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"Oh, you'd probably like it if you didn't know what was in it": Carnism, Cannibalism, and Repression in Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974)

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In his book *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan... and Beyond*, Robin Wood articulates an influential and intuitive theory of the horror film as a distillation of "our collective nightmares" (2003, 70), the laying bare of "all that our civilization represses" (2003, 68). He also frames the genre in specifically ideological terms, drawing a connection between horror's focus on repression as the locus of emergent monstrosity and the kinds of everyday repression that facilitate social harmony. Per Wood, "*basic* repression makes us distinctively human, capable of directing our own lives and co-existing with others; *surplus* repression makes us into monogamous heterosexual bourgeois patriarchal capitalists" (2003, 64: emphasis in original). As Mike Thorn explains, "horror cinema provides a vital means of expressing and subverting this surplus repression" (2021, 114), functioning as a kind of release valve that helps viewers sustain and tolerate their repressive existences. However, their representations and the feelings those representations evoke may just as readily prompt audiences to call into question the validity of the society founded on all this repression. For example, Thorn analyzes how Tobe Hooper's *Eaten Alive* (1976) and *Crocodile* (2000) challenge viewers' belief in human exceptionalism, an article of faith so foundational to most human societies as to be practically invisible. Cannibal-centric horror movies, such as Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), point to a related omission in Wood's ideological laundry list. As the film insists, the ideal ideological subject in contemporary Western society is a monogamous, heterosexual, bourgeois, patriarchal, capitalist *carnist*.

As defined by Melanie Joy, carnism refers to the widespread and generally invisible belief system that permits and encourages individuals to treat certain non-human species (such as cows, pigs, and chickens) as edible commodities while simultaneously acknowledging the sentience and inherent

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moral worth of other non-human species (such as dogs and cats) (2010, 30).[1] The fact that these categorizations are slippery and unstable across cultures attests to their arbitrariness: in short, they are learned and sustained through ideology rather than the inherent value or qualities of the species themselves. In a society where consuming the flesh and secretions of non-human animals is widely assumed to be "*natural*, *normal*, and *necessary*" (96), the exclusion of carnism from Wood's list speaks to its power, pervasiveness, and invisibility as an ideology.[2] When I eat at a restaurant that accommodates vegans with a separate menu, I am not asked to choose between the vegan menu and the carnist menu but rather the vegan menu and the *normal* menu. This is ideology at work, demarcating veganism as a choice (and an aberrant one at that) and carnism as the unacknowledged cultural default, premised on the absence of a choice (71).

According to Terry Eagleton, ideology serves to legitimate existing power relations in society: "A dominant power may legitimize itself by *promoting* beliefs and values congenial to it; *naturalizing* and *universalizing* such beliefs so as to render them self-evident and apparently inevitable; *denigrating* ideas which might challenge it; *excluding* rival forms of thought …; and *obscuring* social reality in ways convenient to itself" (1991, 5–6). Or, more simply, Václav Havel "defines ideology as a 'bridge of excuses between the system and the individual'" (Snyder 2024, 219). Ultimately, carnism is perhaps most productively understood as a permission structure meant to help us—on both the individual and societal level—justify acts of extreme violence against powerless non-human animals; we're not meant to take pleasure *in* their suffering, but we must repress knowledge *of* that suffering in order to sustain our pleasure.

From a vegan perspective, cannibal horror films have the potential to bring this repressed carnist violence into view in precisely the way that Wood suggests. But while traditional horror narratives depict a situation in which "normality is threatened by the Monster" (2003, 71), Hooper's cannibal family, led by the chainsaw-wielding Leatherface, doesn't threaten to upend the carnist status quo but rather to perpetuate and even extend its logic; they represent carnism's most extreme articulation, reflecting back the viewer's own dietary practices as in a funhouse mirror. After all, if the designation of one species as

[1] For clarity, sentience should be understood as the capacity for a subject—whether human or non-human—to experience feelings, including pleasure and pain, and therefore to have preferences about how they are treated.

[2] In Wood's defense, Joy hadn't yet coined the term at the time when he was writing.

edible and another as beloved family pet is based less on inherent qualities than on cultural context—cows are revered in much of India but brutally factory-farmed across North America, for instance—what's to prevent human beings from switching categories based on nothing more or less than a change in external circumstances? As Jimmy Packham puts it in his article on vegetarian horror, it is "only through the excessive language of horror and the grotesque [that] our 'flesh-eating society' [can] be understood for what it is" (2019, 84). To frame it Althusserian terms: if our ideological state apparatuses are all collectively tuned towards normalizing the practice of meat-eating, cannibal horror films have the potential to de-interpellate the viewer from the dominant carnist ideology. *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* defamiliarizes the practice of meat-eating by making human bodies the object of consumption, forcing us to view the consumption of flesh not as the "normal" way of being, but rather as an inherently violent and disgusting practice.

From Carnism to Cannibalism

Global meat consumption continues to rise (Petrovic et al. 2015, 236). The fact may well come as a surprise to many readers, as it flies in the face of the increased visibility and affordability of vegan alternatives to animal products in the contemporary marketplace, as well as a building scientific consensus that consuming animal products is a direct cause of many of the most common lifestyle diseases in the developed world (e.g., heart disease, type-2 diabetes, many cancers, etc.) (Greger 2015, 6). A growing body of research has also made us more acutely aware that industrialized agriculture (i.e. factory farming), the system required to satisfy our society's demand for inexpensive meat at scale, is a leading contributor to many of the most profound existential threats of our times: it is a leading contributor to pandemic risk (Ord 2020, 127), antibiotic resistance (Moyer 2016, 72), and climate change (via the specific mechanisms of deforestation and greenhouse gas emissions, among others) (Higuita et al. 2023, 2). And that is without accounting for the physical and emotional suffering necessarily involved, which is borne both by the non-human animals whose lives are violently ended to provide nothing more than fleeting moments of palette pleasure, as well as the human labourers whose bodies are so often injured during the act of slaughter (Eisnitz 2007,

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271).[3] That we collectively continue down this destructive and unsustainable path, despite the widespread availability of alternatives and a growing awareness of these myriad harms, reveals both our capacity for repression and the power of ideology. Carnism blinds us to the fact that an alternative path even exists.

Cannibal horror films may help shake viewers out of their complicity with these forces in several interrelated ways: by confronting them with the arbitrariness of the line separating "food animals" from "non-food animals" (including humans); by revealing the violence necessarily involved in the production of flesh foods; and by reframing the act of eating meat as fundamentally disgusting. While by no means a fool-proof strategy for animal advocacy—don't expect PETA volunteers to start handing out DVDs of *Cannibal Holocaust* with their "How to Go Vegan" leaflets anytime soon—I at least have my own experience to offer as proof-of-concept.[4] If I may briefly indulge in an autobiographical anecdote, my own transition to veganism can be traced back to the study of a horror text that similarly problematizes the human/non-human binary, H.G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. Reading the novel for an undergraduate class, I noticed that Moreau's monstrous "manimal" hybrids were held to a higher moral standard than the island's human occupants, particularly regarding the consumption of meat: "Not to eat Fish or Flesh; that is the Law. Are we not men?" (2004, 56). A vegetarian diet here is invoked as a marker of civilization, morality, and indeed humanity. For me, this unlocked the insight that the very notion of a species hierarchy was a self-serving farce. As Wells' novel makes clear, men like Moreau are capable of great evil while non-human animals' capacity for suffering—the doctor's experiments involved unanesthetized vivisection—obviously make them worthy of protection under any moral law worth following. The unimaginable pain inflicted on Moreau's animals could not be justified, whether in the name

[3] According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "meat packing is the most dangerous industry in the United States. In fact, a worker's chances of suffering an injury or an illness in a meat plant are six times greater than if that same person worked in a coal mine" (Eisnitz 2007, 271–272).

[4] Of course, one reason why PETA wouldn't use *Cannibal Holocaust* for this purpose is because of the gruesome and cruel treatment of animals in the film—several animals, including a turtle, pig, and monkey—are tortured and killed onscreen. While an interrogation of this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this article, it's worth noting that many animal advocates and advocacy groups (e.g., Anonymous for the Voiceless' "Cube of Truth" demonstrations) do make use of graphic slaughter footage to help shock individuals out of their complacency with industrialized agriculture. The salient ethical distinction is that advocates make use of hidden camera/undercover footage with documentary value, whereas the filmmakers of *Cannibal Holocaust* were torturing and killing animals themselves to increase the shock value of a fictional film.

of scientific "progress" or something as trivial as a mere gustatory preference. I impulsively became a vegetarian shortly after completing the novel, and from there I proceeded to read Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation* (1990), which helped me quickly transition to veganism. But Wells' novel was the initial and necessary catalyst, the text that first defamiliarized my everyday dietary practices, revealing their underlying horror and my complicity in this horror.

The Island of Dr. Moreau is often read as a colonial allegory founded on Wells' "readers' uneasy awareness and horror over the in-human colonial practices in which colonizers have participated, which they would like to repress but which the novel forces them to confront" (Weaver-Hightower and Piwarski 2018, 362). Cannibal horror films too are often explicitly focused on the horrors of colonialism, representing the fear of the "uncivilized" other, the monstrosity of the colonialist project, and often both. The cycle of Italian-made "cannibal-savage" exploitation films made between 1972 and 1988, for instance, depict the horrors of colonial conquest literally, rather than allegorically as in Wells' novel. As Erin E. Wiegand describes in her study of this cycle, "colonizers 'consume' indigenous land and its resources metaphorically; indigenous people exact revenge by consuming the colonizers literally" (2017, 253). While the politics of these films is at least somewhat ambivalent, there's no question that representing native populations as violent cannibals has the potential to reinforce the very colonialist attitudes the films are ostensibly critiquing. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues in his influential essay on monstrosity, "[t]he exaggeration of cultural difference into monstrous aberration [can be used to justify the] anterior [culture's] displacement or extermination by rendering the act heroic" (1996, 7–8). As in *Moreau*, though, cannibal-savage films also trouble the categorization of the colonizer as inherently superior to the colonized subject: "Like many horror films, cannibal-savage films explore the fear that 'civilization' is merely a mask for an underlying brutal savagery (cannibalism) that lies at the heart of all human animals," per Wiegand (2017, 254). "While we are clearly positioned to identify with the Western protagonists over the indigenous characters, it is suggested that 'we' are nevertheless equally or *more* savage than 'them'" (254).

In contrast to these monstrous representations of uncivilized cultures untouched by modernity, Hooper's film is set in the contemporaneous Western world, specifically the southern United States of the early 1970s. As such, its narrative is not concerned with the exploitation of a subaltern culture at the hands of a colonial power, but rather with social hierarchies within a single culture. This dislodges the thematic association between cannibalism and colonial violence and opens the subgenre up to distinct moral concerns

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and critiques, namely those interrogating Western culture itself. One revealing difference between Hooper's film and the cannibal-savage cycle discussed by Wiegand is that the practice of cannibalism is no longer represented as a *regression* into barbarism or savagery but rather can be read a logical *progression* from the accepted tenets of carnism tacitly understood and internalized by most viewers. Rather than a deviant practice, cannibalism is folded into the dominant carnist ideology, such that the viewer's rejection of the films' cannibalistic violence all but requires them to reject carnism altogether.

"My family's always been in meat": American Carnism and *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*

Wood identifies the 1970s not just "as the Golden Age of the American horror film" but also a period in which "the genre produced films more gruesome, more violent, more disgusting, and perhaps more confused, than ever before in its history. They tended also to be more disturbed and more disturbing" (2003, 63). *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* certainly attests to both these latter qualities, setting a new standard for terror and intensity that few films have matched since, and helping to inaugurate the slasher subgenre.[5] That's not to say that *Texas* is completely *sui generis*; significantly, Hooper's film was loosely inspired by Ed Gein, the same Wisconsin-based serial killer whom writer Robert Bloch famously used as the basis for Norman Bates in *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960). Comparing these two horror classics is instructive and indicates seventies horror's new focus on the rotting heart of American culture. As Christopher Sharrett writes, "[w]hile Hitchcock seems concerned with showing how various forms of repression lead to compulsive/schizophrenic behavior, Hooper concentrates on the idea that schizophrenia is a widespread phenomenon of modern society that no discipline can fully explain" (1984, 259). Specifically, Hitchcock roots Bates' murderous desire in a kind of Freudian psychosexual neurosis, ultimately reassuring viewers that such compulsive and deviant personalities as Bates' are isolated cases, both comprehensible (traceable to identifiable causes, in this case Norman's upbringing at the hands of an abusive mother) and curable (subject to psychoanalytic rehabilitation—at least until the studio demands a

[5] *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* was released on October 11, 1974, the very same day as Bob Clark's *Black Christmas*, which is often cited as the first slasher film. Both films predate John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978) by four years.

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sequel). Hooper's film, by contrast, offers no such comforts. The only implicit explanation given for Leatherface and his family's blood lust is their social and economic marginalization, a despairingly banal rationale. In terms of economics, their disenfranchisement is twofold. First, the family operates a rundown rural gas station amidst the 1973 oil crisis, when the oil fields in Texas were running dry and the industry was consolidating under a few transnational corporate actors (Jackson 2008, 48).[6] Second, they are slaughterhouse employees that have been made redundant after the implementation of new and more efficient technologies on the killing floor. As Naomi Merritt writes, "technological advances leading to the redundancy of workers has been a consequence of capitalism's ongoing pursuit of increased productivity (greater output, in less time, for less money)" (2010, 203–04). Despite their presentation as violently uncivilized, then, Leatherface and his family are very much creatures of modern capitalism and can be easily understood as victims of economic circumstance (Wood 2003, 83).

A bit more can be wrung out of the Bates/Leatherface comparison. To start, Bates' hobby is taxidermy, stuffing, preserving, and posing the carcasses of dead animals for the purposes of display. He keeps an array of stuffed birds in the office of his motel, which dominate the mise-en-scène in an early scene between Bates and Marian Crane, his victim-to-be. Taxidermy halts the process of natural decomposition and presents the illusion of a still-living creature arrested in time; it is the repression of violence and death incarnate. By contrast, Leatherface and his brother's "art" betrays no interest in concealing or denying their interest in violence and death. As Sharrett describes, "[t]he details of the Gein crimes are more faithfully rendered in Hooper's film" compared to Hitchcock's, "particularly in Leatherface's fetishism, his use of human skin as a mask, and the artworks made of human and animal remains" (1984, 259). This may be at least partially explained by comparing the two characters' employment status. Whereas the Bates Motel is in an economically precarious state—like Leatherface, Bates too is a victim of progress, with the addition of a new highway rerouting his potential customers away from the motel—it is nevertheless open for business, which requires Bates to be presentable. To return to Wood, he must continue to repress his monstrousness to present as a "monogamous heterosexual bourgeois patriarchal capitalist" (2003, 64). Leatherface, by contrast, is effectively unemployable, his skill set no longer valued by the local slaughterhouse; as

[6] This context is made explicit in the montage of news clips overheard on the radio during the opening credits of the film.

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such, he has no economic incentive to conceal his true nature. Finally, whereas Bates is sexually repressed, Leatherface seems to suffer from no such neuroses. Rather, he embodies the violence demanded by America's commitment to carnism, rendered invisible (i.e. pushed to the margins of society) by ideology. If Bates' antisocial desires can be traced to his family and upbringing, the root cause of Leatherface's bloodlust is the American demand for meat, which enabled his family to make their living slaughtering animals for at least three generations. It is only the recent replacement of the sledgehammer with the airgun that has left Leatherface unemployed and therefore without a productive, socially prescribed outlet for his violence.

In her book *Doppelganger: A Trip into the Mirror World,* Naomi Klein urges readers to consider those parts of the global economy that are deliberately kept invisible to middle-class consumers. She dubs these "the Shadow Lands," a term that denotes "the mangled and dense understory of our supposedly frictionless global economy" (2023, 236). She writes,

> the surface layers of markets that middle-class people in wealthy parts of the planet engage with directly—brightly lit grocery stores and gas stations, sleek websites and dull offices—are not the whole story of capitalism; they are its storefront. All of these operations require a level of extraction from their workers, shoppers, and users, but they also sit on top of more hidden parts of the supply chain, zones of hyper-exploitation, human containment, and ecosystem poisoning that are not glitches in the system but have always been integral parts of what makes our world run. (2023, 236)

Slaughterhouses, like the one that employed Leatherface and his elders, are one key site that constitute the Shadow Lands. Here is where the violence that carnism mandates is supposedly contained, safely out of sight and mind as far as the end-consumer is concerned. But just as the Shadow Lands' "mountains of waste and poisoned waterways" cannot be prevented from contaminating the broader world, the violence of the slaughterhouse has a way of infecting the social body it is meant to serve invisibly; the repressed, per Freud, has a way of returning. For instance, one anonymous slaughterhouse worker interviewed by Gail A. Eisnitz describes how the mentality required on the killing floor cannot simply be turned off at quitting time: "My attitude was, it's only an animal. Kill it. Sometimes I looked at people that way, too. … Most

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stickers I know have been arrested for assault" (2007, 87).[7] Another of Eisnitz's interview subjects describes the cruelty—surplus violence beyond what is required to slaughter an animal "humanely"—that routinely occurs behind closed doors: "Down in the blood pit they say that the smell of blood makes you aggressive. … And it does. You get an attitude that if that hog kicks at me, I'm going to get even. You're already going to kill the hog, but that's not enough. It has to suffer. When you get a live one you think, Oh good, I'm going to beat this sucker" (Eisnitz 2007, 92). It's easy enough to imagine something akin to this kind of internal monologue as Leatherface gives chase to his human prey. This gives us a hint as to why Leatherface and his clan are the way they are: trained by several generations of killing floor labourers, "[the] men cling to the lost bounties of their work" (Slade 2012, 61) and the only trade they seem to know.

Of course, Leatherface and his family are the film's antagonists, not the main figures of viewer identification. Before we encounter Leatherface, we're first introduced to a group of young, white, presumably urban Americans. The two couples—Sally and Jerry, Pam and Kirk—plus Sally's brother, the wheelchair-bound Franklin, are violently dispatched by Leatherface one at a time until Sally alone escapes at the film's climax. Interestingly, though, Hooper seems to be less interested in depicting the cannibalistic family as the opposite of these "normal" Americans than he is in drawing a parallel between them—or perhaps more pointedly, the ways in which their lifestyles are reliant upon each other. This comparison begins just a few minutes into the film. As their van travels down a deserted highway, the group are suddenly struck by a noxious odour, which is quickly identified as a byproduct of the slaughterhouse deliberately relegated to the Shadow Lands of Newt, Texas. "That's where grandpa used to sell his cattle!" Franklin cheerily offers before continuing, "We got an uncle that works at one of those places outside of Fort Worth." Sally and Franklin's family is thus immediately associated with the meat industry via these familial ties. Franklin then points to a building in the distance—"That's where they kill 'em"—before going into enough grisly detail that his companions in the van start to protest: "They *bash* 'em in a head with a big sledgehammer!" (Pam, queasily: "Oh, that's awful.") "It usually wouldn't kill 'em on the first lick. I mean, they'd start squealing and freaking out and everything, and they'd have to come up and bash 'em two or three times! And then sometimes it wouldn't kill 'em. I mean, they would skin 'em sometimes

[7] "Sticker" is the insider term for "the worker who cuts the throat" of the animal on the killing floor (Eisnitz 2007, 20).

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even before they were even dead." Throughout Franklin's monologue, Hooper crosscuts between the human occupants of the van and the confined cows, reminding viewers of the very real bodies that are soon to be sent to slaughter, both human and bovine. While J. Shea and Ned Schantz read this juxtaposition as a "[confrontation with] the animal Other," it equally serves to undermine the categorical difference between a human "us" and a non-human "them" (2021, 224). As they correctly point out, though, the viewer is implicated here as well: the editing in this scene doesn't just dialectically conflate the occupants of the van with those in the feedlot as bodies to be killed and eaten, it also sutures the audience into the mise-en-scène, locating our gaze directly within both spaces (2021, 224).

When Franklin is done, Pam offers a reasonable reaction: "Oh, that's horrible. People shouldn't kill animals for food." The overlapping of human and bovine identities just expressed through montage logically introduces this objection. After all, cows are not just sentient creatures who would prefer to not be killed and eaten, but are themselves biological herbivores. To identify with the cow is not just to imagine oneself the victim of carnism, but also to imagine an alternative to it. But Pam's critique does not lie unchallenged. As the self-appointed spokesperson for the meat industry, Franklin proceeds to clarify that the slaughtering process he just described with such zeal has since been replaced by more humane practices.[8] As Franklin violently mimics the repetitive action of the new, supposedly "humane" slaughterhouse weaponry—"Boom, *shik*! Boom, *shik*! Boom, *shik*!"—it becomes quite clear that the new ways are hardly a substantial improvement over the old ones, that the brutal efficiency of the airgun will only ensure that more animals will meet their violent end per hour. Sally protests from the front seat, speaking on behalf of all carnists: "Franklin, I *like* meat! Please change the subject!" As her interjection suggests, knowledge such as this is meant to be repressed, not shared and performed with shameless gusto. In this scene, both Sally and Pam gaze into the Shadow Lands and neither likes what she sees; but whereas Pam seeks an alternative to carnism, Sally simply wants to preserve the willed

[8] Obtaining better living (and dying) conditions for animals is a central goal of animal welfare advocacy. As Gary L. Francione argues, however, activists lobbying for incremental reforms typically end up perpetuating rather than challenging the carnist status quo. The meat industry tends to embrace innovations that render slaughter more efficient and economically profitable (such as the transition from the sledgehammer to the airgun) and such changes can then be promoted as evidence of the industry's concern for animal welfare (Francione and Garner 2010, 60). The ultimate result is that consumers become more comfortable with consuming animals, not less.

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ignorance necessary to enjoy animal products with a clean conscience. This moment echoes the implicit challenge to the viewer made in the film's opening narration, as described by Shea and Schantz: "'But had they lived very, very long lives, they could not have expected nor would they have wished to see as much of the mad and macabre as they were to see that day.' Why would we want to look upon what our character surrogates would never 'wish' to see, had they survived to do so? What first appeared an invitation now feels like a hostage taking. We might rather close our eyes" (2021, 219). Via its "relay" of audience surrogates (223), the film threatens to confront viewers with information and images that are obvious but nevertheless culturally taboo under carnism. Like Sally, the viewer may prefer to keep their head in the sand.

Shortly thereafter they come across the Hitchhiker, who we will later discover is Leatherface's brother. When asked if he works at the slaughterhouse, the discomfiting stranger starts orating on his family's relationship to the meat industry: "My family's always been in meat," he announces proudly. As we know, the same can be said of Sally and Franklin, the latter of whom quickly starts attempting to bond with the Hitchhiker over their shared knowledge of the killing floor and love of head cheese (Leatherface's speciality, evidently). The others in the van are largely disgusted by the Hitchhiker's graphic description of the jellied meat product, which Franklin rejects: "Oh, you'd probably like it if you didn't know what was in it." Here carnism's pleasures are again represented as contingent on repression, in this case of the knowledge of what precisely is being eaten.[9] Franklin unknowingly but emphatically proves his own point when he avails himself of the cannibalistic barbeque on offer at the family's gas station, spending much of the subsequent scene with a hunk of human sausage suspended from his mouth like a cigar. Of course, he can't tell the difference between pork and human sausage; he becomes a cannibal without even knowing it.[10]

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[9] The Hitchhiker: "They take the head and they boil it, except for the tongue, and they scrape all the flesh away from the bone. They—they use everything, they don't throw nothing away! They use the jowls and the muscles and the eyes and the ligaments and everything! The nose and the gums and all the flesh, and they boil it down into a big jelly of fat." As Shea and Schantz observe, such a description "demands disgust from even the most ravenous meat eaters" (2021, 226).

[10] The family's failing gas station seems to make more money selling human barbeque than petrol. The gas station is another prime example of a storefront that conceals the existence of underlying Shadow Lands. As Chuck Jackson observes, the consumer experience "mystifies gasoline; it conceals from the consumer how gasoline moves from its underground location into the gas pump, what it and its emissions can do to the environment, and its important role in the maintenance of the US as a global political power" (2008, 53). By making the family's gas station the storefront for its cannibalistic

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Having already established a parallel between the occupants of the van and the cows awaiting slaughter, the violent dispatching of each character reinforces the comparison and reduces the humans to meat: Jerry and Kirk are each bludgeoned with the sledge, while Pam is impaled on a meat hook and shoved into a large freezer.[11] As slaughterhouse employees, Leatherface and his predecessors have merely enacted, behind closed doors and deliberately out of public view, the violence necessary for the likes of Sally and Franklin to satisfy their desire for meat. When prevented from doing so by modern innovations that render their labour redundant, they find new ways to apply those skills to feed themselves and others. Their progression from slaughterhouse employees to cannibals doesn't challenge the carnist status quo but perpetuates it; under carnism, it is more logical to transition from eating kidney pie to human kidney than it is to eating kidney beans. Indeed, Pam's moral objection to meat-eating is the outlier position in the film, not shared by any other character.[12]

In the film's proto-slasher framework, Leatherface is the predator and Sally his prey, but this opposition obscures the fact that they operate under a shared ideology. Their primary difference is that one is a producer and the other a consumer; one lives in the Shadow Lands while the other engages only with carnism's storefront. Leatherface is not just willing to look at carnism's necessary violence, like Franklin, but to wield the sledge (or the chainsaw) himself; Sally, like the typical consumer, wants to be insulated from this violence, to enjoy eating meat without being forced to confront what it really is and how it is produced. When she and her friends stumble into the Shadow Lands of meat production, the logic of carnism is suddenly turned against them. Categories collapse and shift: they become the meat. Sally's screeching horror throughout the back half of the film, then, is not simply that of Carol Clover's "Final Girl" (2015, 35); as both consumer and consumed, her screams give voice to the repressive meat-eater directly confronted with the hidden violence of carnism, as well as to the billions of animals slaughtered each year to meet consumer demand. As Wiegand notes, citing Timothy Pachirat, "When 'civilized' humans react with shock to the sight of an animal's

barbeque, the film seems to deliberately conflate these two industries and the violence they both necessarily engender. The fact that Leatherface's chainsaw is gas-powered reinforces this connection.

[11] As Ece Üçoluk Krane observes, the mise-en-scène of the Sawyer home also reinforces the human/animal comparison (2019, 3–4).

[12] Arguably, Pam gives voice to the film(maker)'s implicit position. Hooper apparently became vegetarian while making the film and deliberately conceptualized it as a statement on meat (Waddell 2010).

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slaughter, 'it is a reaction predicated on the operations that remove from sight, without actually eliminating, equally shocking practices required to sustain the orbit of their everyday lives'" (2017, 263). The violence remains; only the knowledge of that violence is repressed.

All Carnists are Cannibals

In *How Not to Age*, Michael Greger describes human flesh as the only "perfect protein" for human consumption, with "perfection" defined not as nutritionally ideal but rather in terms of genetic similarity. "We don't practice species cannibalism," he writes, "but by practicing kingdom cannibalism (Animalia) or, if we eat our fellow mammals, class cannibalism (Mammalia), we're getting protein that more closely mirrors our own than, say, a kidney bean" (2023, 73). Greger's review of the scientific literature on nutrition overwhelmingly leads him to advocate for a plant-based diet centred around whole foods, and so his expansion of the practice of cannibalism to include all forms of meat-eating should be understood as a provocative rhetorical move that may prompt his readers to see this "normal" behaviour in a new light. Horror films depicting the practice of cannibalism can work similarly to defamiliarize the practice of meat-eating, emphasizing the interchangeability of different sources of mammalian meat. In films like *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, killing is killing and flesh is flesh—both on the level of production, where human meat is represented by animal products, and narrative, where the "normal" practice of consuming animal flesh becomes inextricably entangled with the deviant practice of cannibalism.

In cannibal-savage films, human flesh and viscera are often eaten raw, marking the cannibals as subhuman: "Raw meat, dripping blood, is what is eaten by wild, carnivorous animals, not by civilised humans," writes anthropologist Nick Fiddes. "Raw meat is bestial and cooking sets us apart" (Wiegand 2017, 261). Again, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* deprives us of such easy binaries that would allow viewers to imagine themselves as superior to the cannibal killers onscreen. After all, who can say that the innocuous piece of barbeque we purchased that one time from a roadside dive wasn't made of human flesh? How can we really know? While framed by Fiddes as evidence of human culture and civilization, processing and cooking also create a conceptual distance between the consumable food product and the living creature that had to be killed to produce it; the animal thereby becomes what Carol Adams dubs an absent referent. As Adams puts it, "[t]he function of the

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absent referent is to keep our 'meat' separated from any idea that she or he was once an animal" (Wiegand 2017, 262)—or, perhaps, to mask the fact that the meat is human in origin. In other words, if carnism seeks to defamiliarize animal products from the animals themselves, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* defamiliarizes carnism itself—ironically, by *refamiliarizing* flesh foods with the sentient beings from which they were derived and insisting upon an equivalence between all forms of meat.

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