

### Extracts from *Beyond Survival* (2022)



**Léann Herlihy<sup>1</sup>**

*National College of Art and Design  
University College Dublin*

#### **Abstract**

The following text is a transcribed scene from Léann Herlihy's larger docu-film *Beyond Survival* (2022).

*Beyond Survival* is an indigestible mash-up of mainstream survival television, fucking-frenzy naturist collectives and anti-sodomy laws legislated under the title 'Crimes Against Nature'. Tempered by the exaggerated nature of survivalist figures and their excessive performances of non-essential survival, the protagonist of this docu-film transforms into numerous characters, ranging from a cameo as a cis-heterosexual survivalist to a stern warning from a queer environmental activist. Adopting the cinematic stylization of survival documentaries, *Beyond Survival* uses numerous cameras to emphasise feigned solitude and satirically leans into confessional soliloquies employed by handheld cameras. By situating itself in a natural landscape, *Beyond Survival* emphasises how an alternative vision of natural phenomena can de-centre the rigid social order and thus, provide us with new ways of living beyond immediate survival.

#### **Keywords**

Queer ecologies; sexualities; primal masculinity; survivalism; reality TV; pedagogies

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding Author: Herlihy, Léann  
Email: [leannherlihy@gmail.com](mailto:leannherlihy@gmail.com) Website: [www.leannherlihy.com](http://www.leannherlihy.com)  
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## Scene 7: Born Survivor

<b>Characters:</b>	Narrator, Bear Grylls, Mei Mei Evans.
<b>Camera:</b>	DSLR on tripod set at straight angle. GoPro attached to crotch via harness.
<b>Clothes:</b>	Orange-tinted sunglasses, denim shorts, a green jumper, black hiking boots and a black woollen hat.
<b>Visuals:</b>	Bear Grylls is using the camera lens as a mirror. He is positioned in the centre foreground at a side angle to the camera. The background is a bright natural landscape.

**Camera:** DSLR on tripod set at straight angle.

**Bear Grylls:** *[Uses the camera lens as a mirror to aid him in deciding whether he should wear a pair of orange tinted sunglasses or not. He is positioned in the centre foreground at a side angle to the camera]*

Okay shot with glasses off or...

*[Brings a pair of orange tinted glasses up into the camera shot and towards his face. He inquisitively puts them on]*

...shot with glasses on?

Off?

*[Lowers the glasses to the end of his nose and attentively looks into the camera lens. He then edges the glasses upwards towards his eyes]*

On?

Ok—

Shot with glasses on.

*[Steps back from the camera and turns on the GoPro camera which is attached to his crotch via a harness]*

Two cameras rolling.

Two cameras rolling.

And...

*[Claps]*

*[Turns away from the camera and begins to briskly run up a slight hill]*

**Camera:** GoPro attached to crotch via harness.

**Bear Grylls:** *[Hides behind a large bolder in the background of the shot and waits there for a few moments whilst trying to catch his breath]*

**Camera:** DSLR on tripod set at straight angle.

**Bear Grylls:** *[Begins to walk out from behind the boulder and saunters into the main frame. He pretends that he is unaware of the camera. He rubs his hand up against the boulder as if inspecting it. Suddenly, he turns and looks at the camera as if in shock]*

Hi! *[waves]* Oh hi! I didn't see you there!

*[Squats down slightly and rests his hands on knees. He pretends to eagerly scan the landscape]*

**Narrator:** In 2006, Bear Grylls released his popular TV series *Born Survivor*.

Entering the discourse of politics-of-origin, Grylls adopted a mainstream gay rights narrative: *I was born this way*.

**Camera:** GoPro attached to crotch via harness.

**Bear Grylls:** *[Walks to the front of the scene and sits on a rock whilst staring out into the distance]*

**Camera:** DSLR on tripod set at straight angle.

**Narrator:** Just as queers have done before him, Grylls' rallying cry is that he was born to inherently survive.

**Camera:** GoPro attached to crotch via harness.

**Bear Grylls:** *[Hoists himself up and walks back to the centre middle ground]*

**Narrator:** It was not a choice but a way of being.

**Bear Grylls:** *[Kneels on a patch of wet mud and starts inspecting it by rubbing it between his thumb, index and middle finger]*

**Narrator:** Giving Bear Grylls, real name Edward Michael Grylls, a quick background check...

**Camera:** DSLR on tripod set at straight angle.

**Narrator:** ...all you gender benders will be pleased to hear that it was not his chromosomes which brought him into the world as a survivor,

**Camera:** GoPro attached to crotch via harness.

**Bear Grylls:** *[Stands up and walks forward]*

**Narrator:** ...but it was in fact his inherited wealth.

**Camera:** DSLR on tripod set at straight angle.

**Bear Grylls:** *[Stands tall with one of his legs mounted on a rock stub. In a peering motion, he puts his flat-opened palm above his eyebrows and stares out into the distance]*

**Narrator:** A past student at the prestigious Eton College, an Anglo-colonial founded school with an annual fee of forty-five-thousand-five-hundred-and-one-pounds.

**Bear Grylls:** *[Arches backwards in dramatic reaction to each number punctually enunciated]*

**Narrator:** Grylls was not born a survivor,

**Camera:** GoPro attached to crotch via harness.

**Bear Grylls:** *[Kneels one leg on ground]*

**Narrator:** but rather raised...

**Bear Grylls:** *[Stomps other foot off rock]*

**Camera:** DSLR on tripod set at straight angle.

- Narrator:** ...a conqueror!
- Alas, Grylls unnaturally inserts himself in nature, for no other reason than to demonstrate his ability to postpone death.
- Camera:** GoPro attached to crotch via harness.
- Bear Grylls:** *[Gets up and starts running back to large boulder and throws him body down in front of it]*
- Camera:** DSLR on tripod set at straight angle.
- Bear Grylls:** *[Lies horizontally in a lounge position and fidgets with his hair and clothing to get the perfect shot]*
- Narrator:** He promises the viewer not improvement but rather endless struggle, thus resonating with the shadowy side of neoliberal existence. Feigning his solitude, Grylls reminds us in every episode that each decision he makes is a matter of life or death.
- Oh, ho, ho, how wrong you are Bear. As environmentalist Mei Mei Evans delightfully puts it:
- Camera:** GoPro attached to crotch via harness.
- Mei Mei Evans:** *[Gets up and runs to DSLR camera on tripod]*
- Camera:** DSLR on tripod set at straight angle.
- Mei Mei Evans:** *[Positions face close to lens, similarly as Bear Grylls did in the opening shot]*

“Whereas straight white men look to nature to offer up something...against which they can prove themselves; people of colour and queers go into nature in fear of encountering straight white men.”

*[Walks off set]*

**Camera:** Scene runs for a few seconds before cutting to a black screen.

### **Funding and Credits**

The docu-film, *Beyond Survival* (2022), is part of Léann Herlihy’s larger transdisciplinary project *the middle of nowhere* (2022).

Concerned with the subjectivity of space-making, *the middle of nowhere* seeks to criticise the increasingly reductive approach of stripping space of its complexities. This insistence on laying space bare demonstrates the broader commitment to solidifying the predictability of lives that remain emblematic of the heteronormative mould. And thus, by (de-)centring *the middle of nowhere*, and contesting this common spatial perspective as Other, the site emerges as a counter-normative place for individuals who do not relate to the dominant trajectory of place. From a queer perspective, *the middle of nowhere* reveals itself as an autonomous zone of desire, across which an unknowable self is dispersed. At odds with the closet and metaphors of ‘in’ and ‘out’, you are not defined by boundaries but rather speak to your capacities.

Situated in a natural landscape, *the middle of nowhere* emphasises how an alternative vision of natural phenomena can de-centre the rigid social order of racial capitalism’s prioritised dichotomy of gender and sexual binaries—a dichotomy that varies in definition from one historical and socio-cultural context to another. So, what grounds our conception of gender, sexuality and desire *after* nature?

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