proclaimed warlords appears preferable. They represent a personality type with a timeless appeal: from the Middle Ages up to the Chicago Outfit of the 1910s, the egotistic and self-serving strongman transcends epochs. Preparedness novels abound with such characters, whose existence challenges the protagonists' quest for order amid chaos. In Kunstler's Wayne Karp the reader encounters a comparatively clumsy foe. As a former trucker, he is defined as somebody who normally would not thrive, "But in the new era, he blossomed into a local kingpin" (*K* 29). He makes a livelihood from extorting farmers, digging up old landfills and sorting valuables. Once peaceful villagers question the legitimacy of his rule, however, he proceeds to torture and murder. His preferences for live sex shows and hard rock music, especially Guns N' Roses and Metallica, identify him as a rocker. Similar lowlifes can also be found in Rawles's novel. A refugee, whose town was sacked by a biker gang, reports, "What they've been doin' is just terrible. They killed most of the men, and they've been raping the women that are still left alive. I also heard that they've been torturing the little kids" (*R* 202). Interestingly, such waywardness often comes hand in hand with their use of inexpensive equipment – made in China rather than in the US (see *R* 235).

In contrast to such small-scale marauders who pose little threat to the heroic protagonists, regional warlords like Rawles's Norman Arminger are

[38] See Neal Stephenson's *Seveneves* (London: The Borough Press, 2015), 520. As the remaining human population orbits around the destroyed planet, no one is exempted from the temptation of easy protein. Confronted with cannibalism, even the virtuous leader of the space station can emphasize, "The terrible thing was that they had considered doing the same thing, many times. Every freeze-dried corpse that they jettisoned was a big collection of protein and nutrients that, from a certain point of view, could seem mouthwatering."

[39] At the time, the cannibalism tragedy of the Donner Party in 1846–47 was met with understanding. Its survivors were never prosecuted. See Bill Schutt, *Eat Me: A Natural and Unnatural History of Cannibalism* (London: Profile, 2017), 77.   [40] See ibid., 85–86.

comparably mighty villains. As a former professor of medieval history and a self-proclaimed cosplayer, he confirms the suspicion that medieval studies entertains a problematic relationship with white nationalism and white supremacy.[41] Given his expertise, he enjoys the advantage of being ahead of his fellow citizens when it comes to weapons expertise and knowing how to set up a solid power base. His aim is to imitate the Normans, famous for their martial spirit and the surprising reach of their empire during the eleventh and twelfth centuries CE. With the support of former gang leaders, including what is left of the Crips, an LA-based gang, he establishes an armed force in Portland. His farsighted plan is to extend the reach of his power far into the countryside in order to secure food reserves: "Everything that's been invented in the last eight hundred years is useless now. There's only two ways to live now; farming, and running the farmers" (*S* 381).

Rawles's *Patriots* offers a sinister portrait of state authorities. Here, the cataclysm only reveals the tyranny inherent in contemporary democratic governments. The Provisorial Federal Government exacerbates everything that seems wrong about leftist America today: after banning firearms among the population, United Nations troops are allowed on American soil. President Hutchinson acts as a stand-in for progressive Presidents. He represents "a totalitarian globalist oligarchy instituted without the benefit of any semblance of democratic process, or incorporating a republican form of government" (*R* 263), thereby recalling similar accusations made against Barack Obama by the far right.[42] Once the United Nations Protection Force, staffed with German and Belgian soldiers, invades Idaho, the members of the "Northwest Militia" and other guerrilla troops fight back to save their country from falling into the wrong hands. Capital punishment is enforced among the captured soldiers. Alternatively, they receive brands on their faces with a hot iron (*R* 340).

The cannibals, President Hutchinson and local warlords represent three different kinds of antagonists, who correspond to different chronotopes. Cannibalism has an eschatological undercurrent and points towards the end of human civilization. The cooking pot is not the birthplace of a new order, but inaugurates the actual end of history. Marxists may understand

[41] See Dorothy Kim, "The Unbearable Whiteness of Medieval Studies," *In the Middle* (blog), 10 Nov 2016, at www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2016/11/the-unbearable-whiteness-of-medieval.html, accessed 29 April 2020.

[42] Luis R. Miranda, "Obama Will Advocate for Hand Over of Oceans to Globalist Powers," *The Real Agenda News* (website), 17 June 2014, at real-agenda.com/in-depth/obama-will-advocate-for-hand-over-of-oceans-to-globalist-powers, accessed 22 February 2020.

cannibalism as a mere metaphor for neoliberalism,[43] but for preppers it represents a tangible risk that needs to be handled adequately. As a consequence, a cannibal's life has even less value than a murderer's or rapist's, as he represents an abomination that must be erased: "This bunch have read themselves out of the human race. There are things you're just not entitled to do, even to survive" (*S* 228–29). Illegitimate state authority represents the other extreme. Despite the catastrophic impact of the cataclysm, bureaucrats try to shrug off the need for imminent change. According to their agenda, the arrow of time should just continue infinitely. As the invasion of American soil should demonstrate, post-apocalyptic chaos could even facilitate an advancement of the progressive agenda – aided by the globalist conspiracy. Surprisingly, the uninterrupted rule of corrupt politicians is just as dangerous as the spread of cannibalism. Representatives of both groups must be exterminated. As Goehring and Nionisopoulos argued in view of race war in *The Turner Diaries*, the situation justifies a policy of extinction.

In contrast, the local warlords inhabit a chronotope that is quite congenial with the world envisioned by survivalists. In Stirling's novel, Arminger's assessment of the historic shift provokes Mike Havel's praise. The former states, "If people are to survive above the level of cannibal bands or isolated farms, there has to be organization, leadership … and it has to be based on realistic principles. We have to turn to older models" (*S* 275). His future vision, however, does not meet with Mike's approval; after all, Arminger coldly lays out his tyrannical ambitions: "this generation's sharecroppers and hired hands will be the serfs and slaves of the next" (*S* 278). Drawing inspiration from the Middle Ages, post-apocalyptic leaders abandon the liberal concept that all men are equal and that decision taking is a process involving shared competences. In this Shakespearian setup, power is increasingly monopolized in their hands and succession inevitably tied to their murder. Enter the chronotope of the neo-frontier.

THE NEO-FRONTIER

In contrast to lowlifes like Wayne Karp, the cruel rocker, and megalomaniac warlords like Norman Arminger, the protagonists represent desirable role models amid disaster. For one, they do not listen to heavy metal music, read

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[43] In this light, cannibalism is the ultimate metaphor of a neoliberal society which prepares for the suspension of solidarity. Once "We don't eat people," the mantra of father and son in McCarthy's *The Road*, becomes the minimal definition of being a good person, the revaluation of all values is imminent. See Alfonso M. Rodríguez de Austria Giménez de Aragón, "We Don't Eat People: La nueva ética del sistema caníbal propuesta por la narrativa audiovisual postapocalíptica del siglo XXI," *Daimon*, 5 (2016), 737–45, 745.

pornographic magazines or use cheap equipment produced in China, indicative of a non-patriotic and dilettante mind-set. As opposed to the visible self-interest of their opponents, they are visionaries who have the common good in mind. Some read the Bible; others hold spiritual beliefs. When they celebrate, they do not overindulge, but enjoy a simple barn dance or join a jam session in a string band (see *K* 215–21; *R* 217). They withstand seduction and exhibit a caring attitude towards the clan's offspring.

The mission of these communities is to resuscitate the lifestyles of virtuous pioneers and yeoman farmers. They contrast positively with medieval tyranny, which, after all, is a European rather than an American phenomenon. The primary achievement of these novels lies in a thought game that shakes up previously held assumptions about the frontier. Preparedness novels posit that the pioneer lifestyle is not a thing of the past, but of the future. The post-apocalyptic period may indeed give rise to undesirable phenomena, but, at the same time, it allows the reemergence of this classic trope of American mythology. In order to distinguish it clearly from its historic model and to highlight its sheer artificiality, I will call this particular time–space continuum the neo-frontier.

According to Robert F. Nash's inquiry into American environmental history, there existed a disjunction between the aesthetic contemplation of wilderness, as was common in Romanticism, and the actual antipathy that settlers felt towards uncultivated patches of land. As opposed to the European idealization of America as an Edenic paradise, frontiersmen fought for their survival and faced challenges to their moral integrity. Once Native Americans resorted to violence, they were no longer regarded as pitiful creatures in need of religious instruction, but became an additional menace to the livelihoods of the frontiersmen. After the latter pushed further and further into the wilds, some even switched sides and joined tribes, thereby creating an insurmountable gulf between themselves and urban life on the East Coast. Other frontiersmen experimented with cannibalism, like Charles "Big Phil" Gardner. As Nash puts it, "Under wilderness conditions the veneer civilization laid over the barbaric elements in man seemed much thinner than in the settled regions."[44] Only once wilderness was transformed into inhabitable land was it the poet's turn to elevate "the symbols of solitude and contemplation as basic attitude to comprehend nature as a mystic source of creation and moral judgement."[45] In contrast to the Transcendentalists, the frontiersmen

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[44] Roderick Frazier Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 30.
[45] Marius Jucan, "The Symbolic Frontier of Wilderness," *Caietele Echinox*, 5 (2003), 15–24, 15.

viewed the country primarily through utilitarian lenses: "trees became lumber, prairies farm, and canyons the sites of hydroelectric dams."[46]

The rise of the pioneer mythology also coincided with the crisis of Victorian middle-class manliness by the 1890s. As small-scale capitalism was replaced by bureaucratic, interdependent society, a new rhetoric about maleness appeared and gave rise to proclamation of the "natural man"; that is, white men who can engage in violence because they learned self-restraint. Precisely the dichotomy of "control" versus "wildness" was seen as the virtue of civilized man, the most highly evolved of animals. Propagated by statesmen and educators alike, this concept was readily accepted by men who felt marginalized due to the decline in their authority, for example through narrowing career opportunities and women's suffrage.[47]

The complicated dialogue encountered at the frontier also reflects the quintessential concerns of modern survivalists. While their explicit aim is to address the mentioned chaos triggers, their battle is also directed against the emasculization of society. No other character exemplifies the resentments condensed in these texts more than Stirling's Mike Havel. Prior to the cataclysm, he was just a pilot hired by a millionaire; afterwards, his strength and courage become desirable traits. He steps up and becomes an adored and feared charismatic leader. While avoiding the excess of pointless violence, Mark is "primitive" enough to fend off ruthless attackers. In short, he represents the man for whose benefit the post-apocalyptical setting is designed.

Preparedness novels restructure the classic frontier into the neo-frontier by inverting the conventional dualism according to which the human realm stands in opposition to a non-human wilderness. Here, wilderness is identical with the perverted products of modern life. It represents a territory in need of a new conquest. Figure 1 illustrates the antagonisms of the neo-frontier.

With deserted highways and burning skylines, the previous centres of cosmopolitanism turn into their opposite. The racial melting pots reveal their true nature. As city life descends into chaos, urban centres become indistinguishable from the radical alterity of uncultivated land. Once again, the frontiersmen battle not merely for their survival, but to follow a higher purpose: "Civilizing the New World meant enlightening darkness, ordering chaos, and changing evil into good."[48] For obvious reasons, the frontier is an unstable line that moves constantly – originally westward, now in concentric fashion. The territories previously referred to as flyover country now act as

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[46] Nash, 31.
[47] See Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 170–217.
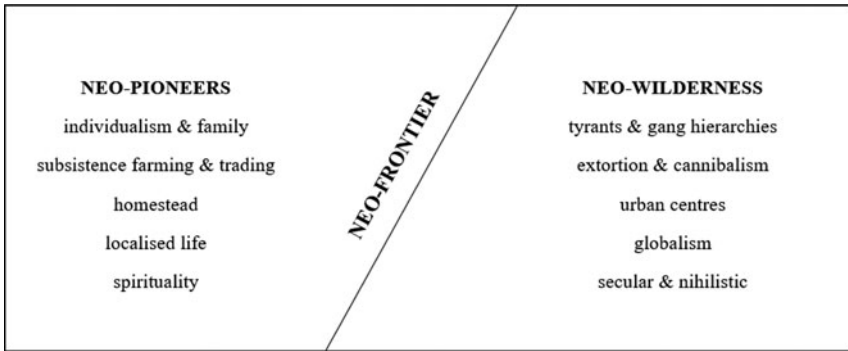[48] Ibid., 24.

Figure 1.   Antagonisms of the neo-frontier.

the strongholds of legitimate rule. The closer one gets to an urban centre, the greater the risk of being attacked, kidnapped or murdered. At the neo-frontier's porous threshold, the future of humankind is decided.

In contrast to the cannibals' protein-rich diet, the frontiersmen rely on cultivating plants and, to a lesser extent, livestock. Given the labour-intensive work, this implies a complete reorganization of daily routines. Kunstler's narrator explains, "We'd gone from a few people using machines to grow monoculture crops and process them for everybody else, to a society in which at least half the people used tools skilfully with human and animal muscle to feed the other half" (*K* 35). Despite their stocked cellar, Rawles's guerrillas also start to cultivate their fenced-off garden. After breaking up the soil, they plant "potatoes (lots of them), turnips, beets, radishes, onions, and corn," as well as "melons, squash, tomatoes, and cucumbers" (*R* 181). They learn about companion planting techniques and even find occasion to indulge in their favourite pastime: to stop birds from ravaging, they set up armed guards to shoot them with live ammunition. Since gardening includes such labour-intensive tasks as sowing and harvesting, a new problem arises. They must mobilize enough manpower while, at the same time, continuing to watch out for aggressors: "Not keeping careful enough watch *might* cause a disaster; not planting the crop in time would *certainly* kill them all" (*S* 160, emphasis in the original).

On the neo-frontier, people have little time for leisure activities, but are constantly on the alert. Amid such life circumstances, idle activities like writing and reading become nearly obsolete. As Juniper, the violent folksinger, explains, they all now learn that true wealth is "being full and knowing you could eat well every coming day to next harvest – and that the seed for that harvest was safely in the ground" (*S* 474).

RACE, LEADERSHIP AND GENDER

The neo-pioneers' aim is to live a desirable life worthy of imitation rather than coercing their enemies into submission. Since this is a high claim, especially in a world where good and evil often depend on subjective standpoints, I will address this alleged model behaviour in light of three areas: race, leadership and gender relations.

Unlike *The Turner Diaries*, ethnicity is not the only factor that qualifies for membership among neo-pioneers. Yet it is difficult to ignore the fact that the leadership of these post-apocalyptic communities is, without exception, white. In Rawles's case, nonwhites are expected to assimilate. As a consequence, a Jew, a Chinese person and an agnostic are allowed among the ranks of the patriotic guerrilla. Dan Fong, a man of Chinese descent, proves himself a worthy member. After single-handedly shooting twenty-one German soldiers, he dies a martyr and proclaims, "'God Bless the Republic, death to the New World Order. We shall prevail. Freedom.' A broad smile spread across his face as he lost consciousness" (*R* 322). In *Dies the Fire*, Will Hutton plays a similar role. After being kidnapped by neo-nazis, the African American is saved by Mike. Once he joins the group of survivalists, his gift for training horses comes in handy and makes him a valuable member. While all members must contribute their fair share, nonwhites have to make an additional effort.

In Kunstler's novel, this patronizing attitude towards other ethnicities is exacerbated by a startling vision of racial segregation. Although there is no explicit negative assessment of any ethnic minority in particular, the general consensus is that segregation prevents trouble. The surviving urban centres serve as negative examples: "There's grievances and vendettas all around at every level. Poor against whatever rich are left. Black against white. English-speaking against the Spanish. More than one bunch on the Jews" (*K* 149). The consensus is that difference creates conflict and deprives people of their identity. As the ailing community of Union Grove allows members of the New Faith Church to settle, some conflict arises, yet their collaboration ultimately yields the best results.

In addition to the rejection of comprehensive diversity, another crucial aspect of the neo-frontier is the legitimization of firm leadership as an antidote to chaos. In *Patriots*, Todd acts as the undisputed leader, a position he owes to his tactical expertise and his "melodic speaking voice" (*R* 149) when reciting the Bible. In *Dies the Fire*, Mike takes control of the group. He explains his role as follows:

I'm not going to take responsibility without authority. If you want to stick with me, well, I hope I'm sensible enough never to think I know everything and don't need advice, but somebody has to be in charge until things are settled. I think I'm the best candidate. We're going to have to pool everything and work together like a military unit, and a camel is a horse designed by a committee. (*S* 139)

As if to prove his point, nobody challenges his proposal. In fact, they stay silent. Mike's concluding figure of speech ("a camel is a horse") reveals a deep distrust in collective decision making, an attitude endemic to preparedness novels. The members of Rawles's Northwest Militia could not agree more. One of their members explains to a new arrival,

When they first set up the Group, they tried running it with votes on every issue. They realized that that was fine in peacetime. The only detractor was that it slowed some meetings down to a snail's pace. But in times like these, what we need are firm, prompt orders, and no messing around. One-man-one-vote and endless debate just doesn't cut it in a survival situation. (*R* 63)

This "survival situation," however, is not a transition period, which eventually develops into a more stable and more democratic phase, but represents a new status quo. Although Kunstler's Union Grove is ruled in a less autocratic fashion, it still eschews broad participation. Here, a small group of "trustees" holds the power. Since membership is limited to a handpicked team of men, there are "no women and no plain laborers. As the world changed … the egalitarian pretenses of the high-octane decades had dissolved and nobody even debated it anymore, including the women of our town" (*K* 101). In the notable absence of any female inhabitant's confirmation of this claim, the many helpless women in the novel illustrate this point. They primarily rely on men, as is the case with Britney, the widow of a murdered man. Despite her awkward feelings about it, she moves into the narrator's house, hoping that he can ensure her and her children's protection. In return, she serves him scrambled eggs in the morning and offers to sleep with him at night. He magnanimously rejects the latter offer, thereby underscoring his leadership qualities. By and large, Kunstler confirms the suspicion that preppers present women primarily as "domestic caretakers of the post-apocalyptic home."[49]

Despite such attempts to resuscitate antiquated gender norms, selected female characters in Rawles's and Stirling's texts deserve a more nuanced appreciation. In *Patriots* every community member must carry out all duties, including dull routines of household chores and martial assignments on the observation post. When it comes to burden sharing, male–female segregation is secondary. While Todd's community nonetheless discourages autonomous decision making by women, the novel also tells the story of Blanca, an American woman of Hispanic origin, whose actions are nothing short of heroic. As the civil war between the patriotic resistance and the federal government enters its hottest phase, the learned pilot boards a fighter plane and launches several attacks – until a bullet goes through her thigh, and she

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[49] Kelly, "The Man-Pocalypse," 108.

Stirling's *Dies the Fire* is less squeamish when it comes to depicting how improvised justice should be implemented. Acting as the undisputed leader, Mike Havel regards it as his duty to facilitate efficient jurisdiction. The narrator explains,

The … juridical proceedings were refreshingly simple, so far; a trial by a quorum of the adults, presided over by [Mike]. Punishments were simple too. With fines and imprisonment impractical, they went quickly from "extra duties" through a mass kicking … called "the gauntlet" to "expulsion," which was equivalent to a death sentence. (*S* 429)

After the inclusion of a bowyer, whose craft is integral to the community's long-term survival, it turns out that he is an alcoholic, who takes to beating his wife and child. Since nobody in the "quorum" speaks on his behalf, Mike proceeds to execute his punishment, a combination of admonition and corporal punishment:

Crack. [Mike] Havel struck again, with his left palm this time. The man spun to the ground and hugged it, rising only when Havel encouraged him with the toe of his boot … "Now let's move on to the subject of how a real man treats his wife … A *real* man busts his ass to feed his family, fights for them if he has to, dies for them if he has to. And he treats his wife with *respect* every day of his life, treats her like a queen – the queen of his home she makes for their children." *Crack. Crack.* (*S* 432, emphasis in the original)

To the onlookers, there is nothing shocking in this punishment. Once the tribunal is concluded, Mike's love interest proceeds to flirt with him: "'And you'll treat me like a queen, hey?' she asked, smiling impishly" (*S* 433). Astonishingly, the ostracized task of the henchman, originally meticulously separated from the judge, does not reflect badly on Mike; quite the opposite, in the eyes of the girl it even underscores his virility and sex appeal.

In certain instances, no further discussion is necessary for an execution. When the members of Rawles's Northwest Militia encounter the two Mao Zedong-reading vagrants and spot the harrowing plastic bag, one of them immediately empties two magazines of bullets into them. Afterwards, they collectively decide to display the bodies with a sign identifying them as "Murdering Cannibal Looters" (*R* 102). Nobody questions the whole procedure. In view of the valuables left behind, however, the community members wonder how they can distinguish themselves from mere thieves:

Lisa Nelson pointed out the fact that much or nearly all of it was probably stolen. The options suggested were: one, keep the gear and divide it equally among the group; two, wait until order was restored and donate it to a charity, preferably one dedicated to refugees; and three, distribute it as charity to refugees as they passed through the area, based on legitimate need. Todd called for a vote. (*R* 102)

Despite an individual member's protest, they eventually opt for the goods' philanthropic use, thus underscoring the virtue of the frontiersmen. From

this moment on, all valuables left behind by killed attackers are stored in a designated locker, only to be distributed among deserving passers-by. As the Northwest Militia starts to cooperate with other militarized communities in the neighbourhood, this procedure is found to be worthy of imitation (see *R* 206).

The community in *World Made by Hand* feels queasier about such improvised forms of justice. After they arrest Wayne Karp, the local malefactor, whom they charge with murder, they realize how exposed they are to possible retaliation attacks by his lowlife associates, if they make it appear like self-serving justice. The solution of this tricky situation, however, does not lie in the setup of rules that both interest groups can agree on, or in the establishment of an armed corps, but in a classic case of *deus ex machine*. Divine justice intervenes (*K* 310). After the cataclysm, the world not only becomes a manlier place, but also facilitates a return to those times when miracles were possible.

In sum, the frontiersmen's idea of a desirable life worthy of imitation distinguishes it from the fascist fanaticism of *The Turner Diaries*. Nonetheless, it represents a decisive step away from a mainstream neoconservative agenda towards a vision of racial segregation and patriarchal gender relationships. Furthermore, the rule of law is rejected as excessively abstract and inadequate. The idea is that a righteous leader can administer justice in a way that is more suitable for the formation of a tightly knit community.

CYCLICAL TIME

None of the three preparedness novels puts forward a spiritual argument that goes beyond commonplace ideas. Kunstler's miracle primarily consists in divine vengeance. After being left by himself for a night, Wayne, the small-scale warlord, is found dead, his body displaying exactly the same gun wounds he previously inflicted on a community member. Robert, the narrator, was previously unfazed by the spiritual realm, but now he views the New Faith Church in a different light. Brother Jobe explains to him, "There's real strangeness in this world of ours. Back in the machine times, there was so much noise front and back, so to speak, it kept us from knowing what lies behind the surface of things. Now it stands out more" (*K* 262). Christian eschatology, however, hardly plays a role in this new world vision. In Stirling's text, the "reenchantment" of the world also lacks a messianic agenda. As a self-proclaimed Wiccan witch, Juniper's faith is quite a secular affair: she encourages nude public bathing, sings Irish songs and elaborates on the moral imperative of the Wiccan Rede: "An It Hurt None, Do As Ye Will … It's … bloody difficult, if you take it seriously; it includes psychological harm, and it includes harming yourself. Very different from *follow your whim*" (*S* 119, emphasis in the original). Ultimately, she wonders herself: "There's no real refuge from what's

happening with the world; and what refuge there is, is in other people" (*S* 121). Spirituality is also elusive in Rawles's novel. Here, the Bible is a decorative object that is best matched with a gun.

The new chronotope is thus not defined by articles of faith, but represents a holistic world vision with an emphasis on the present. This present, however, does not reflect the epicurean motto *carpe diem*, but puts forward an inverted figure of the past and future. The nostalgia felt towards the frontier and the lives of the legendary American settlers transforms into the projected neo-frontier, a place unaffected by the arrow of time. This dichotomy of nostalgia and expectation unsettles the idea that time "passes as if it were really abolishing the past behind it," as Latour states. Consequently, a paradoxical figure emerges: the past, imagined as approaching on the horizon. Once the circular movement allows the protagonists to revisit the glorious past on the neo-frontier, the historic shocks between both frontiers, old and new, fade into oblivion. The ills and achievements of the twentieth century represent nothing but the pauses between two beats. In light of their eschatological indifference, such cyclical notions of time have been condemned by early Christian thinkers like Augustine. Taking offense at the Greek notion of an eternal time that always existed and will forever exist, he insisted that only linear time allows man to hope for redemption.[50] In metaphysical terms, the neo-frontier represents a self-contained universe that can dispense with messianic visions. What Augustine misses is that this chronotope itself represents a form of salvation.

According to Bakhtin, cyclical time represents the main feature of the folkloristic chronotope. In his materialist analysis, this antimetaphysical framework corresponds with a worldview that is produced by the collective agricultural work base prior to the differentiation of the estates of the realm. It features a peculiar concept of time:

This time is collective, that is, it is differentiated and measured only by the events of *collective* life, everything that exists in this time exists solely for the collective. The progression of events in an individual life has not yet been isolated (the interior time of an individual life does not yet exist, the *individuum* lives completely on the surface, within a collective whole). (*B* 206–7, emphases in the original)

In this context, the collective comprises locally defined groups rather than the totality of social strata. Derived from agriculture, human life and nature become analogous phenomena: "Time here is sunk deeply in the earth, implanted in it and ripening in it" (*B* 208). This chronotope stands in direct opposition to the bourgeois culture that would replace it during early

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[50] See Rob Iliffe, "The Masculine Birth of Time: Temporal Frameworks of Early Modern Natural Philosophy," *British Journal for the History of Sciences*, 33 4 (2000), 427–53, 437.

modernity. Being a Marxist, Bakhtin himself believes in the arrow of time, hence portraying the folkloristic chronotope as a historical phase itself. Kunstler, Rawles and Stirling, however, envision a return to this way of life in the near future. Placed at the neo-frontier, an eternal struggle is resumed between civilization and "savagery," where articles of faith do not go beyond the limits of concrete situations and the immediate environment.

In the chronotope of the neo-frontier, America turns into a territory that stretches out endlessly. No longer limited by the coastline of the Pacific, the post-apocalyptic landscape allows the frontiersmen to pursue an endless mission of fighting savagery and cultivating land. Frederick Jackson Turner argued that the pioneer's work finished in the 1880s, thereby stopping this "perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities" (*T* 32). Preparedness novels beg to differ and posit that financial crises, terrorist attacks, meteor strikes or climate change can contribute to the "rewilding" of the country. The dangers of the wilderness stand against the fertility of the freshly cultivated land, which keeps moving further into the new patches of wilderness – where the process continues. The secret of this tireless activity is its stationary nature. Finally, the alienated individual finds a mode of living that is removed from the constantly shifting tectonics of pluralist consumer culture.

CONCLUSION

Owing to the end of linear time, literary post-collapse communities abandon everyday ethics. The idea of society's gradual progression to more equality and pluralism is suspended. The answer to contemporary rootlessness lies in clear hierarchies and problematic, if not racist, attitudes towards nonwhites. The chronotope of the neo-frontier sees the rule of law replaced by law of retaliation and decisions based on mutual interest. Independent judiciaries give way to tribunals or martial law. The novels posit that its white protagonists, male and female, are better off after central governments have broken down. The comforts of modern life and the pointless quest for equality are happily abandoned in favour of a new way of feeling embedded into one's surroundings. Cyclical time offers a new way of finding meaning in the world without the aid of metaphysical reference systems. In fact, this chronotope bears a formal resemblance to a trope that is often associated with a more wholesome form of living, the great snake eating its own tail.[51] In this context, there exists

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[51] Donna Haraway employs this image to exemplify her understanding of the chthonic, the motherly force that makes us "stay with the naturalcultural multispecies trouble on earth." Accordingly, the chthonic is suppressed by exterminated by "the world's great

an unintended proximity between two irreconcilable modes of thought, one hierarchical and chauvinistic, the other egalitarian and emancipatory.

Evidently, the novels share the intellectual horizon of the preparedness movement, but differ in important aspects. First, Rawles's and Stirling's texts feature strong female characters inconceivable in, say, the paternal "prepper" fantasies described by Preston and Kelly. Second, Kunstler's novel relates the interconnected (and conflicting) interests among different groups within a tightly knit community in great detail. Instead of turning post-apocalyptic life into an open celebration of hypercompetitive machismo, the community only succeeds by setting up legitimate hierarchies. And in contrast to popular television series and feature films, the focus is not on individual survivalists and their closest family members; instead, the three novels focus on the communitarian quest of how to reassemble the scattered pieces of society into a new chronotope.

After white populations, especially males, embarked on a quest to trace their ethno-racial identity, the imaginary of the frontiersman provides a welcome model that conveniently erases the complex reality of living in a pluralist society. As one of the quintessential tropes of white Americanness, it oscillates between escapism and a more dangerous component, an idealization of self-administered justice. Once the judiciary becomes dysfunctional or disappears completely, the deliberate use of violence becomes prerequisite to a community's survival.

This said, it should not be forgotten that failed or collapsed states make such behaviour necessary – at least, to a certain extent. Once the authorities fail to deliver on their core mission, "the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory,"[52] individuals must resort to auxiliary modes of self-preservation. According to political scientists, state failure necessarily entails a certain degree of anarchy: "state failure is a function of the contest for power and occurs where the state incumbents are challenged by rivals to such an extent that for parts or all of the state's territory the holders of empirical sovereignty cannot be determined."[53] Following from this, such battlefields initiate the gradual emergence of future state authorities. The chronotope of the neo-frontier, however, puts forward the vision of a world where authority remains highly localized. As an ever forward-moving line, the neo-frontier continues to push further into the land, yet never reaches

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monotheisms in both religious and secular guises." See Donna Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 121 and n. 173.

[52] Max Weber, "Politics as Vocation," in Weber, *Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London: Routledge, 1991), 77–128, 78.

[53] Stefan Weber, "The Regional Dimension of State Failure," *Review of International Studies*, 37 (2011), 951–72, 961.

an ultimate threshold. This delicate balancing act allows the frontiersmen to reach eternal life in banal circumstances: forever on the watch, the neo-pioneer keeps the wilderness at bay, while remaining unaffected by the corrupting forces of civilization.

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