The Refutation of Manifest Destiny in Contemporary American Horror Cinema

Finn J. Ballard, Berlin

American identity has been and continues to be formulated, ruptured, and restructured on the fundamental concept known as Manifest Destiny — the drive toward exploration, expansion, and a teleological notion of history as a process of vanquishing frontiers. Historically, the United States has remained the nation most potently and conspicuously associated with the tenets of an imperative and inexorable desire to "Go West" – and to go North, East and South for good measure – not only since its inception with the arrival of the first Puritan pilgrims, but especially with a series of great migrations from the mid-19th century on. The distance and duration of journeys had less to do with affluence than with endurance, and the hardships of expeditions have served to heighten the sense of romanticism with which they are commonly associated in our collective memory. The breadth of American culture, developing with the nation in which it has been produced, has apparently extolled both the virtue and the sheer necessity of expansionism. However, we can also trace through the broad history of this culture a contrapuntal, profound and tenacious anxiety about the consequences of exploration: a fear that the un-chartered wilderness is rather more hellish than paradisiacal. This anxiety would subsequently influence not only American folklore but also literature both factual and fictional, and visual art — most particularly painting and its visual progeny, film. It is this particular fear that has influenced the development of an American cinematic subgenre that I would like to call the 'road-horror', and

Finn J. Ballard
comes from Bangor, Northern Ireland, and attended the University of Warwick, England. There, he obtained his BA in Film and Literature and MA in Film and Television Studies, and has just submitted his PhD thesis, titled: 'For them, an idyllic summer afternoon drive became a nightmare: The development of the road-horror subgenre.' He currently resides in Berlin, where he is working on a project on the city's queer history.

which will be the subject of this essay. In this piece, we'll investigate the recent, post-millennial articulation of this cinematic subgenre, its particular influence from folklore, and its refutation of the concept of Manifest Destiny.

The concept of Manifest Destiny is nearly as old as the 'New World' itself. In 1630, John Winthrop, the Puritan lawyer who led some of the first English migrants to America, expressed in a sermon his vision of the 'City upon a Hill', an ideal and unique community to which 'the eyes of all people' would be turned, and which would be extolled worldwide as a paragon of aspiration. Winthrop spoke not of expansion but of establishment; nevertheless, his notion of American Exceptionalism is at the root of the idea of Manifest Destiny. In 1845, the columnist John L. O'Sullivan coined the term 'Manifest Destiny' in his call for an expansion of the Union to 'overspread the continent', accommodating new territories for the ever-growing American population. O'Sullivan described the nation's divine mission to promote Republican democracy: a characteristically American rhetorical blend of faith and politics. The fulfilment of Manifest Destiny, he believed, would be the granting of equal rights and 'moral dignity' to each citizen, and the endowment of both individual and institution with an intangible yet nonetheless potently American sense of unique virtue. Of course, the Native Americans, who found their land annexed to allow for continental expansion, experienced the most severely problematic connotations of this concept. Simply put: Indians were to vanish, or to assimilate. To become 'civilized' Americans meant to relinquish the bow for the plough, to prioritise the familial unit over the tribe, and to reorganise Native society into a form more correlative with a "white" model of progress through conquest. Although Native Americans often resisted this model, they were nonetheless successively compelled to migrate and relocate to make way for the realisation of the project of expansion. Contemporaneous to the theorisation of Manifest Destiny was that of 'Indian Removal', made into a legal precedent in 1830 under the Presidency of Andrew Jackson. Whilst his predecessor, Thomas Jefferson, had favoured a policy of appeasement so long as Native 'assimilation' continued, Jackson began an aggressive policy of forcible displacement that resulted in the infamous 'Trail of Tears', during which thousands of members of the Five Civilized Tribes did not survive the journey.

Half a century later, in 1893, the historian Frederick Jackson Turner would publish his 'Frontier Thesis',[1] in which he argued that the American pioneering character had been forged upon the frontier line — even as that line was extended, eroded and eventually vanquished. Turner articulated an individualistic,

1 Frederick Jackson Turner, 1920. The Frontier in American History, Henry Holt and Company, New York.

uncompromising conception of Manifest Destiny, and (perhaps inadvertently) generated a tenacious debate regarding the validity of the concept of the frontier subsequent to the official declaration of the 1890 U.S. Census that the frontier line was no longer in existence. Thus, the idea of the frontier became internalized to allow for the continued pursuit of its continued expansion, becoming not only a geographical, but also a psychological phenomenon. As the tagline of the Civil War-set film *Dances with Wolves* (Kevin Costner, 1990) puts it: "Inside everyone is a frontier waiting to be discovered." The twentieth-century American conception of pushing back or overcoming a frontier was transmuted into the overall quest for progress — scientific, sociological, intellectual, or otherwise. Nonetheless, cultural evocations of a real American frontier — one both geographical and socio-political — have continued to proliferate until the present day.

Although the concept of expanding and eliminating a frontier (however tangible) may have been lauded as a peculiarly American pursuit, anxiety surrounding unchartered space is an integral trope of the European oral folklore that accompanied immigrants and settlers on their long journey to the New World. In particular, we find a continuous trajectory of anxiety regarding the wilderness both in European folklore and its American counterpart. The stories collected by Charles Perrault, the Brothers Grimm, and other European folklorists often have two primary commonalities: concern about the nature of unknown space and particularly that of its inhabitants; and a strongly didactic moral sentiment that leads them to be termed Warnmärchen, or 'warning tales'. Proliferating through such lore is the threat of the forested wilderness, sparsely inhabited by monsters both human and bestial. To venture into this space, a very real source of anxiety for medieval and early modern Europeans, brings severe repercussion (or at least the threat thereof) in tales such as 'Hansel and Gretel', 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears', 'Baba Yaga', and many more. Let us take as our paragon in this respect the story of 'Little Red Riding Hood', which folklorist Jack Zipes terms 'the most widespread and notorious fairy tale in the Western world, if not in the entire world.'[2] Although the pubescent heroine encounters various (more or less grisly) fates in the various versions of the tale, a lupine gentleman with malevolent intentions always interrupts Red's trip through the forest to visit her ill grandmother. Disposing of the unfortunate elderly lady, the Wolf then accosts Red upon her arrival — and most often swallows her up, too. In the version of the tale transcribed by the Brothers Grimm as 'Little Red Cap', the trope of the ill-advised crossing of a frontier is expressly articulated. Red's mother warns her above all: "Behave yourself on the way, and do not leave the path." The

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2 Jack Zipes, ed., 1993 (1983). The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood, Routledge, London, xi.

heroine, however, cannot resist the temptations of the forest, and merrily collects a bouquet of flowers as her grandmother is slaughtered.

The tale of Little Red Riding Hood and her unfortunate fate provides us with perhaps the most coherent articulation of the danger of leaving the beaten track, of crossing a frontier both literal and symbolic, and entering unchartered space. From Red's story, we learn not only that from the wilderness come monsters, but also that entering their territory will result in severe punishment. This European thematic of the inevitability of curiosity and the repercussions it might bring beyond the frontier, had most certainly already ingrained itself in the collective unconscious of pilgrims before they set foot upon the soil of the New World.

American folklore often evidences a more romanticised intrigue with the unknown territory that lurks behind the frontier, and those who may inhabit it. Folk heroes were made of pioneers such as Daniel Boone, the embodiment of what D. H. Lawrence called 'the essential American soul' — 'hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer.'[3] Boone seems to have inspired the fictional character of Natty Bumppo or 'Leatherstocking', the protagonist of James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales of life on the frontier. The child of European settlers, Leatherstocking is somewhat assimilated as a Native. He is adept at hunting and with a ready recourse to violent defence. Therein lies a paradox of Manifest Destiny — with the American desire to push back the frontier also comes the ancient European fear of punishment, since what Turner called the 'meeting point between savagery and civilization' is to be approached with caution. Whilst in European folklore the greatest terror is of what lurks behind the borders of civilization, American folklore is equally anxious of the effects of the wilderness upon the psyche of its explorers. Monsters are not only to be met, but also to be made. What we therefore find throughout American lore is a swathe of characters who have succumbed to 'wilderness-temptations', who have allowed themselves to be unmanned by the hardship of their surroundings. As Turner puts it: 'The wilderness masters the colonist' — a process that causes him ever more to resemble the vanquished Native, as his new environment 'strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirts and the moccasin.'[4]

As the frontier expanded during the nineteenth century and the search for wealth drew many toward the West, some of these settlers were documented to have succumbed to barbarism — particularly the fur-trappers who settled in the Appalachian and Rocky Mountains, becoming known colloquially as 'mountain

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3 D.H. Lawrence, 2003 (1923). Studies in Classic American Literature, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 65.
4 Turner, ibid.

men'. Clothed in buckskins and carrying rifles and Bowie knives, the trappers were self-sufficient and fought against the elements for survival. Many of the trappers travelled with Indian companions and took squaws for wives, while some became honorary members of Native tribes. Ray Allen Billington suggests that the difficulties endured by the 'mountain men' caused them to 'slip backward in the scale of civilization until their wilderness skills matched those of their red-skinned opponents', adding that, '[s]ome, in this reversion toward the primitive, descended to a level of savagery below that of their foes.'[5] The extent of this regressive affect, it seems, was conceived of as being mutually proportional to the depths of the wilderness explored or resided in. Similarly, describing the effect of environment upon character, Turner purported that frontier life encouraged an anti-social and primitive dependency upon familial organisation, allowing for the development of a clan mentality.[6] Reverting to hunting and tribalism, these degraded pioneers embody the failure of O'Sullivan's concept of Manifest Destiny as a civilizing process, and come instead to represent what seems to be the nation's greatest locus of fear: an internalized other who has absorbed the attributes of the vanquished native. A combination of the monstrous attributes of antagonists prevalent throughout European folklore with the rugged individualism of Boone and his counterparts, and inspired by a Euro-American discourse on the frontier and that which might lurk behind it, this figure proliferates most particularly in the cinematic subgenre which is our focus of investigation: the 'road-horror'.

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, popular horror cinema was characterised by a spate of films that shared the same basic thematic: a group of people on a road trip embark upon ill-advised journeys to forgotten rural backwaters and is summarily slaughtered (in all manner of imaginative ways) by vengeful locals. Films that correlated to this plotline were released throughout Europe as well as in the Antipodes, but the subgenre remained primarily an American phenomenon. The subgenre adopts the aesthetic of the road movie — its preoccupation with the vastness of natural landscape and the iconography of the automobile — and the thematic of horror cinema, with its trajectory toward violence and retribution. Its recent manifestation marks the second of its semi-coherent cycles, which have been realised during two moments of great duress for America: the 1970s, the Vietnam era; and the 2000s, the era of the 'War on Terror'. During these two particular historical moments, with their certain amount of commonalities, popular cinema articulated the nation's anxiety by reconfiguring the distant

5 Ray Allen Billington, 1956. The Far Western Frontier: 1830-1860, Harper and Row Publishers, New York, p. 48.
6 Ibid., p. 30.

or invasive enemy as an internal threat which retaliates viciously to its disturbance, but which is otherwise sequestered behind a frontier both socio-politic and geographic.

The elements by which the road-horror is constituted have been apparent in American cinema since the silent era. J.W. Williamson[7] notes the early burgeoning of fictitious travelogue films, such as *Billie,* the *Hillbilly* (Archer MacMackin, 1915), *Rainbow Riley* (Charles Hines, 1926) and *The Big Killing* (F. Richard Jones, 1928), which dramatised the exoticism and potential danger of the American rural, especially of the Appalachian region, its feuding, moon-shining, but essentially benign locals happened upon by bewildered city folk. A few decades later, however, the clownish comedy that characterised such releases had been eliminated in favour of newly dark and pessimistic representations of the imagined brutality of rural areas, particularly those of the Southern states. The establishment of the road-horror was particularly precipitated by two significant road movies: *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969) and *Deliverance* (John Boorman, 1972), both of which explored the violent consequences of trespassing into isolated parts of rural America. These films manifested an anxiety about both the sublime power of nature and the unpredictability of its uncivilised inhabitants. These two texts would lay the foundation for the road-horror to come. From *Easy Rider*, the subgenre obtained its rock music-laden soundtrack, its sun-drenched and vast environmental aesthetic, and its preference for multiple, youthful (and to varying degrees, counter-cultural) protagonists; from *Deliverance*, a deep anxiety about rural space and its inhabitants, who take less than kindly to unwanted interlopers. Both films represent a strict urban/rural divide in depicting the American backcountry as a violent and lawless territory, particularly hostile to intruders from the city: *Easy Rider's* two leads, Billy (Hopper) and Wyatt (Peter Fonda) are eventually murdered by the locals whose lives they have disrupted, and *Deliverance's* protagonists suffer similar violence. A newly coherent cinematic climate was developing – one in which the road-horror could flourish as the ultimate articulation of trepidation about rural territory and its invasion by urban protagonists.

During the 1970s, the erosion of the Hays Production Code assisted an increase of explicit filmic content that particularly affected the horror genre, as the emergent 'splatter' and subsequent 'slasher' subgenres were consolidated primarily by way of their depictions of extreme violence. Contemporaneous to the development of the 'slasher' during the 1970s, the first coherent cycle of the road-horror began, and the conventions of the new subgenre quickly became evident

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7 J.W. Williamson, 1995. Hillbillyland, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London.

with its formal inception: the release of Tobe Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* in 1974. Soon thereafter came Wes Craven's *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977). Both films inspired not only intense controversy (particularly as a result of their explicitly violent content) but also sufficient popularity amongst audiences to allow for a spate of sequels. [8] During the subsequent decade, there emerged a range of imitators in the 'hicksploitation' [9] vein, including *Motel Hell* (Kevin Connor, 1980), *The Creeper* (Peter Carter, 1977), *Don't Go in the Woods* (James Bryan, 1981), *Just Before Dawn* (Jeff Lieberman, 1981), *The Final Terror* (Andrew Davis, 1983) and *Hunter's Blood* (Robert C. Hughes, 1986), all of which were similarly about campers or wilderness trippers being stalked by (often hideously disfigured) backwoods maniacs. Subsequently, at the turn of the twenty-first century, there appeared a new spate of road-horror films, primarily from *America: Wrong Turn* (Rob Schmidt, 2003), *Wrong Turn 2: Dead End* (Joe Lynch, 2007), *Wrong Turn 3: Left for Dead* (Declan O'Brien, 2009), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Marcus Nispel, 2003), *House of 1,000 Corpses* (Rob Zombie, 2003), *Monster Man* (Michael Davis, 2003), *Roadkill* (Steve Taylor, 2003), *The Devil's Rejects* (Rob Zombie, 2005), *Hoboken Hollow* (Glen Stephens, 2005), *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning* (Jonathan Liebesman, 2006), *The Hills Have Eyes* (Alexandre Aja, 2006), *The Hills Have Eyes II* (Martin Weisz, 2007). Non-American members of the subgenre emerged from Australia: *Wolf Creek* (Greg McLean, 2005); from New Zealand, *The Locals* (Greg Page, 2003); from Britain: *The Last Great Wilderness* (David Mackenzie, 2002), *This Is Not a Love Song* (Billie Eltringham, 2002), *Wilderness* (Michael J. Bassett, 2006), *Severance* (Christopher Smith, 2006), *Straightheads* (Dan Reed, 2007) and *Eden Lake* (James Watkins, 2008); from France: *Deep in the Woods* (Lionel Delplanque, 2000), *Haute Tension* (Alexandre Aja, 2003), *Sheitan* (Kim Chapiron, 2006); from Belgium: *Calvaire* (Fabrice Du Welz, 2004), and from Romania: *Ils* (David Moreau and Xavier Palud, 2006). For its considerably more explicit violent content than its 1970s predecessor, the modern articulation of the road-horror has also been even more vehemently disavowed by critics – and just as popular with fans.

8 The Texas Chain Saw Massacre series includes Hooper's 1974 original; The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2 (Hooper, 1986); Leatherface: Texas Chainsaw Massacre III (Jeff Burr, 1990); The Return of the Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Kim Henkel, 1994); The Texas Chainsaw Massacre (Marcus Nispel, 2003); The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning (Jonathan Liebesman, 2006). The Hills Have Eyes series includes Craven's 1977 original; The Hills Have Eyes Part II (Craven, 1985); The Hills Have Eyes 3 (Joe Gayton, 1995); The Hills Have Eyes (Alexandre Aja, 2006) and The Hills Have Eyes II (Aja, 2007).
9 Worth Star Telegram, 2nd June 2003: http://ae.dfw.com/entertainment/ui/dfw/movie.html?id=100998&reviewId=12265&startDate=06%2F02%2F2003

These films, made in disparate places and at different times, and under vastly varying budgetary conditions, all share their common plotline and a didacticism that warns against exploration, and demonstrates the punishment of curiosity — just as did their European folkloric antecedents. This amounts to a trajectory the direct opposite of that which would motivate the notion of Manifest Destiny. Nevertheless, the road-horror has emerged as an especially American phenomenon. Its aesthetic (inherited from the road movie genre) of the vast highway stretching into the unknown, to be traversed by the automobile, is a modernized version of what Marina Warner calls the 'emblem of pioneer America': the empty road. [10]   Beyond this iconography and their shared narrative arc, the subgenre's texts are often rather discordant. Those who find themselves making the road-horror's journey are usually in pairs or in groups, though the subgenre's protagonists are sometimes lone travellers. Frequently, the subgenre's gender dynamics call to mind those of folklore and horror cinema alike: female heroes must vanquish male villains. The road-horror's most significant shared trope is that of its antagonist, always codified as a member of the rural or semi-rural poor. Such villains range from the deceptively benevolent (*Wolf Creek's* Mick) to the deformed and outright insane (the murderous clans of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* or *The Hills Have Eyes,* for instance). They also embody a certain amount of national specificities: the villagers of *Eden Lake*, for example, with their tracksuits and pit bull terrier, are quintessentially British 'chavs'. The antagonists of the American road-horror, however, are codified as 'rednecks' or as 'hillbillies' — and most explicitly articulate the failure of Manifest Destiny as a civilizing process. To investigate this failure, we will examine the shared narrative chronology of the road-horror and of the Warnmärchen, or at least of its paragon, 'Little Red Riding Hood': an explorer crosses a social and/or geographical border in the course of their travels, whereupon they encounter a monster, experience violent repercussions for their transgression, and must escape or conquer their enemy before they themselves are destroyed. This fantasy of a violent encounter at the frontier is a nightmarish reimagination of the trajectory of American exploration and conquest. He who is discovered, however, is no longer the Native, but the white settler who has assimilated the imagined attributes of the predecessor he has vanquished, succumbing to regressive 'wilderness-temptation' and thus giving the lie to Manifest Destiny.

The road-horror narrative establishes itself much like its folklore antecedent, by beginning with the introduction of its protagonist/s, who are often no more multifaceted than their equivalents in the Warnmärchen. These characters

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10 Marina Warner, 1997. 'Voodoo Road,' Sight and Sound, Vol. 8,No. 9, pp. 6-10, p. 6.

operate primarily as ciphers, whose duty is to perform predictable narrative functions to which horror cinema has predisposed them: amongst the travelling group in Marcus Nispel's *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, for instance, we find the good-hearted stoner, Kemper (Eric Balfour); the horny young couple, Andy and Pepper (Mike Vogel and Erika Leehrsen); and the nerd, Morgan (Jonathan Tucker). Immediately, however, we also recognize the group's leader, Erin (Jessica Biel), who also correlates to a particular character type visible throughout the horror genre: the heroine to whom Carol Clover refers as the 'Final Girl'. [11] Clover traces the development of an archetype inherited from folklore (and particularly from the European Warnmärchen) within horror cinema: a virtuous female lead pre-ordained for survival, whose strength and cunning enables her to survive the violence which befalls her friends, to defeat the monster, and to live to tell the tale. Erin identifies herself quickly as the most rational and industrious member of the group, not to mention the most — in horror movie terms — ethical protagonist. Any genre fan is familiar with the 'rules' in Wes Craven's *Scream* (1996) articulated by Randy Meeks (Jamie Kennedy), who warns that those horror movie characters who indulge in drug use or sexual contact may not survive. Erin discards the marijuana consumed by her friends, and although she is in a romantic relationship with Kemper, their sexual energy is somewhat neutralized by the normativity of their partnership, since they are on the verge of becoming engaged. This also establishes Erin as something of a foil to the hedonistic Pepper, who copulates enthusiastically with Andy in the back of the teenagers' van before breathlessly asking: "Can you believe we didn't even know each other nineteen hours ago?" Neither sex-loving character lives to the final credits. Pepper is also surprised by Erin's proficiency in picking a lock — a skill she claims to have learned from her brother, which acknowledges both the element of androgyny Clover considers characteristic of the 'Final Girl' and Erin's predecessor in Tobe Hooper's original *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. In Hooper's film, Sally (Marilyn Burns), who cares for her wheelchair-bound brother Franklin, is the only young protagonist to eventually escape from her tormentors. This character type is also discernible in *The Hills Have Eyes* (both original and remake), *Wrong Turn*, and other road-horrors.

　　　　Horror cinema, then, for all the criticism often leveled against its corruptive quality and moral bankruptcy, in fact primarily reiterates the logic of folklore in rewarding virtue (and in punishing vice). In their proliferation of female protagonists, too, both media share a common trope. However, the prevalence of heroines marks a standard departure not only from the traditional narrative of exploration and colonialism, but also from that of myth. Clover's cinematic 'Final Girl'

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11 Carol Clover, 1992. Men, Women, and Chainsaws, British Film Institute, London.

is a female version of Orin E. Klapp's legendary 'Conquering Hero', a 'composite' of Achilles, Beowulf, Siegfried, and Cuchulain, who outlasts his compatriots and eventually proves himself through a feat or contest – even if merely by his survival. [12] The monster-hunter of myth and legend is traditionally male, and as Lord Raglan describes his shared voyage: '[O]n reaching manhood the hero sets out forthwith on a journey from the land of his upbringing.'[13] The European Warnmärchen, however, are rife with heroines from Little Red to Goldilocks to Gretel, later transmuting into the cinematic staple observed by Clover. Although Clover, writing in 1992, does not theorise the existence of the road-horror as a coherent subgenre, her delineation of the shared narrative of what she considers members of the 'slasher' subgenre in fact correlates neatly to our topic of discussion: 'the killer is the psychotic product of a sick family, but still recognisably human; the victim is a beautiful, sexually active woman; the location is not-home, at a Terrible Place...'[14] Before we go on to investigate the 'sick family', let us first examine the Terrible Place into which the hapless protagonists stumble.

The desire for exploration and for the expansion and eventual diminishment of the frontier, as we know, is at the basis of Manifest Destiny — yet much lore, whether oral, literary or cinematic, warns against the indulgence of this curiosity. The road-horror depicts severe consequences befalling those who transgress by leaving the known path and entering the unchartered space of what Clover calls 'not-home', the unheimlich. This 'not-home' is always a rural space, a malignant wilderness that, in the case of the American road-horror, is frequently (either implicitly or explicitly) located within the Southern United States. The malleable border between North and South is today, perhaps, more pertinent a frontier than that between East and West, pushed back and supposedly eradicated by the original proponents of Manifest Destiny. The road-horror configures this border to be one which is not only geographical, but also social, political, and even psychological. Within the subgenre, Northern states are imagined as urban and modern, whereas their Southern counterparts are coded as rural and antiquated. The subgenre thus reinforces the 'deep-seated cleavage between urban and rural life' that supposedly yet lingers in American society.[15] However, in light of our acknowledgement of the road-horror's influence from European folklore, we might see the phenomenon to

12 Orin E. Klapp, 1949. 'The Folk Hero' in The Journal of American Folklore, Vol. 62, No. 243 (January – March 1949), pp. 17-25, p 17.
13 Lord Raglan, 1934. 'The Hero of Tradition' in Folklore, Vol. 45, No. 3 (September 1934), pp. 212-231, p. 224.
14 Clover, Men, Women and Chainsaws, p. 1.
15 John B. Rae, 1971. The Road and the Car in American Life, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, London, p. 155.

be one that is not only tenacious but also geographically and temporally transposable — as is the symbolic sequestering of the uncultivated land behind a frontier, either physical or imaginary. Raymond Williams contends that 'a contrast between country and city, as fundamental ways of life, reaches back into classical times,'[16] and Robert Pogue Harrison[17] considers the tenacious fascination of the wilderness to be a paradoxical phenomenon. Harrison, in a Eurocentric evocation of Turner's 'Frontier Thesis', observes that although the tenets of Western civilization were established as dichotomous to the forests that were cleared to make way for a bourgeoning urban civilization, that very wilderness would remain an integral preoccupation of the shared 'cultural imagination.'[18] The road-horror, therefore, is but one more articulation of this preoccupation.

The significance of the departure from civilization and the entrance into the wilderness are emphasized throughout the road-horror by the reiteration of certain iconographic tropes; most particularly wayfarer signs that frequently advise against further travel and that conspicuously demarcate the habitat of villains. The disregard of these omens is frequently the first intimation of the ignorance that characterises many of the subgenre's protagonists (with the exception of the Final Girl) — a 'Stop' sign is bypassed in the first few moments of *Jeepers Creepers;* the nuclear test village populated by the antagonists of *The Hills Have Eyes* is marked by 'No Trespassing' notices; 'Condemned' warnings are posted on the door of the slaughterhouse in which Leatherface works in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning*; and the teenage leads of *Wolf Creek* pass an ominously bullet-ridden signpost. Another aesthetic trope reiterating the crossing of a frontier is the forked road, seen in *Wolf Creek* and *Wrong Turn*, which leads travellers from the marked highway and onto a dirt track toward disaster. As they abandon the known road, the subgenre's leads also find themselves slipping further from civilization and embarking upon the regressive path observed by Billington. Technology no longer serves them: mobile phones lose reception; Satellite Navigation systems warn (as in *Eden Lake*): "At your first opportunity, turn around"; and cars begin to break down, leaving the protagonists not only isolated but also increasingly vulnerable to the first antagonistic force to work against them: nature itself.

The country of production determines the representation of landscape in each road-horror, as the subgenre's aesthetic of rural isolation is somewhat nationally specific. The primary location of the European road-horror is dense wood-

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16 Raymond Williams, 1975. The Country and the City, Oxford University Press US, New York, p. 1.
17 Robert Pogue Harrison, 1993. Forests: The Shadow of Civilization, University of Chicago Press, Chicago
18 Ibid., ix.

land: *Straightheads*, *This Is Not a Love Song*, *The Last Great Wilderness* and *Wilderness*, the British contributions to the subgenre, are each set in remote forests, as are the French *Haute Tension* and *Them*; the Belgian *Calvaire* is set in the agricultural Hautes Fagnes. The protagonists of the European road-horror suffer the ill effects of the cold and rain, and are bewildered by the depths of the woodland into which they trespass. By contrast, it is the intensity of heat that weakens and demoralises the protagonists of American road-horrors, many of which depict a sun-bleached, craggy landscape bereft of vegetation. *The Hills Have Eyes* and its sequel are set in the mountainous, scorched New Mexico desert — both were filmed in Morocco, in an attempt to assure a convincing aesthetic of intense heat. *Wolf Creek*, set in the Australian outback, uses similar iconography in the representation of its bleak, barren and hostile landscape. Certain films are characterised by a paradoxical landscape that is both desiccated and verdant: although much of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and its prequel, *The Beginning*, take place in an arid landscape, the home that the villain, 'Leatherface', and his family inhabit is situated deep within a teeming forest. In all cases, though, the journey is arduous and solitary, rapidly rendering the travellers vulnerable, as the hostility of their surroundings becomes increasingly apparent. The protagonists of the American road-horror are quickly wearied and worn down by the oppressive heat of the new environment. The protagonists of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *The Hills Have Eyes* are consistently drenched in sweat, shielding their eyes against a hostile sun that has parched the landscape. Both films are characterised by a colour palette that privileges tones of yellow and red indicative of sun-stroked nausea. Hooper's original road-horror prefigured the subgenre's association with intense heat: lens flare and dramatic colour saturation were used to emphasise the torrid Texas environment by cinematographer Daniel Pearl, who also shot Nispel's remake. The sun-parched environment of the original film was, however, no creation of film stock or special effect: Hooper's 1973 grueling summer shoot took place during a heat wave in which temperatures regularly reached one hundred degrees Fahrenheit. The physically challenging experiences that his actors endured therefore became quickly notorious, and the film's visceral quality is enhanced by the verisimilitude of their sweat and suffering. Further, not only does the road-horror's hostile landscape also have a wearying and disorienting effect upon travellers, it also seemingly colludes with antagonists, who have mastered it for their own advantage, and who thus obtain shelter, vantage and ambush points. The cannibalistic clan of the *Hills Have Eyes* series, for instance, hides in a labyrinthine network of tunnels deep inside the New Mexico mountains; in Weisz's *The Hills Have Eyes 2*, one mutant antagonist has even developed a chameleonic ability to merge with his backdrop.

As the leads traverse the wilderness, they will stumble upon the homes

of antagonists — often before meeting the villains themselves. These domestic spaces alone give the lie to the notion of a universal American civilizing process; they are dilapidated, unsanitary, untouched by the progress of modernisation and of technology — locked in anachronism. As well as inverting a normative image of home, each dwelling evokes historical iconography from the earliest pioneer dwellings to the antebellum period and particularly to the 1950s, the Eisenhowerian era, which Baudrillard considered to be 'the real high spot for the US.' The antagonists of *Wrong Turn*, for instance, inhabit a ramshackle wooden house reminiscent of the log cabins that succeeded the dugouts of pioneer settlers. As the teenage trespassers search for a telephone, Carly (Emmanuelle Chriqui) comments, "I am not sensing a phone here," as if the existence of such an icon of modern technology would be impossible in an antiquated home, and also as if the temporal illogicality and geographical isolation of such a building would deprive it of connection to the outside world. The protagonists are incredulous that such an environment could still be inhabited. The objects visible throughout the home are a series of anachronisms, not consistent with any one particular era. The occasional kerosene lamp illuminates the rooms and a gramophone needle scratches repeatedly across a record. As in the case of *The Hills Have Eyes* and *Wolf Creek*, the clan has also stolen modern paraphernalia, such as video cameras and hiking equipment, from their victims. And a pot full of meat of indiscernible source still boils on the stove — much like the Three Bears' porridge that Goldilocks discovers. This iconic image — and the possessions stolen from previous victims — also exacerbates tension by intimating that the antagonists have only just departed and could soon return. We are keenly aware that this new round of victims/trespassers will suffer the same fate as that of their predecessors. Furthermore, the antagonists' possessions also connote agricultural work and hunting: hoes, picks, and a quiver full of arrows hang from the wall. In another motif shared by Nispel's film (and also by Hooper's original), the utter isolation of these homes is reiterated by the motif of an electricity generator, which show that the areas have been untouched by the WPA (Works Progress Administration) and other New Deal civic improvement programs since the Great Depression: the inhabitants of these dwellings are quite literally living 'off the grid'.

Architectural historian David P. Handlin posits that the vast social changes of the early nineteenth century also influenced structural alterations to the standard American home.[19] Handlin suggests that during this era, architecture transformed in response to shifts in familial structure, as the desire for greater privacy

19 David P. Handlin, 1979. The American Home: Architecture and Society, 1815-1915. Little, Brown: Boston and Toronto.

and space made obsolete the traditional sharing of homes by large families. Still living in their clan-like groups, the road-horror's monsters inhabit homes that have successfully resisted modernity. In *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, for instance, numerous people of all ages reside together in the family home of Leatherface. Their relationships to one another are difficult to determine. This house and its nearby trailer park are apparently the only inhabited buildings left in the streets of Fuller, rendered a ghost town since the closure of the abattoir for which Leatherface and his relatives once worked. Their home itself evidently has not benefited from interior modernization - its bathroom tap spurts a constant stream of rust-coloured water, and the newest technological innovations on display are an ancient foot-pedal sewing machine — and, as in *Wrong Turn*, a rusted gramophone, its needle spinning uselessly. On the walls hang sepia photographs and the mounted heads of cows and pigs, all of which underscore both the home's anachronistic quality and irrational, ominous oddity. The house preserves icons of Americana: the faded wallpaper is patterned with images of guitars and cowboys, and an American football sits on the mantelpiece, although it is difficult to imagine any of the family partaking in the sport. The interior of the home is a melancholy shrine to the Eisenhower era — the architecture of the building, however, predates the twentieth century, connoting the antebellum South and its vast plantations.

In evoking and blending these different eras, the road-horror presents a series of environments located behind a frontier that is both geographical and temporal. These interior spaces reveal cracks in the monolithic ideal of American progress by representing instances of American history made perverse in their prolongation. The pioneers have failed to move beyond their ramshackle wooden dwellings; small-town industry and agriculture have failed to succeed, as encapsulated by the closed abattoir, rusted tractors and the slow-turning windmill of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and by *Wolf Creek's* hoes and picks hanging from the wall, suspended in stasis. The rural Gothic imagery of the road-horror reverses the 'pastoral idea' of Leo Marx,[20] for whom the 'machine' is an obtrusive and uncanny presence within the 'garden': in the road-horror, the garden has overtaken the machine once again, and technology is becoming evermore subsumed within a malevolent nature. Furthermore, the road-horror's particular preoccupation with the iconography of the 1950s distorts this era (a supposedly glorious American decade) and demonstrates that those who have failed to join the progress of modernity or to reap the benefits of the 'American Dream' have been left in barbarous, pre-modern chaos. Most particularly, the icon of the 'stuck record', a motif reiterated in *The Texas*

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20 Leo Marx, 2000 (1964). The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Idea in America, OUP, New York.

Chainsaw Massacre and *Wrong Turn*, seems to suggest an artificially prolonged sta-sis, a microcosmic Möbius strip condemned to be forever frozen in time.

The 1950s, America's Nuclear Age, is particularly connoted by Alexandre Aja's *The Hills Have Eyes*. The film opens with a series of images of nuclear testing in New Mexico, as forested land and farmhouses are destroyed by test blasts. The an-tagonists, having resisted evacuation, have been left behind in this former mining town that became a nuclear test zone. The dilapidated homes are embodiments of the characters who reside in them — all of whom suffer from deformities as a result of nuclear fallout. Some of the villains inhabit a ghost town that was given over to the United States government for use as a testing facility and live alongside cracked and faded remnants of the era: mannequins used for military exercises, an embodiment of the stasis of the past, rendered immobile in friezes that parody familial harmony. These homes, as well as the mining profession of the antagonists' ancestors, have been rendered obsolete by modernity, the onslaught of urban cap-italism, and the impingement of the government and military.

The temporal incongruity of these homes reinforces the premise that the road-horror's antagonists exist behind a border, albeit an invisible or allegorical one, all of which confirms Turner's hypothesis that those restricted by the frontier are immobile in a state of stasis and are condemned to a life of anachronism and primitivism.[21] The villains are rendered savage by their failure to accept the prog-ress of modernity. They endure as relics from an earlier era and can exist in the contemporary world only as scavengers, destructive and cannibalistic. Through the depiction of its interior spaces, the subgenre evokes periods of glory in American history, but dramatises the perversity of their prolongation. In a nation founded on mobility and advancement, the embracing of stasis is represented as an unnatural act that generates regression and barbarism. The road-horror explicates this con-cept through a visual motif reiterated by every member of the subgenre: that of the immobilised vehicle. The broken-down cars that litter the road-horror represent the literal end of the journey, both indicating the fates of their drivers and symbol-ising the triumph of stasis.

These stationary vehicles are the obverse of the travelling wagons em-blematic of pioneer-era America, and indicate the reversal of what has been im-mortalised as the nation's most glorious era. The end of exploration and the sur-render to stasis is encapsulated by the icon of the trailer park, as inhabited by allies of Leatherface in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. The trailer park also represents a modern emblem of American poverty and a signifier of 'trash' status. Jim Goad terms it 'the media's cultural toilet, the only acceptable place to dump one's racist

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21 Turner, ibid.

inclinations.'[22]   As Goad claims, this location is iconographic of tenacious stereo-types of poverty and uncleanliness associated with the rural American South in particular. Throughout the road-horror, interior locations are invariably unsanitary, although this fact seems to go unnoticed by their residents. Leatherface's home, for example, is described by one of the teen intruders as a 'pigsty', although its occupant insists he likes to "keep a clean house." This sentiment is reminiscent of that articulated by the patriarch of the family in Hooper's original, living amongst a mess of dismembered body parts and bones, who grumbles about a door which Leatherface has destroyed during his murderous rampage: "Ain't he got no pride in his home?" Depictions of disgusting bathrooms are reiterated by *Wrong Turn*, *The Hills Have Eyes*, and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*: this trope seems representative of the antagonists' lack of civilization and modernity, a definable signifier of which is the interior bathroom. The unsanitary nature of their bathrooms underscores the bestial quality of antagonists, but it also marks the subgenre's engagement with a particular stereotype of the Southern American states, within which most of the American road-horrors find their setting, and upon which the light of mo-dernity apparently has not yet shone. Indeed, the moments of American history preserved in the dwelling places of road-horror antagonists are also those of the nation's greatest shames: the brutal treatment of Native Americans by pioneers, who have transmuted into the grotesque, cabin-dwelling mountain men of *Wrong Turn*; the era of slavery, the culpability for which is most often associated with the Southern states, such as Texas and Georgia, where *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *2001 Maniacs* find their respective settings; the New Mexico nuclear weapons tests of the 1950s which have afflicted the antagonists of The Hills Have Eyes; and the oppression of the poor which may be traced throughout the nation's history. The road-horror acknowledges the culpability of America's history, but attributes the culpability for these crimes to the Southern states that are thereby represented as an isolated underworld, splintered from the enlightened and modernised ma-jority of the United States. Fittingly, then, the villains who inhabit these locations are equally as degraded as their homes.

The road-horror's monstrous villains, much like their folkloric predeces-sors, reiterate enduring stereotypes of rural brutality. In their atavism, they embody the anthropologist E.B. Tylor's concept of the persistence of 'tribes of low culture' or at least their impulses, in spite of the gradual progress of civilization from an origi-nal state of savagery. They are universally monstrous and barbarous, their physi-cal aberrations mutually proportional with their bloodlust. The antagonists of the

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22 Jim Goad, 1997. The Redneck Manifesto, Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, New York, p. 16.

American road-horror in particular engage with a repository of images and notions associated with inhabitants of the rural 'backcountry', the inhabitants of which were often considered by Eastern prospectors as an obstacle to Manifest Destiny. These are pioneers who have failed to modernise (or to colonise) as the frontier is further pushed back, remaining stubborn, isolate and obsolete. It is something of an irony that such characters were once conceived of as the heroes of the bourgeoning 'New World', but have become anti-heroic in their refusal to partake in the next stages of the 'American Dream'. Sargeant and Watson allow us a deeper understanding of how such anxiety surrounding the rural poor would develop and later influence the road-horror. In discussing the road movie, an antecedent of the subgenre, Sargeant and Watson describe a proliferation of anti-heroic characters who uphold the values of rugged individualism upon which the United States were founded. They argue: 'The figure of the anti-hero is often a version of an earlier hero whose society has abandoned or disillusioned him with its corruptness.'[23] The frontiersman, they maintain, is the 'mythic, archetypal American hero' with 'an intricate relationship to the wilderness,' who represents both 'the first moment of European civilization' but also understands the landscape in a manner akin to that of Native Americans.[24] For Sargeant and Watson, this hero is conceived of as the pioneering woodsman such as Daniel Boone. While no criminal per se, this figure follows his own ethical code outside the legal system and is because of this vigilante status transmuted into the outlaw or bandit of the road movie. Watson observes this figure particularly in road movies set in the American South, such as *Smokey and the Bandit* (Hal Needham, 1977) and *Convoy* (Sam Peckinpah, 1978), as 'a representation of the mythical untamed Rebel Spirit of the South.'[25] The road-horror, which shares this Southern preoccupation, inherits from the road movie its inversion of Boone's type, the folk hero who braided his hair and wore Indian leggings, and who is transmuted into the semi-'native' antagonists of *Wrong Turn*. Further, the road-horror also demonstrates the inversion of another, more modern American hero: the petty entrepreneur, such as the Sawyers of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, whose family slaughterhouse is going bust but who have always "been in meat."

      The road-horror deprives the outlaw of his nobility, imbuing him instead with a destructive, even cannibalistic bloodlust. Thus, the subgenre continues the trajectory that Edward Said defined with the term 'Orientalism': the demonization

23 Jack Sargeant and Stephanie Watson, in Sargeant and Watson, eds., 1999. Lost Highways: An Illustrated History of Road Movies, Creation Books, London, p. 7.
24 Ibid.
25 Stephanie Watson, 1999. "From Riding to Driving: Once Upon a Time in the West" in Lost Highways: An Illustrated History of Road Movies, eds. Jack Sargeant and Stephanie Watson, Creation Books, London, pp 22-42, p. 25.

of the 'primitive' in a bid to justify colonialism. And the subgenre's particular pre-occupation with cannibalism resonates with William Arens' assertion that (exaggerated) reports of man-eating would operate to serve a similar function. Such a legacy has already been borne by the backcountry folk, albeit for entirely the opposite purpose. Nancy Walker argues that chronicles of frontier violence were exaggerated not to encourage but rather — in the interests of economic stability - to discourage the modern colonialism of the great 'stampede to the West'.[26] This rhetoric has infiltrated cinema — from 1915's Billie, the *Hillbilly* and the other early films Williamson discusses to, for instance, 2010's *Winter's Bone* (Debra Granik), a depiction of drug-dealing and kin violence in the Ozark Mountains — and it finds its apex in the road-horror. The subgenre, as always inspired by its cinematic predecessor, the road movie, thereby does nothing short of reversing America's ultimate foundational myth — that of the desirability or even the duty of expansion through mobility. At the same time, the road-horror reverses America's ultimate archetypal hero, once a pioneer but now a figure embodying all that is antithetical to progress, having absorbed the ways of the conquered 'natives' whom the Declaration of Independence derided as 'merciless savages'. As aberrant whites who have succumbed to 'wilderness-temptations', indulging their base impulses and refusing to conform to urban civilization, the road-horror's 'rednecks' defy the distinction between Native and settler, embodying the conflation of the two identities: they are pioneers left behind by progress and made primitive through hardship. As 'poor whites' in particular, they occupy a particular category of racial ambiguity. George Brown Tindall and David E. Shi refer to the perception of 'poor whites' as 'the most degraded race of human beings claiming an Anglo-Saxon origin that can be found on the face of the earth';[27] Mirrin et al. demonstrate the means by which 'backcountry whites' were aligned with Natives, being perceived as 'no different from the defeated Indians' and accommodating themselves to the 'borderless forest' on account of having 'melded Indian and white ways.'[28]

The road-horror villains are whites who have adopted survivalist attributes historically associated with their aboriginal predecessors: their representa-

26 Nancy A. Walker, 1998. What's so funny?: humor in American culture, Rowman and Littlefield, Maryland, p. 129.
27 In George Brown Tindall & David E. Shi, 1989. America: A Narrative History, W.W. Norton and Company, London, p. 359.
28 Mirrin, John M., Paul E. Johnson, James M. McPherson, Alice Fahs, Gary Gerstle, 2011. Liberty, Equality, Power: A History of the American People, Vol. 1: To 1877, Cengage Learning, Hampshire, p. 236.

tion defies the settlers' attempts 'to turn the Indians into Englishmen,'[29] and shows the failure of George Washington's project to inculcate Natives with European values. Instead, the antagonists betray the suppressed history of 'mountain men' and those who adopted the supposed 'primitivism' of their Native American counterparts. The road-horror's antagonists are akin to those 'mountain men' who have assimilated with their surrounding tribes — pioneers who have been forgotten. They have succumbed to the influence of their austere environment; they represent the transmutation of James Fenimore Cooper's articulate 'Leatherstocking' into Hooper's brutal Leatherface. Therefore, the road-horror villain also betrays the falsity of the myth of pioneer nobility, and that of Manifest Destiny. Both Robin Wood[30] and Christopher Sharrett[31] , in discussing *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, similarly contend that the film's antagonists are the products of oppression by industrial capitalism, those who have been rendered archaic and obsolete by an uncompromising progress. In both Hooper's film and *The Hills Have Eyes*, former slaughterhouse workers and miners, respectively, become bestial and brutalized after the collapse of small industries that have become outdated in the wake of technological progress. The costuming of these antagonists, in ageless denims, battered suits and rags, correlates with the outmoded interior decoration of their homes to display their failure to progress beyond the mid-twentieth century, an era now made perverse in its prolongation. The identity of the road-horror 'rednecks' is therefore diametrically opposed to that of the 'Yankee', who is defined by 'the absoluteness of his estrangement from his past.'[32]

Merrell reports a conflict between John Smith's explorers and a hunting party of Native Americans in 1608. When asked why they had attacked the English, one of the captured hunters responded that he had heard that they were 'a people come from under the world, to take their world from them.'[33] The road-horror's villains hold similar sentiments: they fiercely defend their territory against invasion and resist the forces of progress and modernity that the urban protagonists so

29 James Axtell, 1981. The European and the Savage, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 262.
30 Robin Wood, 1984. 'An Introduction to the American Horror Film,' The American Nightmare, Festival of Festivals, Toronto, pp. 164-200.
31 Christopher Sharrett, 'The Idea of Apocalypse in The Texas Chain Saw Massacre' in Barry Keith Grant, ed. 1984, Planks of Reason: Essays on the Horror Film, ed. Barry Keith Grant, Scarecrow Press, London, pp. 255-276.
32 Michael McGiffert in McGiffert, ed. 1964, Character of Americans, Dorsey Press, California, p. 5.
33 In James H. Merrell, 1984. 'The Indians' New World: The Catawba Experience,' in William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series, Vol. 41, Issue 4 (Oct., 1984), pp. 537-565.

clearly represent. Sequestered in small, isolated towns, the antagonists evidence no knowledge of the passage of time, nor do they desire to transform or escape their surroundings. Rather, they regard the outside world with suspicion. Upon being interrupted by the teen protagonists of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, who inform her of the suicide of the hitchhiker whom they had collected, Leatherface's adoptive mother Luda Mae (Mariette Marich) replies: "Something like this comes along, makes you realise how crazy the world is out there." Similarly, when asked by one of the young road-trippers if he is aware of landmarks in his vicinity, *House of 1,000 Corpses'* Captain Spaulding (Sid Haig) simply answers, "I don't drive cross-country." Sustaining themselves by preying upon those who inadvertently venture into their territory, and secure in the claustrophobic proximity of their familial tribes, the road-horror's antagonists have no desire to overcome the entropy that, for them, has become normality.

In the self-sufficiency of their familial alliances, the road-horror's monsters uphold a tribal logic. None overstep the boundaries of their clearly defined relationships, for fear of repercussion. As stated by Andrew Bryniarski, who portrayed Leatherface in both Marcus Nispel's remake and Jonathan Liebesman's prequel, the antagonist family of the Chainsaw films is 'like a feral pack of dogs, but [with] enough… natural, primal necessity to solidify that as a family unit.' [34] The villains may demonstrate a ready willingness to engage each other in violent mock-battles, as do the antagonists of *The Hills Have Eyes*. However, they are essentially protective of one another, as evidenced by Luda Mae's mollycoddling of her adopted son. The psychological state of Leatherface and other road-horror monsters evokes Rudyard Kipling's description of 'primitives' as '[h]alf-devil and half-child;'[35] the antagonists are ready to indulge their bloodlust, but also demonstrate instances of infantilism. For instance, as an animated discussion takes place between Luda Mae and her husband, Sheriff Hoyt (R. Lee Ermey), Leatherface crouches in the nearby corridor as he eavesdrops, rocking gently and hugging himself, displaying the body language of a distressed child. Generally, the road-horror antagonist compounds Malinowski's assumption that the primitive individual is 'completely dominated by the group… that he obeys the commands of his community.'[36] The families endeavour to protect each other, and to provide each other, whenever possible, with fresh

34 Down to the Bone: Anatomy of a Prequel, Special Feature on The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning DVD.

35 In Rudyard Kipling, 1994. Collected Poems of Rudyard Kipling, Wordsworth Editions Ltd., London.
36 Bronislaw Malinowski, 1947 (1926). Crime and Custom in Savage Society, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., Ltd., London, p. 3.

'meat'. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre's* Hoyt articulates a sentiment of tribal defensiveness in pledging a solidarity which he believes will sustain his family through adversity: "As long as we stick together, there ain't nothing we can't handle." Indeed, the proximity of these relationships is often intimated to be so confined as to engender inbreeding; a primary cause of the monsters' almost-universal deformities.

Almost every one of the villains of the American road-horror manifests some form of physical malformation or injury. Even in the few cases of antagonists who do not appear to be deformed, indicators are given of some anomaly. For instance, 2001 Maniacs' Mayor Buckland (Robert Englund) wears an eye-patch, and Captain Spaulding, who appears in both *House of 1,000 Corpses* and its sequel *The Devil's Rejects*, wears make-up that gives him the appearance of a grotesque clown. *The Hills Have Eyes* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* feature obese female characters. In the latter film, Luda Mae's friend, 'The Tea Lady' (Kathy Lamkin), is shot from an extreme low angle, which further exaggerates her size, as does her coupling with an emaciated counterpart. In addition, in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre,* 'Uncle Monty' (Terrence Evans) is wheelchair-bound — after Leatherface has performed some home surgery, as is revealed in *The Beginning.* The masked Leatherface himself suffers from a skin-wasting disease and is a virtual giant: in Hooper's original, 6'4" Gunnar Hansen wore three-inch heels to maximise his physical potential, and in Nispel's remake, the role was filled by Bryniarski, a 6'5" bodybuilder. Liebesman's prequel depicts the Luda Mae's adoption of the newborn Leatherface, who has been previously abandoned. Upon seeing the new baby, Hoyt retorts, "that's the ugliest thing I ever saw." Particularly deformed are the antagonists' eyes, hands and mouths, the synecdochal vessels of expression, as the aberrances of *Wrong Turn's* 'Saw-Tooth' (Gary Robbins), 'Three-Finger' (Julian Richings), and 'One-Eye' (Ted Clark) clearly exemplify.

The opening sequence of *Wrong Turn* is the road-horror's most overt demonstration that the physical deformity of its antagonists is the result of inbreeding. A montage of mock newspaper headlines, photographs and highlighted sections of textbooks attempts to add verisimilitude to this connection. Intercut with numerous microscopic image of cells undergoing mitosis, photographs of bodily and dental malformation accompany phrases which flit across the screen: 'genetic mutation', 'resistance to pain', 'deformity caused by inbreeding', 'inbred-related psychosis'. The narrative reinforces this connection between the antagonists' unfortunate nativity and their mental degradation: as one of the young leads, Chris (Desmond Harrington) he drives unwittingly toward their lair, he tunes briefly into a radio show, during which an emotional orator is proclaiming, "When you plant the seed into your own kin, you anger God!" The practice of inbreeding is a signifier of the

isolation and perversity of the road-horror monsters, and one that restricts them to a premodern state of tribalism. As Freud contended that incest indicates the re-surgence of an atavistic impulse instilled to the 'primal horde' during a 'precultural stage of human evolution,'[37] the private indulgences of the road-horror 'rednecks' are signifiers of their anachronistic status, their defiance of civilization and refusal of the modernist concept of the public sphere. They represent the return of a re-pressed, primeval impulse, giving the lie to the American myth of total progression: they are undiscovered savages, who respond with violent brutality to intrusions upon their territory.

The road-horror is saturated by depictions of violence: impalement (Hoop-er's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*); dismemberment (*Wolf Creek*); crucifixion (*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, *Wolf Creek* and *Calvaire*); immolation (Aja's *The Hills Have Eyes*); decapitation (*Haute Tension*); as well as throat slitting and flaying (both vis-ible in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning)*. The subgenre also breaks one of the few remaining taboos of horror cinema, by visualising violence threatened and enacted against children and animals (Aja's *The Hills Have Eyes*, during which a baby is held at gunpoint, and the head of a pet bird is bitten off). As mentioned above, the particular trope that connects violent images in several members of the subgenre is that of cannibalism. Depictions of anthropophagy certainly evoke not only the European villains of Warnmärchen (particularly the Wolf met by the unfortunate Little Red Riding Hood), who often demonstrate a predilection for the taste of human flesh, but also the mythic American 'Native' to whom both extreme violence and the breaking of this particular taboo was often ascribed. As the ser-monizer John Wesley put it, 'The natural religion of the Creeks, Cherokees, Chicka-saws, and all other Indians… is to torture all their prisoners from morning till night, till at length they roast them to death'[38] — presumably to consume them later. The prospect of encountering man-eaters, however based in myth, became a very real source of anxiety and a tenacious phenomenon to which Gananath Obeyesekere refers as 'the European dread of being eaten by savages.'[39] As the European tellers of folklore partook in the new opportunities afforded by the Age of Exploration, their imaginative anxiety of the unknown would colour their preconceptions of 'savage' natives, represented by works of mytho-anthropology as analogous to the

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37 Bruce H. Weber and David J. Depew, 2003. Evolution and Learning: the Baldwin Effect Reconsidered, MIT Press, Massachusetts, p. 257.
38 John Wesley, 2010 (1806). Sermons on several occasions, BiblioBazaar, South Carolina.
39 Gananath Obeyesekere, 1998. 'Cannibal feasts in nineteenth-century Fiji: sea-men's yarns and the ethnographic imagination' in Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen, eds. Cannibalism and the Colonial World, pp. 63-86, p. 63.

wilderness-dwelling beasts of folklore. Early anthropological writing evidences a simultaneous terror or and fascination with violence. Explorers' accounts often tended toward the graphic and explicit, becoming 'a form of pornography that could be openly admitted to polite households.'[40] Just as folklore once was, and horror cinema is becoming. The accounts of the Spanish conquistadors, and particularly those describing Hernan Cortés' conquest of the Aztec Empire, were sufficiently rife with violence to inspire the claim of Lévi-Strauss that Aztecs had 'a maniacal obsession with blood and torture;'[41] one which was apparently shared by their European counterparts, who invested their descriptions with as much graphic content as possible.

A search for similarly lurid content would inspire anthropologists even into the twentieth century. Experiences in remote areas relatively unaffected by the progress of modernisation facilitated the graphic descriptions of several writers. The combined influence of history and fantasy is apparent in the work of anthropologists such as Edna Taft, who upon visiting Haiti imagined 'those murdering blacks who had chopped off white peoples' heads, burnt white people alive, put them between planks and sawed them in two.'[42] Similar sentiments also influenced the development of the mytho-anthropological 'mondo' film of the 1960s-80s, which utilised a bombastic pseudo-documentary style to depict the grisly brutality of isolated tribes. Fantasies of savage retribution by oppressed 'natives' have remained tenacious, even as modernisation and globalisation have largely eradicated the reality of 'primitive' peoples. Frantz Fanon claimed that such aggression may be a legitimate reaction for members of a colonized culture, whose identity risks being 'swamped', and who may therefore desire to 'renew contact… with the oldest and most pre-colonial springs of life of their people,'[43] through enacting an archaic fantasy of violent retribution.

The antagonist of the American road-horror represents a composite of these mytho-anthropological enactors of brutality, whose characterisation is reminiscent of the most notorious, most bestial monsters of folklore. The combined influence of a folklore-suffused imagination, and of an artistic licence motivated

40 Henrika Kuklick, 1991. The Savage Within: the Social History of British Anthropology, 1885-1945, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p. 13.
41 In Michael Harner and Alfred Meyer, 1979, Cannibal, William Morrow and Company, Incorporated, New York, p. 294.
42 Edna Taft, 1938. A Puritan in Voodoo-Land, Penn Publishing Company, Philadelphia, p. 100.
43 Frantz Fanon, 1994. 'On National Culture,' in Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader, eds. Patrick Williams & Laura Chrisman, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hertfordshire, pp. 36-52, p. 37.

by the isolation of their surroundings, seems evident in much of the writings of early explorers and colonialists. The discourse regarding 'Little Red Riding Hood' and its counterparts, sparking terror of the wilderness and its potential inhabitants, remains detectable in the accounts of Columbus' informants, who related that Native American tribes were similar to 'starving wolves,' [44] ready to consume their enemies. Descriptions of the physical aberration of these subjects are also evocative of the ogres who proliferate throughout folklore and legend; sightings of Cyclopes, and of men with 'dogs' snouts' [45] were reported. Native tribes were characterised, with the same rhetoric as Vico's giants, as members of a lost, deformed race, ready to indulge their violent impulses. The same depiction is a formative element of the road-horror. However, the subgenre also derives influence from an established American history of brutality.

The road-horror killer is as barbarous as the Warnmärchen monsters and reacts to the invasion of his territory with the same brutality as the 'savage' natives depicted by European explorers and settlers. Richard Maxwell Brown suggests that the American association of settlement and violence was consolidated by the so-called 'white-Indian war', beginning in 1607 and continuing until its official cessation in 1890. Although colonialists emphasised the bestial brutality of Natives, Brown posits that settlers fought with equal if not greater violence, adopting the Indian practices of torture and scalping. That these events have had a permanent effect on the American psyche Brown considers indubitable, stating that '[the war] has done much to further our proclivity to violence,' [46] which has resultantly become an integral part of the 'value structure' of the nation. [47] Awareness of this concept is demonstrable in the road-horror: the identity of the subgenre's villain is an amalgamation of the oppressed and vengeful native with the brutal and defensive white settler. As such, he is neither anomalous nor psychopathic; rather, he embodies a history that the nation may prefer to forget, but one that ultimately refuses to be suppressed.

The antagonists of the American road-horror are predetermined by genetics to be bestial, their physical and mental aberrations having isolated

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44 In Lewis F. Petrinovich, 2000. The Cannibal Within, Transaction Publishers, New Jersey, p. 5.
45 Ibid., p. 5.
46 Richard Maxwell Brown, 1979. 'Historical Patterns of American Violence,' in Violence in America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives, eds. Hugh Davis Graham and Ted Robert Gurr, SAGE Publications, Beverly Hills and London, pp. 19-48, p. 34.
47 Ibid., p. 41.S

them from society. In the folkloric sense, therefore, the antagonists of the American road-horror are true monsters, and in the anthropological sense, they are also true primitives. Beyond simple bloodlust, their primary motive is revenge. Generally, the road-horror adheres to the narrative logic of the horror genre and of folklore, according to which virtuous behaviour is rewarded and vice punished. Those characters who commit the most transgressive acts may be quickly dispatched, whereas their more ethical counterparts, particularly the 'Final Girl', have a greater chance of survival (as in *Wrong Turn* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*). However, the logic (shared by folklore and horror cinema) of transgression and punishment is obfuscated in the road-horror, and discourse on the subject is vague and confused. In *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning*, Sheriff Hoyt (played again by Ermey) informs the apparent 'Final Girl', Chrissie (Jordana Brewster), that she and her friends will "pay for [their] sins." However, this dialogue is atypical and unsubstantiated. Generally, all victims suffer equally severe treatment, regardless of their behaviour, as is evidenced. The protagonists misinterpret Hoyt's intentions for them, believing that he may be appeased by a display of morality. Hoyt, who claims to be a veteran soldier, becomes angered by the sight of a destroyed draft card belonging to Dean (Taylor Handley), one of the young protagonists. His older brother Eric (Matt Bomer), in a bid to save Dean, claims that the card is his own. However, Hoyt disregards their comparative virtue, and both characters experience the same brutality, with Dean obtaining no reward, nor lesser punishment, for his sacrificial offer. Equally, the 'Final Girl' may suffer retribution despite her relatively moral conduct, and her escape is facilitated only by her fortuity and resourcefulness. Unlike certain instances in the 'slasher' film, the road-horror heroine is not saved by her success in obtaining either the sympathy or sexual attraction of her enemy.

In one particular road-horror, however, the desire revenge is explicitly articulated in relation to class. The concept of class vengeance is a consistent undercurrent throughout the road-horror subgenre, due to the evident discrepancy of wealth between the affluent protagonists and impoverished antagonists. Aja's *The Hills Have Eyes* includes a sequence unique to the road-horror, during which a villain addresses one of the surviving heroes with a brief and vague explanation of his motivations — and above all shows the failure of Manifest Destiny. To the soundtrack of country singer Merle Kilgore's 'More and More', the film's opening credit sequence provides a series of images depicting the subjugation of the rural poor during the mid-twentieth century. As Kilgore sings, "More and more, I'm forgetting the past…. I'm forgetting about you," a montage shows the dropping of bombs and the clearing of small mining villages to make way for nuclear testing grounds. With increasing regularity, accompanied by a discordant, metallic noise which overwhelms the soundtrack, images of physical aberrations interrupt the

sequence, indicating the resultant deformity of those locals who remain in their former homeland, now condemned and radioactive, catalysing the degeneration of their progeny and isolating them utterly from civilization. To the villains, the affluent young protagonists represent those who have orchestrated their oppression, and are therefore deserving of retribution. In dialogue uncommon to the road-horror, one tumour-ridden antagonist berates Doug (Aaron Stanford), his potential victim: "Your people asked our families to leave our town, and you destroyed our homes. We went into the mines. You set off your bombs, and turned everything to ashes. You made us what we've become." The concept of Manifest Destiny as progressive unification is reversed to a nightmare of degenerative disintegration, in which the antiquated is not vanquished but merely repressed, to return with a vengeance. Neither the past can be forgotten, nor its enduring inhabitants, in this negative imprint of the American Dream.

In conclusion, the road-horror represents just one new articulation of an enduring fascination with the 'sylvan fringe of darkness'[48] that we imagine lurks beyond the boundaries of urban civilization. Although this trepidation certainly characterized the founding of the 'New World' and the subsequent phenomenon of Manifest Destiny, the frontier legend possessed equivalent cultural resonance for citizens of medieval Europe and their folklore. This legend was eventually relocated to the 'New World' by wave upon wave of European settlers. In this respect, we might question the oft-cited metaphor of the bourgeoning United States as a 'tabula rasa'. We may more usefully conceptualise this 'new' nation less as a slate than as a screen — a canvas overlaid with iconography, onto which American aspirations and fears have been continuously projected. The post-millennial road-horror has certainly represented a powerful manifestation of this cycle of projection, refraction, and reflection.

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48 Harrison., ix.

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