MALE BODIES ON-SCREEN: SPECTACLE, AFFECT, AND THE MOST POPULAR ACTION ADVENTURE FILMS IN THE 1980S

Christopher Paul Wagenheim

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2016

Committee:

Theodore F. Rippey, Advisor

Thomas A. Mascaro
Graduate Faculty Representative

Andrew E. Hershberger
Jeffrey A. Brown
ABSTRACT

Theodore F. Rippey, Advisor

While popular movies are often overlooked in film studies, the action-adventure genre in the 1980s has drawn considerable academic attention. The consensus among the literature is that a conservative backlash (spurred on by Ronald Reagan’s two terms in office) against a resurgent equality movement gave rise to hypermasculine movies like *First Blood* and *Predator* and hypermasculine stars like Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone. While this still holds true, a closer look at the movies and the era reveals a much more nuanced picture. A thorough examination of the culture, the movies, and the male bodies on-screen in the 1980s—through the lens of affect theory, cinematography, and spectacle, among others—uncovers a number of significant cultural phenomena that have the potential to shape future academic work.

This study not only elucidates and reconstructs the conception of filmic spectacle to include the male body on-screen, it also identifies two types of male bodies on-screen in the 1980s—the muscle-bound, aesthetically spectacular body and the lithe, kinesthetically spectacular body. Additionally, this study argues that filmic spectacle (as experienced by viewers) is actually made up of two discrete dimensions, a physical dimension composed of massive scale and explosions and a physiological one composed of affect and emotion. Unpacking spectacle in this way ultimately produces a number of new tools for film scholars while reimagining, in a significant way, American culture in the 1980s, the action-adventure movies of the decade, and the greater cultural currents in the Reagan era.
I would like to dedicate this dissertation and all the time, effort, and tears that went into its creation to my best friend, my partner in life, and my wife, Mariah Postlewait. Her unconditional love, unyielding support, incomparable intelligence, and endless supply of empathy, encouragement, and belief in me not only got me through this challenge but also made me a better scholar, thinker, and person. Mariah is my greatest role model and the love of my life.

Mariah, I am proud of you and all of your incredible accomplishments. You got this.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I want to thank my mom and dad, Charlotte Wagenheim, GNP, and George Wagenheim, PhD. They have always believed in the freedom and opportunity that comes with education; now I understand why. I want to thank my advisor, Theodore Franks Rippey, PhD, for his continued support throughout this process. I want to thank Sarah Selden for her meticulous proofreading and unparalleled commitment to my manuscript. And finally, a big thanks to Matthew Wagenheim MBA, PhD, Jacki, Gabe, Ben, Cyrus, Charlotte, Michaela, and Magnus Tinti, Brian and Gina McGarey, Ryan Meehan, Carolyn Kylstra, Debbie Ribera, PhD, Norma Jones, PhD, Grant and Earleen Postlewait, and Alaina Tackitt for their deep well of understanding, their continued support, their guidance, and their love.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: THE INTEGRAL ROLE THE MALE BODY HAS ON THE PRODUCTION OF SPECTACLE IN ACTION-ADVENTURE MOVIES FROM THE 1980S............................................................................................................................. 1

Introducing Spectacle............................................................................................................. 3

Spectacular Bodies and the Action-Adventure Genre .......................................................... 4

The Rise of the Action-Adventure Blockbuster, the Male Action Hero, and the Two Kinds of Body Spectacle................................................................................................................ 8

What This Study Is and Is Not.............................................................................................. 12

Conclusion ............................................................................................................................ 15

Notes .................................................................................................................................... 17

CHAPTER 1: REFINING THE DEFINITION OF SPECTACLE BY DIVIDING IT INTO TWO DISTINCTIVE, BUT INTERRELATED, COMPONENTS................................................. 19

The Creation of Spectacle Through Cinematographic Methods......................................... 20

The Ontology of Technologically Driven Spectacle .............................................................. 21

Scope as Both a Physical and a Psychological Phenomenon .............................................. 23

Cinematic Technology as Competition: Continually Increasing Excess........................... 25

Cinematography and Editing: An Integral Component of Technologically Driven Spectacle .................................................................................................................. 29

Deemphasizing Narrative to Highlight Technologically Driven Spectacle ....................... 35

Affect: Experiencing Spectacle Through Preconscious, Physiological Events................. 41

Affect, Spectacle, and Movies as Sources of Experience....................................................... 47
Conclusion.......................................................................................................................... 51

Notes ....................................................................................................................................... 54

CHAPTER 2: AESTHETIC BODIES, KINESTHETIC BODIES, AND THEIR ABILITY TO ALTER AND AUGMENT THE TECHNOLOGICALLY DRIVEN COMPONENT OF SPECTACLE .......................................................................................................................... 59

Academia, Scholarship, and the Cultural Role of Male Action Stars of the 1980s... 61

How the Kinesthetic Body Creates and Contributes to Spectacle ......................... 71

How Kinesthetically Spectacular and Aesthetically Spectacular Bodies Alter and Augment Cinematic Scope ................................................................. 72

The Original Star Wars Trilogy and Scope................................................................. 76

How Kinesthetically Spectacular and Aesthetically Spectacular Bodies Alter and Augment Framing and Editing .............................................................. 84

How the Kinesthetically Spectacular Body Is Framed, Filmed, and Edited in the Original Star Wars Trilogy ................................................................. 88

Dutch Angles and Opposite Movement .................................................................. 96

How Dutch Angles and Opposite Movement Highlight the Kinesthetically Spectacular Bodies in the Original Star Wars Trilogy .......................... 101

Shot-Reverse Shot Action Sequences and the Afterimage .................................. 105

How Kinesthetically Spectacular and Aesthetically Spectacular Bodies Alter and Augment Cinematic Inserts ................................................................. 108

How Kinesthetically Spectacular and Aesthetically Spectacular Bodies Alter and Augment Dialogue ................................................................................. 111
Race, Politics, and *Beverly Hills Cop* ........................................................................ 247

Conclusion.................................................................................................................. 254

Notes ................................................................................................................................ 258

BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................................................................................... 261
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Batman on the left, thug on the right, grappling hook in the middle, <em>Batman</em> (1989)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Schwarzenegger’s back muscles, <em>Predator</em> (1987)</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Skywalker—near the bottom right—is a speck on an icy landscape, <em>Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back</em> (1980)</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Skywalker is a blur as he jumps out of Vader’s carbonite trap, <em>Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back</em> (1980)</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Skywalker leaps through the air, <em>Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi</em> (1983)</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The swinging scene in <em>Star Wars</em> (1977)</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Rocky’s abs, <em>Rocky II</em> (1979)</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Worms-eye view enlarges the protagonist, <em>Predator</em> (1987)</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Skywalker runs alongside the AT-AT, <em>Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back</em> (1980)</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Skywalker grapples the AT-AT, <em>Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back</em> (1980)</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Skywalker hangs from the AT-AT, *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) ................................................................. 91

Promotional image of Harrison Ford as Han Solo from the original run of *Star Wars* (1977) ........................................................................................................ 92

Promotional image of Clint Eastwood as Dirty Harry, *Magnum Force* (1973) ....... 93

Body sizes are reversed in movies that highlight aesthetically spectacular bodies, *Commando* (1985) ..................................................................................................... 94


Positioning of elements in the scene suggests a Dutch angle, *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* (1980)................................................................. 103

The collection of angles in this scene connotes a Dutch angle, *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* (1980)................................................................. 104

Google Image search for “movie rain kiss” .................................................................... 132

A Google Image search for “funeral in a movie” ........................................................ 134

An advertisement for *Olympus Has Fallen* (2013) ..................................................... 136

Indiana Jones and other workers dig in the earth with their hands, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) ........................................................................................................ 148

A partial dissolve of Paramount Pictures’s production logo ...................................... 150
30 Initial establishing shot awash in reddish-brown, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989) ................................................. 151

31 Riders on brown horses, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989) ................ 151

32 Even the plants in the foreground are tan, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) .......... 153


34 The sand kicks up, washing everything in shades of tan, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) .......................................................... 154


37 Mos Eisley spaceport, *Star Wars* (1977) .............................................................. 161

38 The cantina band, *Star Wars* (1977) ................................................................... 161

39 Brown and tans abound, *Star Wars* (1977) ......................................................... 162

40 Schwarzenegger’s Matrix is surrounded by boundless, green adventure, *Commando* (1985) ................................................................. 165

41 Gray tones, *Rocky IV* (1985) ............................................................................. 167

42 They are all in love with Dr. Jones, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) .................. 173

43 They are really in love with Dr. Jones, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) .............. 174

44 Rambo strikes a pose despite being tortured, *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985) .... 177

45 One of Stallone’s many muscle-display performances, *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985) ............................................................. 178

47 An elongated muscle group, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984).......... 181
48 Jones appears to fly through the air, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989).... 182
49 Schwarzenegger’s Dutch starts to get undressed, *Predator* (1987)..................... 184
50 Schwarzenegger’s Dutch is topless for his final battle, *Predator* (1987)............... 185
51 An excessive display, *Predator* (1987).................................................................. 186
53 It’s all about Conan, *Conan the Barbarian* (1982)................................................. 189
54 It’s still all about Conan, *Conan the Barbarian* (1982)............................................. 189
55 Jones dives away from the boulder at the top of the screen a third of the way from the left, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981)............................................................... 192
56 Schwarzenegger’s Matrix stalks his prey, *Commando* (1985)............................ 194
57 Dutch singlehandedly pulls down a tree, *Predator* (1987).................................. 199
58 Feeling safe with Carl Weathers’s massive physique, *Predator* (1987).............. 199
59 A straight shot, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981).................................................... 200
60 Rambo holds his weapon close on the box art for *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985) ............................................................................................................................ 200
61 Curling up to get away, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981)........................................ 201
62 Schwarzenegger’s massive forearm drives a sword through Jones’s neck, *Conan the Barbarian* (1982)................................................................................................. 203
63 Charting a course, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981)............................................... 206
64 Blinking lights and maps, *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985)............................ 207
66  Jones is nervous, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989).......................... 215
67  Jones cures his father, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989)................. 215
68  Jones is figuring things out, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989)......... 216
69  Coming to terms with losing the grail, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989) .......................................................... 216
INTRODUCTION: THE INTEGRAL ROLE THE MALE BODY HAS ON THE PRODUCTION OF SPECTACLE IN ACTION-ADVENTURE MOVIES FROM THE 1980S

Film studies as a discipline has been historically concerned with artistic value, auteurs, and film, not movies. As such, the American action film has been an ancillary concern within the discipline; it receives less attention due to its widely accepted status as a low-brow vehicle with little substance, meant to turn profits and subdue the masses with half-dressed ingénues and massive explosions. However, the mere fact that an industry can mobilize such an effort on a large scale and create massive entertainment products that attract millions of viewers is worthy of attention. Additionally, when one considers that action blockbusters are often thinly veiled reflections of the politics, people, and culture of the time and place in which they are produced and viewed en masse, “extreme blanket dismissals” of the genre as a whole are ill-advised.

At any rate, there are scholars who have heeded such warnings, examining the most popular films of a given era—one of the more revisited movie topics for these scholars are action films in the 1980s. This subset of scholarly projects is particularly interesting, because scholars have all drawn similar, concrete, and overwhelmingly pessimistic conclusions—most notably, the supposition that a resurgent conservative agenda marshaled by Ronald Reagan manifested itself in hypermasculine, heavily muscled actors rising to the box-office fore. While my scholarship is indebted to these previous treatises on the action-adventure films in the 1980s, my own examination of the decade and its films challenges a number of these suppositions, primarily the almost unlimited influence on culture attributed to Reagan and the dominant cultural status applied to Schwarzenegger and Stallone, in particular. That isn’t to say I disagree with all of the scholarship; in some ways, this project reaffirms various, established conclusions. In fact, my reexamination of the 1980s, its films, and the established scholarly conclusions
emerge out of a preliminary agreement—that male bodies in the most popular action-adventure films in the 1980s are of particular import to the genre and the decade in question. The male body in the most popular action-adventure films from the 1980s is ultimately a lynchpin for a number of cinematic devices, both technical and emotional. The male body is not only a integral part of movie spectacle, it is object around which the films themselves shift in accordance to them—a way a movie is created and produced shifts as does the way in which a film is politically and culturally coded.

Regardless of the conclusions one draws, when looking at action-adventure movies through the lens of genre, it is a fascinating cultural artifact—discernible patterns of motif and meaning emerge from the text, just as they do in other filmic genres. These patterns—which not only are contained within the films themselves but also emerge as industrial, marketing, and viewing practices as well—point to complex, multifaceted cultural products that cannot simply be disregarded as devoid of meaning or cultural significance. Instead, the most popular action-adventure films in the 1980s are nuanced reflections of the complex sociocultural currents that dominated the decade. Ultimately, there is more to action-adventure films in the 1980s than the totalizing narrative presented by prior scholarship would lead us all to believe.

This study ultimately opens up our understanding of the male body’s role in the action-adventure genre and its impact on cinematography, editing, and affect. Additionally, a whole host of evidence about culture and society in the 1980s can be mined by simply recognizing the male body as a critical component of filmic spectacle. And even more can be gleaned by applying a body analysis (like the one that will be outlined in this study) to the films of a given era—this study has created a new analytical lens centered around affect, spectacle, and the on-screen male body and it can be used to further explore and examine American culture, American
politics, popular American films, and the relationship between them. And while this lens is applicable to the 1980s (as will be applied and evidenced), it could be used throughout academia as a way to ascertain a more nuanced understanding of a film, an American era, or some combination therein.

**Introducing Spectacle**

In film scholarship, there is this idea that the success and popularity of the medium has something to do with spectacle. In the context of film, spectacle is about the immense physical and psychological dimensions of a production; the word *bigness* is often the go-to descriptor for the concept. While the actual size of the sets, the number of extras, the size of the screen, and wide, sweeping cinematography factor into this idea of bigness, exotic locations (both imaginary and real), narrative arcs, costuming, props, special effects, the film’s budget, and scoring are also seen as contributing to a film’s massive scale. As consumers, we not only recognize spectacle with our eyes, we recognize it with our minds and bodies (goose bumps, quickened heart rate, spine-tingling, and other things); defined in terms of “extra dimensions,” “bigness,” and “excess,” spectacle is not merely a measure of size, but a feeling of weight and sensory overload. In fact, some scholars think that it is these metaphysical attributes (in essence, a film’s ability to engulf its viewers psychically), not the physical attributes of spectacle, that drive financial success. Simply put, anything that adds to a movie’s sense of scale, scope, or immensity is considered a component of spectacle. All movies contain a modicum of spectacle, but popular action-adventure films are particularly rife with it—consider the biblical epics of the 1920s; the wide-screen, Technicolor Westerns of the 1950s; the blockbusters of the 1970s and 1980s; and the disaster films resurging in the twenty-first century such as *San Andreas* (2015), *Battle Los Angeles* (2011), *The Road* (2010), and *The Book of Eli* (2009). So, “while it cannot
therefore be said to be the sole preserve of blockbusters, the perception that ‘big’ films offer a version of outsize or extraordinary spectacle underlines many attempts to differentiate and so specify the blockbuster experience.6

Spectacular Bodies and the Action-Adventure Genre

The action-adventure film falls into what scholars call the genre movie category, described as a collection of “commercial feature films, which, through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations.”7 Consequently, the action-adventure genre is one of the (if not the) most popular American film genres among both audiences and producers because the familiarity of the product makes it a known entity for viewers and an often-reliable financial investment for investors. It should come as no surprise that retailers, restaurateurs, and advertisers constantly exploit the human desire for familiarity—every McDonald’s around the globe serves, more or less, the same food in the same packaging for a reason: human beings like familiarity and consistency.8 The films that the major Hollywood studios produce year in and year out are no exception; the “repetition of certain visual patterns in genre movies allows audiences to know immediately what to expect of them by their physical attributes, their dress and deportment.”9 As a result, those who are involved in the creation of action-adventure films employ familiar repetition as an attempt, in the midst of a complex matrix of culture, economy, politics, and competing industries, to hedge bets just enough to be successful.

What makes up the action-adventure genre? We know it when we encounter it, but what exactly is it? The genre is not clearly delineated and can often be amorphous in its understanding (as is true with genre as a whole), but it does have unifying characteristics—justified, spectacular violence and hurried pacing among them. In and of itself, violence is not the defining marker of
the action-adventure genre; action films always have violence, but not all films with violence are action films. However, the action-adventure genre often employs violence that is enacted by the protagonist for seemingly justified reasons; the hero is driven to violence as a means to an altruistic end. And while the hero may truly be altruistic, they can also be anti-heroes that cut across the social grain; Sylvester Stallone’s Rambo is emblematic of the anti-hero. Additionally, the action-adventure genre often employs an onslaught of violence—body counts are often high and the speeds at which violent plots unfold and scenes play out are rapid.

The action-adventure genre often employs a violence that is over the top, spectacular, and aesthetically garish—death is dealt in a variety of improbable, often impossible ways: “The main archetype of the action film, then, is violence itself, and its rendering in the most creative, original, funny, or colorful ways possible is the genre’s major ambition.”10 However, in action-adventure films, the violence has to be justified—this is what separates action-adventure from horror; the doer of violence in horror is the villain, not the hero. For example, The Evil Dead (1981) and Evil Dead II (1987) are considered horror while Army of Darkness (1992) could be considered action because the hero, Ash (Bruce Campbell), is the one dishing out the violence from beginning to end. Likewise, a combination of justified violence and pacing, in addition to the role of narrative, separates action from violent drama. Fargo (1996) for example, has violence, but it is often grim, not spectacular, or it’s criminal. Additionally, the plot in Fargo fundamentally drives the violence in Fargo; the plot in Fargo is not driven by the violence. And finally, the action-adventure’s inclusion of, and dependence on, spectacle is one of its most obvious defining markers. While the horror film often employs spectacle, it does not employ it to the degree that the action-adventure films does—generally speaking, the action-adventure genre simply has more explosions, bigger sets, more exotic locations, and a more frenetic pace.
While this idea of spectacle (and its unique connection to popular film) has always resonated with me, personally—everything about the history of popular cinema seems to make sense through this lens—I often wondered why bodies were never considered specific, contributing components. Is Arnold Schwarzenegger’s massive, spectacular physique not contributing to the sense of scale, adventure, and exoticism in Predator (1987)? Are Jackie Chan’s spectacular flexibility and death-defying stunts not contributing to a sense of awe in Rumble in the Bronx (1995) or the immensely successful Rush Hour (1998)? Action stars and blockbuster staples like Schwarzenegger, Stallone, Bruce Willis, Chan, Jean-Claude Van Damme, Jet Li, and more recently, Chris Hemsworth, Chris Evans, Tony Jaa, and Hugh Jackman have been recruited, marketed, and watched for their bodies. Schwarzenegger’s dialogue was dubbed over during editing for his first feature film, Hercules in New York (1970), and even portions of Schwarzenegger’s performance in Conan the Barbarian (1982)—the film that legitimately launched his acting career—were dubbed. It was Schwarzenegger’s body that was important to filmmakers, not his voice.

Similarities abound in the decades since Schwarzenegger’s peak; much has been made of Christian Bale’s body transformation between the The Machinist (2004)—he shed almost 70 pounds and most of his muscle mass—and Batman Begins (2005) when Bale topped out at a muscular 190 pounds. Bale did it again between Rescue Dawn (2006), The Dark Knight (2008), and The Fighter (2010) when he dropped down to 135 pounds, bulked back up to 190 pounds, and then went back down again to 145 pounds. Similarly, there was the buzz actor Chris Pratt generated when he was cast as Star-Lord in Guardians of the Galaxy (2014). Pratt, known for playing the overweight funnyman Andy Dwyer on the television show Parks and Recreation (2009), immediately began working out after he was cast and was posting pictures of his
impressive progress to social media soon after. It wasn’t long before major news and entertainment outlets began covering his transformation and reaching out to Pratt for comment.¹³

Body transformation has been, and continues to be, a component of the cinematic experience. In some cases, it’s a part of the narrative; Linda Hamilton in *Terminator 2* (1991), for example, leans out and tones up as an integral part of the story. All matter of physical change can and does occur inside and outside the frame of a film, but this study is focusing specifically on aesthetically spectacular and kinesthetically spectacular bodies.

Pratt’s story is a consummate example of the role the human form has in the construction and maintenance of filmic spectacle. Inside the film and outside the film, the human body is integral to our conception of spectacle. It often seems as though the body transformation that takes places outside of the film takes precedence over the film itself. Gunnar Peterson, a personal trainer responsible for the physiques of innumerable action stars, including Stallone and Willis, says of the contemporary fixation on spectacular male bodies: “Now we expect actors who aren’t action stars to transform themselves and we expect them to be big and powerful and commanding.”¹⁴ For filmmakers and audiences, spectacular bodies—particularly spectacular male bodies as protagonists—have been and continue to be a vital aspect of the action-adventure genre.

But what is spectacle? How can it be defined? And how does it correlate to the male body on-screen in action-adventure films? This project ultimately argues that spectacle, as it manifests in the American action-adventure film, extends to the male body (or bodies) on-screen. Similar to the expansive scope of the action blockbuster, the exotic sets in faraway lands, or the immersive special effects, there is, more often than not, a masculine body on-screen that is
spectacular in nature—making spectacular male bodies a discernible characteristic in the action-adventure genre.

**The Rise of the Action-Adventure Blockbuster, the Male Action Hero, and the Two Kinds of Body Spectacle**

The way in which spectacular bodies on film have been framed and encoded, and the sociocultural environment in which they have manifested, have shifted and morphed from one decade (give or take a few years on either end) to the next. Even a cursory glance at action-adventure films, categorized by decade, reveals dynamic changes. Between 1981 and 1991, action blockbusters with noticeably spectacular bodies appeared in the top ten highest-grossing films of the year eight out of ten times—1984 and 1987 are the only exceptions. From 1981 to 1991 thirty-one action films featuring a spectacular body or bodies were among the top thirty highest grossing films per year. The success of the action-adventure genre in the 1980s is even more impressive considering twenty-one of those thirty-one films were released with an R rating. Of all the available decades to study, the 1980s has inspired the most scholarship concerning bodies, spectacle, and the action film—a combination of monumental cultural shifts in the United States, Ronald Reagan’s two-term presidency, and an evolving film industry created a highly dense, ultimately complex decade of movies that remain ripe for investigation. As a result, this scholarship (and my interpretation of the results) in addition to a thorough definition of spectacle, is a main focus of the first chapter.

Among the preeminent works discussed in the first chapter are Mark Gallagher's *Action Figures: Men, Action Films, and Contemporary Adventure Narratives*; a collected volume of essays entitled *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in the Hollywood Cinema*; and Yvonne Tasker’s *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema*. However, most
seminal to this study, and the impetus for this project’s exploration of the spectacular body in action films during the 1980s and beyond, is Susan Jeffords’s article “Can Masculinity Be Terminated?” and her seminal work *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*. Jeffords’s work explores the blockbuster action films of the 1980s—and, in particular, the bodies that populate them—as a manifestation of a wider resurgence of conservative masculinity embodied by the Reagan administration and its foreign and domestic policies. In some ways, the findings in this study reaffirm Jeffords’s conclusions about action-adventure films and male physiques in the 1980s. In other ways, this study recontextualizes Jeffords’s image of the 1980s with more nuance. Where Jeffords sees the 1980s as irretrievably, conservatively one-dimensional, I see a more complex political landscape. Where Jeffords see the action-adventure films of the decade as little more than cultural support for regressive political policy, I see a more complex and less-than-regressive filmic genre. And where Jeffords frames the male body in the most popular action-adventure films from the 1980s as a singularly masculine, monolithic cultural force, I again, frame the body as significantly more nuanced and complex. And while Jeffords’s image of the 1980s, the male body, and the action-adventure genre is in some ways corroborated within this study, I ultimately reframe the 1980s—and the popular bodies and films that were prominent—with significantly more nuance. I take Jeffords’s work and expand it in new, unique directions.

The first chapter also explores the concept of spectacle in depth and ultimately offers a redefinition that incorporates a number of different theories, author interpretations, and disciplinary perspectives. Additionally, the first chapter introduces the idea that the spectacular body on film in the most popular action-adventure films of the 1980s consists of two uniquely identifiable types—the aesthetically spectacular body and the kinesthetically spectacular body.
Simply put, male bodies on-screen in the most popular action-adventure films of the 1980s were contributing to the spectacle of their respective films, or were spectacular themselves, either as a result of their massive physiques or their ability to move through space. For example, Schwarzenegger’s body was spectacular as it was dimensionally enormous, whereas Mel Gibson’s or Michael Keaton’s bodies were spectacular as they were quick, agile, and athletically capable. As a way to clearly delineate these two common types, I refer to them as aesthetically spectacular (Schwarzenegger, Stallone, Dolph Lundgren, Lou Ferrigno) or kinesthetically spectacular (Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford, Gibson, Keaton, Eddie Murphy). Additionally, these divergent body types were filmed using two different sets of cinematographic techniques.

The second chapter introduces the idea that spectacle is actually comprised of two constituent parts—a technical aspect and an affective aspect. However, the bulk of the second chapter addresses the technical aspect of spectacle and how the male body augments and shapes the way in which a film is shot, edited, written, and otherwise created. Big sets, giant explosions, sweeping landscapes, and multitudes of extras; the technical aspects of spectacle that can be measured are explored by a number of different scholars writing standalone texts or articles appearing in edited collections and will form the base of the chapter’s analysis. In addition to exploring and redefining technical spectacle, the second chapter also identifies the ways in which the two different kinds of male bodies featured in the most popular action-adventure films in the 1980s (aesthetically and kinesthetically spectacular bodies) uniquely shape it. In short, the second chapter outlines how a film starring an aesthetically spectacular body is aurally and visually different from a film starring a kinesthetically spectacular body. A film like *Batman* (1989) utilizes a number of long shots, which allow Keaton’s character to utilize the entire frame, moving from one edge to the other. This highlights Keaton’s long, nimble physique.
Contrastingly, a film like *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985) employs tighter shots, which accentuate Stallone’s large, shirtless, muscular physique (his muscles literally fill the frame). In effect, the cinematography and editing of top action-adventure films in the 1980s are radically different depending on the type of body being showcased.

The third chapter, in addition to defining affect and affect theory, identifies and explores how the affective dimension of filmic spectacle is uniquely altered by each kind of spectacular body. A relatively new theory that is gaining popularity among cultural scholars, affect theory is applied to investigate the male body’s intimate connection to culture. I explore a number of films with special attention paid to the two types of spectacular bodies and how each body, while seeming to stir audience in similar ways, are actually grounded in significantly different cultural mores. Applying affect theory to spectacular male bodies (and to the most popular action-adventure films in the 1980s in which they appear) reveals a uniquely initiated and informed experience that bifurcates the spectacular male body in ways that at first glance seem singular.

And finally, in the fourth chapter, all of the previous methods and theories outlined, explored, and contextualized in the first three chapters are applied in a short case study. This case study focuses on *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984) and combines affect theory and cinematography (with particular import given to spectacular male bodies) as a way to reexamine and ultimately nuance a given decade. In this case of the 1980s, a number of scholarly works draw similar conclusions, namely that the 1980s was a decade dominated by regressive Reagan-era politics. However, by combining affect theory, cinematography, and the body analysis outlined in this study, a much more nuanced interpretation of the decade (one that was not as regressively anti-feminist or anti-black) can be retrieved. In short, the fourth chapter introduces the following methods, theories, and unique combinations therein, as a new, investigative lens through which the intersection of
male bodies, movies, and culture can be viewed. It is my hope that this new lens can be used by scholars, within film studies and without, to further explore film’s uniquely intimate relationship to culture.

**What This Study Is and Is Not**

The potential scope of a project such as this is massive. As both reflectors and shapers of sociocultural configurations, movies produce an endless amount of cultural comments, questions, and concerns that both scholars and critics explore daily. This litany of concerns taps into issues of race, gender, sexuality, class, history, and politics. The action-adventure genre is especially difficult to grasp in its entirety due to the number of films that have constituted its domestic canon in the past three decades; loosely defined, the action-adventure genre has made up 37 percent of the top 680 annually highest-grossing films in the past thirty-four years. Due to the massive selection of action-adventure films and the innumerable sociocultural avenues one could explore, this project has necessitated the selection of a very specific scope.

At its roots, this project is one that is interested in US culture and as such, it will explore films made by domestic production companies, released in the domestic market, and consumed en masse by domestic audiences. This narrowing omits action-adventure movies produced outside of the United States that were financially successful in the domestic market and domestic products that were successful globally, but failed to gross at home. These omissions are necessary not only in terms of numbers, but also due to the cultural exchanged involved when Japanese, Korean, or even Western European or Canadian films are introduced into the research set—the study of American-produced, American-consumed film has enough cultural exchange and markers of globalism already embedded that to introduce more would expand the project in unmanageable ways. Thus, the focus will be on films produced and released by both the major
and mini-major production companies housed in the United States. The major production companies responsible for the selection of films in this study include Sony Pictures Entertainment and its subsidiaries Columbia Pictures and TriStar Pictures; Warner Bros. Entertainment and its subsidiaries Warner Bros. Pictures, New Line Cinema, and Orion Pictures; The Walt Disney Studios and its subsidiaries Lucasfilm, Marvel Studios, and Touchstone Pictures; and finally, Universal Pictures, Twentieth Century Fox, and Paramount Pictures. The mini-major studios included in this project are Reliance Entertainment’s chief film studio DreamWorks Studios and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer’s studio subsidiaries United Artists and MGM. Combined, these studios are responsible for the 680 annually highest-grossing films between 1980 and 2014. However, Sony Pictures, Warner Bros. Pictures, and Twentieth Century Fox have produced the lion’s share of the action-adventure films within that top 680.

The temporal scope of this project is approximately eleven years: 1980 to 1991. The 1980s were ultimately selected as the project’s focus due to the established literature in cinema studies concerning the intersection of the decade and the rise of the spectacular body as the dominant star in the action-adventure genre. Scholars such as Tasker, Jeffords, and Gallagher have explored this phenomenon from both a cinematic and sociocultural perspective, and their studies are the foundation on which this project has been built. After determining the genre, original source, market, and time period for this project, the scope got narrower. However, it needed to be narrowed further. This was done at the individual film level.

It is important to note that the 680 films to which I have been referring are not the top highest-grossing films of the past thirty-four years in consecutive, domestic-gross, order, but a stratified compilation of the top twenty most financially successful films per year, every year, stretching back to 1980. I compiled the list of 680 films by combining the twenty highest-
growing films—based on annual domestic gross returns, adjusted for inflation, as reported by Box Office Mojo—of each year between 1980 and 2014.\textsuperscript{15} This was done in order to better represent what was \textit{popular} in each year and to avoid a pileup of years where film returns were high.

Once the list of 680 films was compiled, any movie that I considered outside of the action-adventure genre was removed, leaving 252. No single era (1980s, 1990s, and 2000 to 2014) had a significant deviation in the number of action-adventure films represented: the selection of films from the 1980s produced seventy-four action movies (out of 200 compiled), the 1990s produced sixty action films (out of 200 compiled), and the twenty-first century produced 111 (out of 280 compiled). Keep in mind that the twenty-first century was a span of fourteen years, not ten. Although I compiled this list to include the 1990s and the twenty-first century—in order to gain a more complete understanding of the action-adventure genre and its domestic popularity—the 1980s will be the central focus of the study. I believe the 1990s and the twenty-first century are worthy of more thorough examinations; however, I chose to focus on the 1980s as they are a well-established topic of scholarship fraught with misconceptions. In short, the 1980s has the most to gain from more nuanced and careful consideration. Of the seventy-four highest-grossing action-adventure films from the 1980s, nearly half were selected for examination based on their gross return in the year they debuted, their importance to prior scholarship, or their spectacular cast—a number of Westerns, for example, were omitted due to a decided lack of spectacular bodies. As such, the list of films in this study includes \textit{Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi} (1983), \textit{Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back} (1980), \textit{Raiders of the Lost Ark} (1981), \textit{Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom} (1984), \textit{Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade} (1989), \textit{Beverly Hills Cop}, \textit{Predator}, \textit{Commando} (1985), \textit{Total Recall}

Finally, I would like to address, briefly, what falls outside the focus of this study, primarily female bodies. The subject of spectacular female bodies in cinema—and the examinations inherent in such a study, like sexuality in contrast to spectacle, masculine female bodies, and the political ramifications of spectacular female bodies—deserves an entire volume unto itself and this project simply doesn’t have the room to do it justice. Additionally, while race is going to be a factor in the examination of the masculine bodies present in the research set—specifically when looking at *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984)—I am not going to be looking at black bodies in particular, this is simply a reflection of the well-known and often critiqued over-emphasis on white bodies in popular cinema. In short, this dissertation is primarily concerned with the representation of white, male bodies and white, male masculinity during a specified time range—and what that representation means in, and for, American culture.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, I will use the available scholarship concerning the 1980s action-adventure genre, and the spectacular male bodies that populate them, as a foundation—ultimately, this project maps the changes in representation, definition, and popularity of spectacular male bodies in action films. This dissertation investigates the sociocultural configurations behind the spectacular male body in action films and the shifts, both inside and outside film, that occurred in the decade that saw Rocky Balboa, the Terminator, and John McClane at the top of the box-office heap. At the heart of this dissertation’s methodology is interplay—the interplay between
society, culture, race, gender, history, politics, film, genre, bodies, ideology, class, technology, industry, and performativity.

Within this matrix of overlapping nodes of examination, bits of insight are to be found. Interplay is an integral part of the cultural media studies methodology in its current, popular form. Media studies, since it has emerged out of the Birmingham School in the 1960s, has been and continues to be the exploration of the “interplay of representations and ideologies of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality in cultural texts, including media culture.” Within this methodology, “culture must be studied within the social relations and system through which culture is produced and consumed. Thus, this study of culture is intimately bound up with the study of society, politics, and economics.” It is my desire to reach, at least in part, a greater sociocultural understanding of American consciousness through the exploration of top-grossing action-adventure films in the 1980s. This is only accomplished through the examination of the interplay between the diegetic moments on film and the nondiegetic moments that occurred more or less simultaneously within American culture. This method has produced spectacular film scholarship in the past, from Susan Faludi’s chapter on Rambo in *Stiffed* to works already mentioned by Tasker, Jeffords, and Gallagher. This dissertation shifts those examinations to the more nuanced lenses of industry technology and spectacle, but race, class, gender, sexuality, military history, political history, globalism, foreign policy, and performativity are all considered in the examination of the selected films.
Notes


3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.


15. I used Box Office Mojo’s built-in adjustment calculator, which reinterprets box-office returns based on an average ticket price in 2014 set to $8.35.


17. Ibid.
CHAPTER 1: REFINING THE DEFINITION OF SPECTACLE BY DIVIDING IT INTO TWO DISTINCTIVE, BUT INTERRELATED, COMPONENTS

This chapter will explore the concept of spectacle in depth, and ultimately offer a unique filmic definition that incorporates a number of different theories, author interpretations, and disciplinary perspectives, which, in turn, will give theoretical form to the spectacular male body in cinema. This chapter draws upon not only the works of Julian Stringer, Geoff King, Steve Neale, Larry Gross, Tom Gunning, Thomas Schatz, Douglas Gomery, and Joseph Arroyo—all of whom are well known for their scholarship on blockbuster movies, the action-adventure genre, and cinematic spectacle—but also a number of works on affect theory. After careful examination of the scholarship on spectacle, I ultimately separate the idea of spectacle into two constituent parts: a technical dimension and an affective dimension. Specifically, the technical dimension encompasses the measurable components that constitute spectacle, like editing, framing, or formatting. Conversely, the affective dimension represents the more experiential components of spectacle—chiefly, a moviegoer’s preconscious reaction to audiovisual stimuli and the factors shaping that reaction (a detailed analysis of which can be found in chapter 3). We as audiences recognize spectacle, not only with our eyes, but also our bodies and minds. We can feel or sense spectacle. We experience spectacle affectively. Spectacle isn’t simply a measurable or quantifiable entity, but a catalyst for a state of mind and for a visceral reaction.

The works of Stringer, King, Neale, Gross, Gunning, Schatz, Gomery, and Arroyo delineate the technical dimensions of spectacle such as size, scope, and special effects, while special attention will be paid to the exchange between product and reception. Finally, affect theory will be used to highlight the experiential dimensions of spectacle recognized in physiological sensations like tension, a quickened pulse, or a sense of awe. These two halves,
and their respective theories and authors, provide a comprehensive and detailed definition of spectacle that is key to informing this dissertation. This pairing is important because although each component on its own is illustrative, neither one in isolation can accurately represent the whole of the phenomenon. Ultimately, the explication of this bonded pair is an attempt to create a thorough understanding of spectacle within action-adventure films that explains the potency of the phenomenon.

**The Creation of Spectacle Through Cinematographic Methods**

My understanding of the technical aspect of spectacle—big sets, giant explosions, sweeping landscapes, and multitudes of extras (the things that can be measured)—is informed by a number of different cinema scholars. Chief among scholarly texts that treat the technical aspect of spectacle is Julian Stringer’s *Movie Blockbusters*. *Movie Blockbusters* is a collection of essays that span a variety of topics, including industry practices, cinematography, blockbuster auteurs like Steven Spielberg and George Lucas, marketing practices, production motifs, technology, narrative patterns, violence, sexuality, viewership, globalism, and sound design. Interestingly, the first few articles in the collection deal explicitly with spectacle and its role in film. These include Thomas Schatz’s “The New Hollywood”; Steve Neale’s “Hollywood Blockbusters: Historical Dimensions”; Douglas Gomery’s “The Hollywood Blockbuster: Industrial Analysis and Practice”; and Geoff King’s “Spectacle, Narrative and the Spectacular Hollywood Blockbuster.” Chapter 2 will also explore—in depth—the spectacular body’s connection to the technical dimension of filmic spectacle.

King’s article within the volume, “Spectacle, Narrative, and the Spectacular Hollywood Blockbuster,” and Stringer’s introduction to the volume are of particular interest. Similarly, in a melding of Stringer’s *Movie Blockbusters* and King’s *Spectacular Narrative: Hollywood in the*
Age of the Blockbuster, Arroyo’s Action/Spectacle Cinema is a collection of essays from the Sight and Sound cinema journal that are collected due to their interest in spectacle and the action-adventure genre. Action/Spectacle Cinema explores the relationship and overlap of spectacle and action films. Gross’s “Big and Loud,” Arroyo’s introduction to the volume, and Arroyo’s introduction to the second section entitled “Arnold Schwarzenegger as Spectacle in Action (and some Moore)” are particularly enlightening. Additionally, technical spectacle has a long history, and contemporary action-adventure films belong to a distinct lineage that begins in the 1920s. Schatz, Neale, and Gomery incorporate technical spectacle into their concise accounts of Hollywood’s midcentury shift, a shift in production and marketing emphasis after the breakup of vertical integration in the late 1940s and the emergence of a new kind of industry strategy beginning in the 1950s and culminating in Jaws in 1975. It is to this history that I now, briefly, turn.

The Ontology of Technologically Driven Spectacle

Spectacle, from a technical perspective, started with the invention of film itself—the phenomenon of capturing and then replaying motion was technically spectacular in its own right. There were early stories of audiences running in fear as a locomotive steamed toward the camera. And while these stories were most certainly exaggerated, a grain of truth emerges from the urban legend; the invention of motion capture equipment and the ability to play that motion back was nothing short of spectacular. Early on, motion pictures without sound or story contained enough spectacle to draw crowds into cramped, poorly constructed exhibition houses: “In the earliest years of exhibition the cinema itself was an attraction. Early audiences went to exhibitions to see machines demonstrated (the newest technological wonder, following in the wake of such widely exhibited machines and marvels as X-rays or, earlier, the phonograph),
rather than to view films.” However, the antecedent of action-adventure films and the spectacular nature, technical or otherwise, of the genre begins, in earnest, some forty years after in the 1950s with the epic films (also referred to as colossal films), which were themselves a successor of the silent epics of the 1910s and 1920s.

In the wake of vertical integration’s collapse—when the major studios were legally obligated to divest themselves of either their production, distribution, or exhibition—and faced with the rising popularity of television, film companies in the United States sought a way to return to a level of profitability that they had enjoyed in the 1930s and early 1940s. Hollywood turned toward epic films with big budgets, big screens, big sets, big props, and, they hoped, big returns, and focused on “the production of spectacular qualities, primarily in terms of visual strategies.” These visual strategies included scope, innovative audiovisual technologies, cinematography, and editing. And although technically spectacular, epic films ran the gamut of genres. A number of wildly successful epics of the 1950s were firmly rooted in action-adventure as we know it today. These films included Ben-Hur (1959), Quo Vadis (1951), The Robe (1953), The Bridge on the River Kwai (1957), and Hercules (1958). However, like the silent epics of the 1920s, the big-budget colossal of the 1950s were predominantly historical, mythic, or, more often than not, biblical in nature. It wouldn’t be until the 1960s that big-budget epics started to, more strikingly, resemble what we now traditionally recognize as action-adventure films. In the 1960s, Ben-Hur and Hercules gave way to Dr. No (1962), The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly (1966), Goldfinger (1964), Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (1969), and Thunderball (1965), all of which were among the highest-grossing films of the decade. Most importantly, though, these early action-adventure films of both the 1950s and the 1960s were borne out of a specific marketing strategy that was meant to lure consumers into the theater with entertainment they
couldn’t find elsewhere. The strategy was highly dependent on new technological innovations and new filmmaking techniques developed for the sole purpose of delivering a more spectacular experience to a dwindling consumer base who was getting more comfortable with sitting at home in front of the television. Chief among these innovations was anamorphic wide-screen and an ever-expanding sense of cinematic scope.

**Scope as Both a Physical and a Psychological Phenomenon**

Technical spectacle is, at least in part, a matter of scope. Scope as pertaining to spectacular film is often referred to as “bigness” and often alludes to a sense of size, ambition, and numbers: the quantity of extras, the cost of production, the dimensions of sets and props. In short, scope is a dramatic sense of filmic capture that aims to contain as much as it can—whether that be people, places, or things—and then, in turn, display it on a single screen. Massive scope—a staple of action-adventure cinema—is a matter of getting lost or swallowed up in the film, a trait that sets the genre apart from dramas and comedies which tend to create an intimate, interactive experience. The technical manifestation of this process is called anamorphic wide-screen.

Developed and implemented in the 1950s, anamorphic wide-screen (popularly known as CinemaScope WarnerScope, Naturama, or Panavision), was a filming and projection technique that utilized an anamorphic, or ovoid-shaped, lens to create an aspect ratio that was significantly wider than it was tall—the contemporary cinematic standard is 2.39:1. CinemaScope was lauded by its creator, Twentieth Century Fox, in the early 1950s: “Now, through its panoramic range and sweep and the intensity of its dramatic impact that makes the audience participants in the action without the use of glasses, the motion picture truly has come alive.” Whether it was the technology itself, or the promotional blitz that touted it, CinemaScope was a resounding success.
Fox was emphasizing what television could not: “Visually, the emphasis was put again, on sheer scale of imagery: the width of the screen and the vast panoramas it could encompass.”

Fox was selling a massive scope and audiences were buying.

To this day, panoramic filmmaking is ubiquitous within the Cineplex—and at home thanks to the advent of high definition wide-screen televisions. The introduction of the wide-screen television could explain Hollywood’s resurgent success in the past decade or two, because while “the large vistas of spectacular attraction are designed to work at their best on the big screen,” the “bulk of revenues are currently earned through viewings on the small screen, via videotape/disc or broadcast television of one variety or another.”

King’s emphasis on the phrase “small screen” is telling, because although that was the name given to televisions in comparison to theater screens, modern television-screens are anything but small. Ultimately, the increasing width and general size (due to light construction) of television sets is possibly responsible for the enormous success of Hollywood in the home market. Simply put, spectacle drives sales and spectacle is better accommodated on a wide-screen, large format. And although Fox was knee-deep in its own marketing schlock, it struck a chord of truth when it said that its CinemaScope would make audiences a part of the film.

Immersion, or total audience involvement, is dependent on audiovisual technologies. In a work entitled Effects of Field of View and Stereo Graphics on Memory in Immersive Command and Control, Kurt Chris Dohse explains that “a system that has a small field of view, low screen resolution, poor sound quality, and an obtrusive style of control has a much lower level of immersion that a system with a large field of view, high quality visual and auditory output and more natural modes of interaction.”

Simply put, film technology is more immersive as the field of view, or the width of seeable data, is increased. And since anamorphic wide-screen allows for
the viewing of more data at a time than our own eyes can perceive naturally, it is a technology that provides spectacle through an increased sense of visual scope, visual bigness, and visual excess. It is this conception of immersion that has led to “the trend of the American motion picture industry toward the ‘wide screen’—a technical development which has been promoted as a means for the ‘engulfment’ of the audience, greater ‘spectator participation,’ and a heightened sense of ‘realism.’” This is true for both the colossals of the 1950s—when the previous quote was written—and the action films of today. For instance, during the chariot race in Ben-Hur, there were several long and medium shots that took advantage of the wide aspect ratio; at several points in the race the audience sees, in dramatic detail, eight, ten, sometimes twelve horses abreast while throngs of spectators cheer. Likewise, in Gladiator (2000), long and medium shots are used to capture multiple levels of the digitally recreated Roman Coliseum, almost half of the battle pit, several soldiers, several tigers, thousands of screaming spectators, and two gladiators in a single shot, all while the action of the battle scenes is still clearly recognizable. The invention and utilization of anamorphic wide-screen is the basis for the elevation of spectacle, but what is contained within the expansive screen ratio is equally important to the spectacular nature of action-adventure films. A film’s special effects, its sound effects, and the concept of filmic excess all contribute to spectacle’s creation.

**Cinematic Technology as Competition: Continually Increasing Excess**

Spectacle is not a static phenomenon; it is an ever-shifting process of innovation and audiovisual excess. Stringer’s introduction to Movie Blockbusters describes spectacle in terms of “outsized,” “volume,” and “scale.” Stringer, however, is adamant that size and scope, alone, are not responsible for spectacle—some form of audiovisual competition also drives spectacle. He writes the following:
The promise of ever-increasing levels of audiovisual intemperance lies at the heart of the commercial film industry’s ability to rejuvenate itself. To take just one familiar example, James Bond movies are consumed around the world on the basis of their lavish scale. Yet they also sell millions of tickets through the expectation that any new title in the series will go the rest one better—that the latest Bond will outstrip the spectacular achievements of the series’ already highly extravagant past.

Stringer’s use of the word intemperance—a quality of being unbound or without restraint—is telling; spectacle is large and expansive, yes, but it is also defined by being more than what predated the now, audiovisually speaking. Nowhere is this concept more apparent in the contemporary moment than in the *Transformers* franchise (2007, 2009, 2011, 2014); each subsequent film is faster, more dramatic, more spectacular, with more explosions, cars, robots, gunfire, and flying debris than the last. Director Michael Bay—known for the ever-increasing excess of spectacle present in his films—has upped the ante, so to speak, in each on-film iteration of the toy line. Spectacle is not just a wide-screen with stunning special effects; it is a wide-screen with considerably more stunning special effects that are more special than what was seen in the last movie with stunning special effects. What was considered spectacular in the 1950s has long been labeled unspectacular today thanks to this concept of competitive audiovisual excess.

Historically, the major, and sometimes minor, film production companies in the United States have engaged in a behavior of competitive excess, primarily in terms of production budgets, technology, special effects, casting, and narrative. The current strategy at Disney’s Marvel Studios of jamming as many superheroes onto the screen at once—as seen in *The
Avengers (2012)—has persuaded DC Entertainment to pursue a similar strategy with Batman vs. Superman: Dawn of Justice (2016) and a forthcoming Justice League (2017) project. However, most salient to the concept of spectacle is the historical and ongoing one-upmanship in regard to audiovisual effects and technological capabilities contained within the wide-screen of action-adventure cinema.

The latest technological innovations are spectacles unto themselves, and studios continue to draw audiences in based on what they are technologically capable of. Not only do film studios want to integrate these innovations into their films to achieve a greater excess of spectacle, they also want to be able to advertise said spectacle. Filmic technologies are often touted as being one of a kind, special, or groundbreaking. Technological spectacle takes the shape of both filming and projection equipment. One such example of this is Avatar (2009), which was enhanced by the use of a proprietary stereoscopic three-dimensional filming technology first designed by director James Cameron in 2003 for a documentary on the Titanic. This unique stereoscopic camera, which mimicked the approximate separation of human eyes, was advertised as “The Fusion Camera System.” It combined two high-definition digital cameras that created what some considered new dimensions in cinematography: “This immersive 3D brings a heightened believability to Avatar’s live-action sequences—gradually bringing viewers deeper into the exotic world of Pandora. In an early scene, Sully looks out the window as he flies over the giant trees and waterfalls of the jungle moon, and the depth afforded by the 3D perspective gives the planet mass and scale, making it as dizzyingly real for viewers as it is for him.” From the patent wars of the early twentieth century to the race for sound, technology has figured heavily into motion picture production; “in each case, there was a keen desire to make a mark, to make the film industry sit up and take notice of the new image and/or sound-producing
technologies.” Cameron’s unique three-dimensional camera is an extension of this history that also magnifies the already large, expansive, weighty scale of a film like *Avatar*.

Historically, the advancement, procurement, and monopoly of new filmic technologies has been a vital strategy in Hollywood and a major selling point for all types of cinema, but especially action-adventure films. No other genre is as reliant on the latest technologies or the most spectacular special effects than the action-adventure genre. Like the midcentury colossals and the silent epics of the early twentieth century from which they came, the contemporary action film relies on a level of technical spectacle not expected of dramas, comedies, or other nonaction genres. In the action-adventure film, technological spectacle particularly manifests as special effects and later as computer-generated imagery, or CGI. Some of the most profitable action films of the past three decades have been lauded for their technical achievements. *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991) was a breakthrough in cinematic CGI and was acclaimed for the liquid metal effect that was fused with a live actor. This fusion was “marketed as the central experiential pull of the film.”12 Similarly, *Jurassic Park* (1993)—the sixteenth highest-grossing film of all time, adjusted for inflation—is considered a watershed moment for CGI in film.13 *Jurassic Park*, by all accounts, “advance[d] the technology to the point where the seam between illusion and reality completely disappeared.”14 George Lucas, a director and filmmaker that pushed the effects envelope himself with the Star Wars franchise, said of *Jurassic Park*: “It was like one of those moments in history, like the invention of the light bulb or the first telephone call. . . . A major gap had been crossed and things were never going to be the same.”15 In fact, some scholars argue that the superhero films popular in the contemporary moment are only possible due to these great leaps forward in CGI.16
Regardless of whether the technology is software like CGI or hardware like stereoscopic three-dimensional filming, the action-adventure genre, above all other genres, is bought and sold on the strength and modernity of its technologies. Summer blockbusters like *Jaws*, *The Avengers*, *Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace* (1999), and *Ghostbusters* (1984), were not consumed en masse on the strength of the narrative or the development of interesting characters, but on the promise of the latest and greatest technological spectacle on display anywhere at that moment in time. However, a flying superhero alone does not guarantee technical filmic spectacle. To achieve the kind of spectacle that the action-adventure genre is known for, a specific kind of filming and editing technique must be used.

**Cinematography and Editing: An Integral Component of Technologically Driven Spectacle**

An expansive scope and the latest innovations in filmmaking are not enough, by themselves, to create the sort of spectacle that drives the action-adventure films of the past three decades. The way those technologies are used and what is presented on that wide-screen is essential to the phenomenon of spectacle. In addition to the technical capabilities of cinema, cinematography (how footage is shot) and editing (how footage is stitched together) are essential processes that bind the other elements of technical spectacle together. The combination of shooting and editing film “generally involves presenting chiefly linear information (the story) through a battery of shots,” and by “using various cinematic configurations, the artist creates expectations in his audience, which thus elaborates on the given information.” Ultimately, “the unique quality of the kinesthetic elements is that they are repeatable configurations with stylistic and narrative functions which every moviegoer learns how to read.” Thus, it is cinematography and editing that lie at the heart of technical spectacle; the other elements, such as the wide-screen format, innovative filming, and projecting hardware, are used to accentuate and magnify what
cinematography and editing can invoke. Spectacle is achieved through accelerated montage editing, unstable camera techniques (also known as shaky cam or handheld shooting), rapid cuts (also known as fast-cutting or rapid editing), and other shooting and editing techniques.

Commonly utilized in contemporary music videos and commercial advertisements, fast-cutting—defined as a series of sequential shots lasting no more than three to five seconds—is used to convey a sense of urgency, energy, and excitement. In combination with expansive, anamorphic, lingering shots of impressive vistas, rapid-fire editing (or fast-cutting) drives modern spectacle. According to King, “A typical strategy today is to combine moments of broader, more expansive spectacle with those of tightly framed explosive-montage-impact effects.” In *The Avengers*, the assembled heroes find themselves in New York City trying to fight off an alien invasion brought forth by a space portal opened by Loki (played by Tom Hiddleston). This prolonged battle scene is extensively shot in a combination of wide views of New York City—both a bird’s-eye view as seen from the other side of the gaping space portal and a worms-eye views as seen from the street—and edited with staccato sequences made up of close and medium shots, no longer than four seconds, depicting the action of the heroes and their various abilities. The wide, bird’s-eye view of the city offers a twofold moment of spectacle: one, it offers a view of the city seldom seen, and two, it shows the impressively large monsters and other enemies, in the foreground and in full profile, invading a familiar and recognizable place. The audience gets a sense of the monsters’ scale through the recognition of the city’s dimensions. The worms-eye view also intimates a sense of scale; everything on-screen in the foreground looks larger, while objects in the background look smaller. In opposition to the bird’s-eye view used in this scene, the worms-eye view sequences make the heroes look large. Additionally, the rapid editing of the heroes’ fighting implies a frenetic pace. The tighter shots
are intimate and contained, framing the city in a familiar, close-up, and recognizable way. The tight, rapid spectacle is familiar and manageable (from a visual perspective), creating a spectacle of virtuous action, while the wide, lingering bird’s-eye view is strange and out of reach and creates a spectacle of scale. Together, these two seemingly divergent techniques create a silent “David and Goliath” narrative that is spectacular in its speed, its affect, and its aesthetic appeal.

While fast-cutting, by definition, is a visual technique that consists of several consecutive shots within a very brief period of time, typically three seconds, hip-hop editing is a method that utilizes the rapid, consecutive editing of both video and audio components to represent character actions in an even more urgent and sped-up way than what is conveyed in fast-cutting. A notable example of this technique is seen in Requiem for a Dream (2000) and more recently Don Jon (2013). Interestingly, both examples represent addiction in some way, as the hip-hop editing method is particularly suited to convey a sense of anxiety. In Requiem for a Dream, the fast-cutting of dilating pupils, close-ups of cocaine on a mirror, and images of blood vessels in a vein combined with the sounds of a sigh, a scraping noise, and a rushing noise, are meant to represent the frenzied need of drug addiction. Similarly, in Don Jon, the fast-cutting of a tightly framed laptop power button, pornography, and a tissue in combination with the sounds of a computer turning on, an orgasm, the closing of a laptop, and the throwing away of the tissue are meant to represents the main character’s addiction to internet pornography. While most action films may not utilize hip-hop editing as it is formally defined, they are edited, both audibly and visually, faster than dramas and comedies and, in a lot of cases, faster than traditional fast-cutting. It is this increased number of shots and cuts that creates a sense of urgency that, in part, drives spectacle.
In addition to fast-cutting, hip-hop montages, and the complementary technique of fusing long shots with rapid editing, other specific techniques like handheld shooting, Dutch angles, opposite movement, and separation shots enhance spectacle. The handheld shooting, or shaky cam, technique, which was used to great effect in *The Evil Dead*, was popularized by director Sam Raimi. This technique not only adds to the frenetic pace of action sequences—think of it like rapid cutting, but for shooting—but also mimics documentary filmmaking. The shaky-cam, which similarly replicates the handheld hardware of the documentary, replicates the genre’s attempt at conveying the authenticity of subject, which in turn promotes immersion. In popular films, particularly in the action and horror genres, this illusion of authenticity encourages a greater emotional or affective investment through a greater connection between the action on-screen and the audience. If it appears authentic (in this case, the authenticity is residual from what audiences know about documentaries), it becomes more immersive. The shaky-cam technique can be seen in *The Bourne Identity* (2002) and its sequels, *The Bourne Supremacy* (2004) and the *Bourne Ultimatum* (2007). In these films, the shaky-cam technique is used primarily in fight scenes to heighten authenticity—fists fly, things are broken, and audiences (thanks to the shaky-cam technique) are there amidst the action, either right behind the person filming or maybe filming it themselves. It almost becomes a suggested point of view. In conjunction with rapid editing, point-of-view shots, and close-ups and extreme close-ups, the shaky-cam technique creates a gritty mise-en-scène that enhances the speed, chaos, and immersion of the action sequences. Similarly, the Dutch angle—popular in action films—also mimics the instability of a handheld camera as an oblique or tilted framing style that creates a sense of distortion or confusion.
Ultimately, the Dutch angle and the shaky cam techniques mimic (or, alternatively, are actually produced by) a handheld camera, or more contemporarily, a smart phone. And while we may not necessarily tilt our heads, as is the marker of a Dutch angle, these techniques—arguably more effective than other filming techniques—position the viewer as an intimate part of the action vis-à-vis the television series *Cops* (1989). Yes, the Dutch angle and the shaky cam have the potential to be visually jarring, but these techniques ultimately entrench the viewer by making the audience become the person behind the camera. Two more theoretical concepts warrant mention here: the theory of opposite movements and the theory of separation afterimage. Both of these theories are presented by Steven Sharff, who was not only a scholar and cinema theorist but also a filmmaker and producer.

Sharff’s theory of opposite movements (or opposite-movements editing) is best illustrated through the example of an on-screen car chase. In *The Elements of Cinema*, Sharff explains that instead of editing a chase scene to depict one car chasing another—both cars entering from screen left and exiting screen right—the two cars should be edited coming into the center of the screen from opposite sides of the frame\(^2\). When this technique is utilized correctly, the tension, tempo, and impact of the scene are more pronounced—it increases spectacle by increasing the imagined stakes. For instance, in the film *Blades of Glory* (2007), Will Arnett’s character chases Will Ferrell’s character, both of whom are on ice skates, through a park and into a shopping mall. When the two characters enter the mall, the filmmakers go to great lengths to make sure that Arnett’s character enters the shot in the exact same place, using the exact same path, as Ferrell’s character. The comedy of the scene is derived from the clumsiness the two characters experience once their skates are rendered useless off the ice, but it is heightened by purposefully ignoring the opposite-movements editing—the tempo of the scene is slowed way down and the chase has
no tension. However, when non-car chases are edited for opposite-movement, the effect is as potent as a car chase. In *Bad Boys* (1995), a foot chase between Will Smith’s character and a gang of bad guys is edited for opposite movement—both left to right alternation and top to bottom alternation. This gives the impression throughout the scene of an impending collision, thus raising the tension and apparent speed of the pursuit.

Lastly, another Sharff construction is the concept of the afterimage. A by-product of the separation or shot-reverse shot, the afterimage creates a phenomenon called apparent time. In separation editing, most commonly used when constructing a conversation between two people, “time is compounded in the sequence of images by the ‘aura’ of that extra afterimage. While watching image A, the viewer is strongly and predictably aware of the presence of image B in recurrent cycles. In short, image A receives a ‘shadow’ of apparent time from the previous shot and, in turn, projects an apparent time on the next image B, and so on.”22 And while this technique can intimate a strong link between characters, its disruption of time is more relevant to spectacle because, as Sharff contends, “more significant” images give the impression of more apparent time.23 For example, in *Commando*, the protagonist John Matrix (played by Arnold Schwarzenegger) gets into a firefight with the chief antagonist Arius (played by Dan Hedaya). The one-minute scene comprises a series of one- to two-second shot-reverse shots. And although both characters actually share the one-minute screen time just about equally, the shirtless Schwarzenegger seems to take up significantly more time because Schwarzenegger’s afterimage is more significant than Hedaya’s. Why is Schwarzenegger’s image more significant than Hedaya’s? It is chiefly due to the difference in the two men’s bodies and clothing; Matrix is camouflaged, bloodied, shirtless, and thickly muscled while Arius is slight, free of blemishes, and entirely clad in beige. Schwarzenegger has a memorable, spectacular aesthetic, and when
paired with a neutrally toned, average counterpart, his afterimage is substantial, thus giving rise to the illusion that he spends more time on-screen than anyone else. The afterimage’s disruption of time leads to greater immersion, such as the experience one might have in a casino with no clocks and no windows. Manipulation of time and the way it enhances immersion are hallmarks of spectacular editing.

**Deemphasisizing Narrative to Highlight Technologically Driven Spectacle**

Finally, the last aspect of technical spectacle has to do with emphasis. In this case, the emphasis is one of visual machinations over narrative structure, or, if you will, aesthetic form over narrative substance. Due in part to the aforementioned technical competition between studios, mainstream filmmaking constantly sacrifices narrative minutiae in favor of bigger explosions, more realistic CGI, and visual spectacle. Couple that with almost a century of teaching moviegoing audiences to elevate visual spectacle above all else, and viewers will find narrative regularly takes a backseat to visual spectacle. It is with this in mind that action-adventure narratives—or any other genre that wishes to achieve a certain level of spectacle—are kept simple.

The expert on cinema that sacrifices narrative content for affective thrill is Tom Gunning, who explores the exhibitionist nature of early film in his seminal 1986 and 1990 articles on what he has termed the cinema of attractions. Gunning argues that early cinema was concerned not with narrative, but with showing the audience something novel. Gunning’s cinema of attractions is a cinema of spectacle: “This is a cinema that displays its visibility, willing to rupture a self-enclosed fictional world for a chance to solicit the attention of the spectator.” Thus, the spectacle that appears in the action-adventure genre is not something new, but something old. And, according to Gunning, spectacle is not only something that predates narrative cinema but
also something that plays to the strength of the medium of film and is in some way more filmic than the narrative form so popular in contemporary cinema.

The cinema of attractions gave way to the more popular narrative cinema form early in the twentieth century, but characteristics of the cinema of attractions have found traction in genres outside of avant-garde filmmaking, a bastion of aesthetic technique that heavily ignores narrative elements. The action-adventure film is one such genre, due to its imbalanced ratio of aesthetic spectacle to narrative development. Gunning even invokes spectacle within his definition of the cinema of attractions, explaining that “cinema of attractions directly solicits spectator attention, inciting visual curiosity, and supplying pleasure through an exciting spectacle—a unique event, whether fictional or documentary, that is of interest in itself.” In other words, the cinema of attractions is a form of cinema in which the aesthetic experience—the images on the screen—is the primary attraction, and those images do not have to form a cohesive, linear, storytelling experience. A number of popular, contemporary films fit this definition; one only has to look at some of the top-grossing films in 2013 like *Gravity*, *Iron Man 3*, *World War Z*, and *Fast & Furious 6* to see the connection. This is not to say that these films don’t have narrative elements—they all certainly tell a story—instead, I am suggesting that these films sacrifice narrative complexity in favor of robust aesthetic spectacle. In contemporary action-adventure films, like the pre-narrative cinema of attractions, “the story simply provides a frame upon which to string a demonstration of the magical possibilities of the cinema.” This is one of the reasons why so many films can be neatly fit into a genre: the narrative is rehashed, reused, and simple. It would be harder to categorize such films on aesthetic spectacle alone as that is the aspect that is in continual flux.
Gross’s “Big and Loud” outlines the characteristics of the action film and the industry practices surrounding their creation, distribution, marketing, and release, and likewise places special emphasis on technical spectacle’s dominance over traditional narrative storytelling. Appropriately, Gross calls the action-adventure genre, “the-movie-as-Theme-Park, the-movie-as-Giant-Comic-Book, the-movie-as-Ride,” which accurately describes an emphasis on affective thrills and visual spectacle. Gross’s definition is more literal than one might expect, because “not only did [early, pre-narrative] films consist of nonnarrative sequences taken from moving vehicles (usually trains), but the theater itself was arranged as a train car with a conductor who took tickets, and sound effects simulating the click-clack of wheels and hiss of air brakes. Such viewing experiences relate more to the attractions of the fairground than to the traditions of the legitimate theater.”

Gross ultimately points to a convergence of technology, special effects, and the reduction of narrative in favor of technical marvels as the defining marker of spectacle within the action-adventure genre.

Specifically, Gross points to four crucial ingredients—designed in his opinion for maximum profits—repackaged by directors George Lucas and Steven Spielberg at the end of the 1970s that gave rise to the action-adventure genre as we know it today. Culminating in Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977) and Star Wars (1977), the ingredients for box-office, action-adventure success, according to Gross, are the “elaborate and expensively produced elevation of B movie genre plots,” a “reduction of narrative complexity,” the domination of image technology over narrative experience, and “self-deprecating humor.”

Although it is not immediately recognizable, the fourth ingredient in Gross’s conception of the “Big Loud Action Movie” is about pacing, spectacle, and immersion and a, “humor that permits you to breathe back away from it.” Humor, Gross contends, temporarily interrupts the staccato rhythm of the
sensory experience associated with spectacle. Gross argues that it is ultimately “the organizing rhythm of all subsequent Big Loud Action Movies.” Tying into both the definition of action films themselves—a definition that hinges upon justifiable, not abhorrent, violence—and spectacle amongst all genres, the self-deprecating humor that Gross points to is predictable, recognizable, and easy to understand; it aligns itself with the second ingredient, the reduction of narrative complexity. Similarly, Gross’s first ingredient, the elevation of B movie genre plots, is also about narrative simplicity, and thus his summation of action-adventure films can be simplified as a convergence of narrative minimalism and the “ability to make the visual sensation answer all questions of meaning and value.” Despite Gross’s disapproving tenor, a tone that permeates his text, he accurately characterizes the action-adventure genre as “food for the eyes.” And though the reduction of narrative complexity may seem separate from the definition of technical spectacle, the one’s reduction ensures the other’s ascension as it serves to emphasize one over the other. By reducing narrative complexity, filmmakers make technical spectacle appear that much more spectacular as there is no competition for the spectators’ attention.

Likewise, Arroyo’s introductions to the two editions of Action/Spectacle Cinema sketch a picture of action-adventure spectacle as a technologically driven vehicle meant to provoke sensations within the audiences that watch them. Arroyo, like Gross, concludes that action-adventure films emphasize the latest effects and the newest sensations while largely ignoring narrative and privileging “an imaginary world over a ‘real’ one, action over characterization, spectacle over depth.” However, Arroyo argues that the use of genre to explore what he calls action/spectacle is increasingly futile due to the fractured nature of genre in contemporary filmmaking: “One can link each film to historical genres: Titanic to the women’s film, melodrama and disaster movies; Men in Black to action/adventure, comedy, and sci-fi; The Lost
World to children’s films, comedy, and horror. Yet it is difficult to detect a shared iconography, style or thematic concern. And while this may be increasingly true, one can look to reduced narrative emphasis with increased technical spectacle—an inverse in the emphasis seen before the late 1970s—as commonly binding action-adventure cinema together. And furthermore, it is the affective results of the new emphasis on technical spectacle and the intertextuality of aesthetic, filmic moments that make action-adventure films a discernible genre. The action-adventure genre seems to be less invested in provoking critical thought in the audience through complex themes that comment on social and cultural configurations, and instead, are focused on making moviegoers feel, through the manipulation of sight and sound; the action-adventure film initiates an affect experience through the use of technical spectacle. Affect, I argue, is the second of the two components that constitute spectacle. (It will be the focus of the next section.) And due to the changing landscape of motion picture production, exhibition, marketing, and horizontal integration, technical spectacle is—and maybe has to be—an intertextual experience, not only referential in regards to society and culture, but also to other genres, films, and mediums. In the time of the sequel, trilogy, series, and franchise, audiences better appreciate spectacle through their knowledge and participation in other manifestations of filmic spectacle; this is akin to Stringer’s notion of the competitive excess seen in the James Bond franchise. This intertextuality is also closely aligned with affect and the involuntary welling-up of feeling associated with its mobilization.

The reduction of narrative is ultimately about letting the audiovisual component of films take precedence over the narrative component. As we can see from Gunning, this was the original configuration of film until roughly 1909, because film—simply the production and exhibition of moving images—was in itself the singular attraction for moviegoers. Thus, not
only is narrative reduction in film a long established practice, it lends itself to the nature of film, namely technical spectacle. And while narrative began to mold the audiovisual shape of popular film, visual-centric films were pushed underground and erroneously labeled avant-garde. However, action-adventure films since the early 1980s owe a great deal to early, pre-narrative cinema as they are technically driven spectacles with little to no narrative complexity.

In summation, the technical aspect of spectacle is four sided: it is visually expansive in size and scope; it relies on a shifting landscape of new, better, bigger audiovisual technologies; it is a product of specific filming and editing techniques that emphasize speed, size and immersion; and it sacrifices narrative complexity in favor of aesthetic phenomena. Through the combination of these elements, immersion is intensified. The moviegoer is more easily engrossed by the immersive experience, which drives spectacle as a whole. Anamorphic wide-screen and expansive vistas help shut out the outside world for the moviegoer as it takes up the whole of his or her field of vision, while cutting-edge cameras, projectors, and audio equipment extend natural senses beyond their limits—the audience can see and hear things through advances in film technology that they otherwise couldn’t see and hear through natural means. Filmmakers further manipulate the conception of time and space through filming and editing techniques that create physical, temporal, and spatial illusions that are felt, not just observed. Through the process of filming and editing, car chases feel faster, fight scenes are more violent, and selected people, places, and things can seem smaller or bigger which, in turn, disrupts the audience’s notion of its own size. In short, technical spectacle creates for the audience an experience that overwhelms them visually and sonically—it immerses them by way of overwhelming their perceptions of space and time. One minute, audiences are entrenched in a fight scene full of Dutch angles and shaky images. The next, they are miles above New York City looking down at
the hustle and bustle. Either way, audiences become immersed in the spectacle.

It is possible, for example, that the film adaptation of the novel *Ender’s Game* may have had too much plot. Considered a middling success—placing fifty-seventh in yearly domestic gross revenue for 2013—*Ender’s Game* was a technical spectacle on par with the likes of *Iron Man 3* and, maybe more appropriately, *Gravity*, yet its gross revenue paled in comparison. However, where *Gravity* dealt with the concept of loneliness, danger, and getting back to earth from space, *Ender’s Game* examined genocide, child labor, the ill effects of the military industrial complex, espionage, subterfuge, morality, and nationalism. It is quite possible that *Ender’s Game* was too narratively complex for audiences to achieve the immersion they felt watching *Gravity*.

Is it that audiences would rather feel than think when they go to the movies? After all, feeling is ultimately what technical spectacle is about; feeling an experience rather than simply being witness to it. The affective nature of spectacle gets closer to answering that particular question.

**Affect: Experiencing Spectacle Through Preconscious, Physiological Events**

In film scholarship, it is commonly accepted that the success of the medium has something to do with spectacle. And in the context of film, spectacle is about the immense physical and metaphysical dimensions of a production; as has been discussed, the word bigness is often the go-to descriptor for the concept. While the actual size of the sets, the number of extras, the size of the screen, and establishing shots factor into this idea of bigness, exotic locations (both imaginary and real), narrative arcs, costuming, props, special effects, the film’s budget, and scoring are also seen as contributing to the immensity of a film. Anything that adds to a movie’s sense of scale, sense of scope, or immense nature is a component of spectacle. If
one takes a moment to consider the Cecil B. DeMille biblical epics of the 1920s, the wide-screen, Technicolor Westerns of the 1950s, the action-adventure blockbusters of the 1970s and 1980s, and the disaster film renaissance that we are in the middle of now (*San Andreas, Guardians of the Galaxy, The Avengers*), one begins to get an idea of what these scholars mean by spectacle.

Spectacle, though, is a combination of technical process and affect. Furthermore, it is the interplay between these two things that really defines spectacle. It is not enough that there is a massive explosion on the screen—that massive explosion has to elicit a reaction of some kind in order to be spectacular.

A relatively new theoretical branch of cultural studies, affect theory has been gaining traction among scholars since the turn of the twenty-first century. This period has been called the affective turn. Among those that have led the affective turn are Brian Massumi, Teresa Brennan, Melissa Gregg, and Gregory Seigworth. What links these scholars is the conviction that the human experience is culturally informed and physiologically, preconsciously rendered onto the individual. It is my position that technical immersion, as was discussed in detail above, is prompting these culturally informed, preconscious affective responses and that this link is a constitutive element of the spectacle seen in action-adventure films. Additionally, it is the aim of this section to link audience experience and affective spectacle in action-adventure films using the analytical vocabulary of affect theory. Since affect theory is comparatively new, a working definition is necessary.

Understood in some interpretations as a physiological reaction to stimuli, that is informed by preconscious cultural knowledge, affect is not simply emotion. Instead, it is a process of reaction that is “social in origin but biological and physical in effect.”

Seigworth and Gregg
define it as “the name we give to those forces—visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension.”38 In other words, affect is, “involuntary or instinctive” and “registered on the body before it can be engaged by the intellect.”39 Affect is experienced, it is a sensation that precedes emotion—however, the time between a preconscious rendering of affect onto the body and the conscious recognition of emotion is so fast that the two may not initially be seen as separate. Additionally, socialization and an understanding of a person’s given cultural informs and shapes the affective response to stimuli. For example, Massumi writes, “An event where threat materializes as a clear and present danger extrudes a surplus-remainder of threat-potential that can contaminate new objects, persons, and contexts through the joint mechanisms of the double conditional and the objective imprecision of the specificity of threat.”40 In other words, Massumi is arguing that rhetoric (a term he uses to mean the media’s symbolic and linguistic contributions to an atmosphere of danger) and lived experience are embedded in the psyche—this socialization informs one’s reaction to stimuli. It’s the reason that basements, attics, or dark houses simply seem scarier after watching a horror movie that features them—one’s mind soaks up the rhetoric that a basement may be holding something dangerous and that informs our reaction to them. Simply put, one’s experiences with the rhetoric and signs of everyday life influence how one reacts physiologically to stimuli—people, places, and events.

For example, part of our socialization as members of a US collective—especially in the wake of 9/11—is a renewed appreciation of patriotism as good, honorable, and unassailable; simply put, we are taught that patriotism is a good thing. As a country, we are socialized to appreciate patriotism by reciting the pledge of allegiance in grade school; by singing and
standing for the national anthem at sporting events; by being exposed to stars, stripes, and bald eagles plastered on advertisement and news outlets; and by being exposed to rhetoric like “support our troops.” As such, whether or not one consciously supports the ideals of nationalism, patriotism and our socially ascribed reactions to it are embedded in our minds and inform our reactions to certain configurations of stimuli. So, while someone may be anti-war and consciously despise the gross abuse of patriotic symbolism all around them, that person may tear up or experience chills when they see the American flag or sing the national anthem on the Fourth of July. Our reactions to stimuli are culturally informed. And while our conscious mind may catch up quickly, we have already experienced something, we have already felt something.

I contend that the affective phenomenon—physiological reactions to stimuli, informed by our collective experience—is integral to movie spectacle. At its core, a movie is a combination of stimuli that aims to communicate something—love, patriotism, revenge. When audiences encounter these combinations, an interpretive process is initiated—the mind interprets the film’s stimuli using a preconscious understanding of one’s culture and society, culminating in an affective response. All of this is seamlessly followed (almost simultaneously) by a conscious, interpretive meaning-making process that culminates in emotion.

The opening scene to *Quantum of Solace* (2008) serves as a potent example of the way an action-adventure movie (and its configuration of stimuli) can initiate an affective response, and how socialization and cultural understanding informs that response. *Quantum of Solace* opens up with a long, forward-moving aerial shot of a sunny, seaside mountain road and slowly zooms in on an aged tunnel built right into the side of a cliff. This is interspersed with tight tracking shots of a speeding, silver sports car, its occupant, and his gun. The entire opening scene is overlain with by a slowly building score that crescendos as it is joined by the sound of performance
engines and gunfire. Without any knowledge of the plot, characters, or genre of the film, viewers will respond to this scene—not only emotionally, but physiologically.41 A combination of audio and visual stimulation initiates a process that culminates in an affective response, but why? The opening scene to Quantum of Solace makes one’s heart race because the cuts come quickly, but also because of the audience’s preconscious understanding of what the scene presents—a viewer’s cultural understanding of masculinity, cars and their respective subculture, guns and violence, architecture, geography, and even traffic laws, and an understanding of automotive manufacturers all factor into the affective response initiated by the movie’s stimuli.

The concept of not being in complete control of one’s emotions is, maybe for some, unsettling. Yet it dovetails with the concept of immersion, a state of being that is (at least in part) a substantial source of pleasure when watching movies and a necessary component of filmic spectacle. Technical immersion, as described above, is the process by which a viewer is engulfed by sensory data. As such, the wide-screen format of popular film dominates a viewer’s field of view, while a loud, multidirectional auditory experience overpowers non-cinematic noise. This immersive experience is not, by itself, capable of spectacle—anyone could stare at a blank chalkboard and listen to white noise at a deafening level, but it wouldn’t be very spectacular. In order to achieve cinematic spectacle, technical immersion and emotional immersion need to work in tandem. And by emotional immersion, I mean a bombardment of stimuli that overwhelms the self and initiates physiological responses—sweaty palms, a quickened pulse, tension that, in turn, culminates in emotional responses. Gregg and Seigworth write, “Indeed, affect is persistent proof of a body’s never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world’s obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations.”42 As one is constantly bombarded with sensory information—sights, sounds, smells—they are constantly interpreting
that stimuli preconsciously through an understanding of culture. It’s not simply the stimuli that creates spectacle, but the reaction to that stimuli—first preconsciously (affect) then consciously (emotion) that combine to create what might be recognized as spectacle.

A reduction in narrative, audiovisual techniques of filming and editing, immersion (both physical and affective), and one’s own culturally informed existence as a whole create an experience that filmmakers, film scholars, and film critics call spectacle. It is important to keep in mind that filmic spectacle is predominantly a bodily experience as opposed to an intellectual one and that the body physiologically experiences the phenomena before the conscious mind is able to react. However, it is designed by the filmmaker to invoke reaction; thus, it is somewhat calculated, rather than spontaneous. And it is action-adventure films and their creators that utilize these calculations most frequently, as evidenced by the genre’s lack of narrative complexity, the immersive film and editing techniques, and the common presence of obvious configurations of stimuli meant to initiate an affective response, like symbols of patriotism, tools of war, good and evil, and acts violence.

While I have tried to separate the technical and affective aspects of spectacle it is, in practice, a entwined phenomenon. For example, in the contemporary action-adventure film *Olympus Has Fallen* (2013), a film that takes many cues from the action-adventure films of the 1980s, a North Korean terrorist organization storms and occupies the White House, then a terrorist lowers the American flag from atop the building and unceremoniously throws it off the roof. This scene is bathed in twilight, the flag is seen falling in slow motion from a worms-eye view, and a somber and dramatic score is played in the background as the men speaking Korean remove the flag and toss it over. The cinematography, editing, blocking, and score—the technical aspects—initiate an affective reaction, while the viewer’s socialization and experience
with the culture they live in (war, patriotism, the American Revolution, “The Star Spangled Banner,” Communism, and geopolitical relations with the Korean peninsula) preconsciously interpret that experience. This chain of events ultimately terminates in emotion, maybe sadness, maybe anger. Regardless, this entire process, while upon close examination is separate, it appears almost simultaneous. It is the stimuli that a film presents that initiates a chain of events that moves from an affective reaction informed by cultural knowledge to an emotional reaction that is the conscious mind’s effort to understand the physiological reaction.

**Affect, Spectacle, and Movies as Sources of Experience**

Finally, I would like to discuss the transmission of affect, a phrase I borrow from Brennan. Brennan writes that “by the transmission of affect, I mean simply that the emotions or affects of one person, and the enhancing or depressing energies these affects entail, can enter into another.” Although affective experiences can be unique, the source of those affective experiences can, and often do, come from outside one’s own body and that outside source can shape a similar experience. At the very least, these sources can initiate a reaction that lead to common responses, both affectively and emotionally; common in the sense that those within the sphere of the source’s influence all experience an affective and emotional reaction, not necessarily common in the sense that those moments are exactly identical. It should be noted that Brennan uses the word “energies” in a seemingly metaphysical way. However, my understanding of her work is that the use of the term energy is metaphorical, not actual—a cultural energy or a social energy that is palpable, but ultimately figurative.

People, although uniquely emotional and uniquely affective, are not the only entities that initiate the affective process. A substantial body of scholarship suggests that objects, including art, poetry, literature, film, and everyday things like furniture, knickknacks, and clothing, are
often capable of initiating an affective process. On a very basic level, objects, according to anthropologist Alfred Gell, are social agents capable of causing a change or shift in the viewers or consumers of such objects; objects are able to stir one’s emotions and thoughts. This concept is easy to grasp when one thinks of family photographs that are capable of making the viewer remember and feel. However, object agency theory argues further that “art objects take on lives of their own, independent of their creators.” A director, producer, actor, technician, or any combination of filmic creators can intend for a film to say, or do, or espouse a certain theme, tone, or message, but those themes, tones, or messages are often reinterpreted, misinterpreted, ignored, lamented, or criticized. This is possible because “object agency and affect occupy opposing sides of the same theoretical coin. While object agency concerns the message conveyed by objects, affect refers to the perceived psycho-physical reactions experienced by spectators.” In other words, every object has the potential to initiate an affective reaction, and because affect is reliant upon each individual’s matrix of cultural knowledge, people feel and think a wide variety of things when interacting with an object. Thus, objects like films have agency and can transmit affect that lies beyond the intention of their creators.

This concept also finds purchase in examinations of affect alone. I argue, as does Nigel Thrift in his treatise on affect titled “Understanding the Material Practices of Glamour,” that a visual entertainment medium—in this case, film—has an agency beyond the intentions of its creators. Movies and other aesthetic entertainment products are imbued with, and are thus capable of transmitting, affect:

The point is that aesthetic pleasure has quality and substance that is generated by that side of sensation that is sheer formless enjoyment. It is an affective force that is active, intelligible, and has genuine efficacy: it is both moved and moving. It is a force that
generates sensory and emotional gratification. It is a force that produces shared capacity and commonality. It is a force that, though cross-cut by all kinds of impulses, has its own intrinsic value.\textsuperscript{47}

In short, affect contributes to (but does not necessarily define) aesthetic pleasure. The action-adventure genre is especially designed to generate and initiate affective processes. As such, the spectacular nature of the genre taps into a preconscious, instinctual, human condition, that although described by Brennan as primarily interpersonal or human social, is accessible by the medium of film. Movies can, and do, effectively initiate affective responses and are indeed indented to do so.

All one has to do is analyze a set of reviews for a single film to find a range of affective experiences initiated by a single film. Take, for example, the polarized response to the action-adventure film \textit{Lucy} (2014). Regardless of whether they rendered positive or negative judgments, critics spoke of the movie in terms of “feeling” or “experience.”\textsuperscript{48} Matt Kelemen of AspectRatio.us wrote, “You’ve just got to let go and enjoy \textit{Lucy} for the mindfully mindless entertainment it is.”\textsuperscript{49} Andrew Crump of Movie Mezzanine echoes Kelemen, writing, “Besson mines so much entertainment value out of his absurd, unrelenting foolishness as to feel manically inspired in its own way.”\textsuperscript{50} Kelemen is drawing on a concept that is used not only in this study, but also in affect theory: a concept of experiential, preconscious reaction to stimuli. Crump, too, emphasizes an experiential reception of the film that ignores, or at the very least demotes, a consciously intellectual reception. These two critics espouse that enjoyment or entertainment can be mined from \textit{Lucy} by positioning oneself to receive the film as an affective experience rather than an intellectual one. In fact, a number of negative reviews lamented the blending of plot and spectacle present in \textit{Lucy}:
A valiant if ultimately futile attempt to graft a brainy mind-bender onto a traditional action film template, Luc Besson’s *Lucy* frequently comes across as *The Tree of Life* as directed by Michael Bay. –Matt Brunson, *Creative Loafing*

It wants to be a thinking man’s action movie, but it’s really a by-the-numbers revenge movie for people who thought *The Butterfly Effect* was profound. –Eric Melin, *Lawrence.com*

Part philosophical/scientific treatise, part action movie, a film that goes from mayhem to boredom in a heartbeat. –Kenneth Turan, *Los Angeles Times*

Sets up a perfect Charles Bronson-style vengeance movie, but goes and screws it up by getting artsy! –Willie Waffle, *WaffleMovies.com*

Though they may not realize it, it is not simply a mixing of genre that has the above critics upset or disappointed, but a block in the affective experience: the intellectual, thought-provoking narrative elements of *Lucy* get in the way of its experiential, affective elements. *Lucy*, as evidenced by a range of critical responses, is a consummate example of mildly successful transmission of affect that produces, based on unique matrices of cultural knowledge, differing interpretations.

In contrast to *Lucy*, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, a film that has been universally praised, was lauded for being an unapologetic blockbuster that valued style over substance. This sentiment was neatly contained in a review written by Justin Lowe of the *Hollywood Reporter*: “Despite occasional disregard for the laws of physics, much of the imagery displayed on-screen is so realistic and thrill-inducing that sometimes even the plot becomes almost secondary during the more intensely visual sequences.” This point of view was regularly echoed by other critics who regarded the movies as “fun,” “thrilling,” “heartfelt,” “a cinematic blast,” “pop-literate,”
Juxtaposing the critical response to Lucy, the critical response to Guardians of the Galaxy is an example of audiovisual configurations—in this case, the film—that initiate a consistent affective reaction in those that saw it. Additionally, the consensus that this film was successful, both critically and commercially due to the imbalance of spectacle and intellectual narrative, indicates not only the action-adventure genre’s spectacle, but also the draw of affective, aesthetic, technical spectacle.

The action-adventure genre is especially effective at initiating affect because such films are charged by spectacle—a phenomenon that is inherently affective. Spectacle, and therefore affect, fills movie theaters; this has been especially true since the turn toward blockbusters in the mid-1970s. Similarly, “spectacular special effects and beautiful movie stars enhance box-office success in foreign markets because they offer universal aesthetic pleasure; clever dialogue which is cognitive and culture-bound doesn’t travel as well.” While the affective process is not usually initiated by a conscious act—if one were to be sad and other people picked up on that sadness, it is usually not by choice. In contrast, filmmakers actively try to configure stimuli in an effort to initiate an affective reaction; it is in their financial and creative interest to do so.

**Conclusion**

Some scholars think that it is the metaphysical attributes—a film’s ability to engulf its viewers psychically—more than the physical attributes of spectacle that drive financial success. At its core, affect theory supposes that by simply being a part of one’s culture, one is susceptible to preconscious, pre-emotive biological reactions that are informed by the process of socialization. However, susceptibility to this phenomenon does not guarantee static reactions across the board. Human beings and the cultures they create are simply too complex. And while
practitioners of affect theory within the field of cultural studies are concentrating on that susceptibility—recognizing that certain combinations of audiovisual stimuli filtered through our own unique socialization have the potential to initiate a biological process—they do not suppose that this is a universal truth. Instead, they concentrate on emerging patterns. A preconscious, pre-emotive biological reaction, and what initiates it, will differ from person to person, but the way in which commercial film operates economically, theoretically, and socially suggests a shared experience. Thus, the logic looks something like this: Mass attendance equates to mass interest or mass appeal. Successful action-adventure films are often laden with spectacle. Spectacle is not only a tangible or technical phenomenon, but also a physiological or affective one. Therefore, it is not unimaginable that audiences will have similar affective reactions to a particular film. And since affect is culturally dependent and shaped, it is possible to work backwards and dissect the audiovisual configurations present in a particular film or set of films to discover what the cultural connection to those configurations are.

I ultimately conclude that the male body is a contributing factor to spectacle; moreover, that bodies themselves are spectacles in their own right, especially when you consider that one of the defining characteristics of spectacle is the notion of excess. The male bodies that appear in the most popular action-adventure films of the 1980s are excessive—in size, speed, agility, strength, beauty, ability, or endurance. Sylvester Stallone’s muscles in the 1980s were excessive (they are still excessive thanks to modern science). Schwarzenegger’s excessive physique earned him the title of Mr. Olympia seven times. And Jean-Claude Van Damme’s body has always been touted as being excessively flexible. While these examples are easily discernible, there were other spectacular bodies on-screen in the 1980s, including those of Harrison Ford, Mark Hamill, Michael Keaton, Mel Gibson, and Eddie Murphy.
I ultimately find that, for the most part, male bodies on-screen in the most popular action-adventure films of the 1980s were contributing to spectacle, or were spectacular themselves, either as a result of their massive physique or their ability to move through space. Schwarzenegger’s body, for example, was spectacular as it was dimensionally enormous, whereas Gibson or Keaton’s bodies were spectacular because they were quick, agile, and athletically capable. As a way to clearly delineate these two common types, I refer to them as aesthetically spectacular (Schwarzenegger, Stallone, Dolph Lundgren, Lou Ferrigno) or kinesthetically spectacular (Hamill, Ford, Gibson, Keaton, Murphy).

The cinematography and editing of a top action-adventure film in the 1980s, like *Batman*, for example, utilized a number of long shots that allowed Keaton’s character to move from one edge of the frame to the other. This served to highlight Keaton’s long, nimble frame. Contrastingly, a film like *Rambo: First Blood Part II* contained tighter shots that served to accentuate Stallone’s large, shirtless, muscular physique. In effect, the cinematography and editing of a top action-adventure film in the 1980s was radically different depending on the type of body being showcased. As I will explore in the following chapter, male bodies on-screen in the most popular action-adventure films of the 1980s not only contributed to the spectacle of film, they in large part shaped it.
Notes


7. Ibid., 116.


14. Ibid.


18. Ibid., 5.


22. Ibid., 63.

23. Ibid.


26. Ibid., 383.


30. Ibid., 8.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.


35. Ibid., vii.


46. Ibid., 19.


49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.
CHAPTER 2: AESTHETIC BODIES, KINESTHETIC BODIES, AND THEIR ABILITY TO ALTER AND AUGMENT THE TECHNOLOGICALLY DRIVEN COMPONENT OF SPECTACLE

Action-adventure films are often identified through genre conventions as possessing and exhibiting spectacle. This phenomenon, as I laid out in the previous chapter, has two discrete dimensions: a technical dimension and an affective dimension. The male action-adventure protagonist or hero is often in and of itself spectacular, and therefore embodies these two discrete dimensions; this concept as a whole has been identified as body spectacle. In this chapter, body spectacle will be split into two distinct categories: *kinesthetic spectacle* and *aesthetic spectacle*. Actors that possess superhuman proportions, bodybuilding physiques, and chiseled musculature are considered aesthetically spectacular. Actors that are astonishing due their ability to move through space in various, spectacular ways and have the ability to manipulate the environment around them either through special knowledge or clever wherewithal are kinesthetically spectacular. The kinesthetically spectacular body is not about brute force, but intelligently applied pressure. Adjectives like lithe, agile, fluid, nimble, fast, and deft begin to describe the kinesthetically spectacular body. However, kinesthetically spectacular bodies are not free from adhering to certain aesthetic expectations; they are fit and fall into a physically ideal category that isn’t about size as much as it is about symmetry. Actors like Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, Dolph Lundgren, Carl Weathers, Jesse Ventura, Lou Ferrigno, and Mr. T are aesthetically spectacular. Actors like Harrison Ford, Mark Hamill, Mel Gibson, Eddie Murphy, Michael Keaton, and Paul Hogan are kinesthetically spectacular. However, regardless of the kind of spectacular body being filmed, films are technically constructed for and around them. In the following pages, one will see that the way in which a film is written, shot, edited, and generally
constructed and produced (from a technical standpoint) shift as a result of the protagonist’s physique.

By most accounts (popular and scholarly, both), the 1980s was the golden age of the action film and the aesthetically spectacular action star.¹ It was an era during which bodybuilders like Schwarzenegger, Stallone, Lundgren, Weathers, and Ventura did their best to fill up the wide-screen with their wide bodies. And although these actors and their various film franchises—Rocky, Terminator, Predator—were successful, none of these projects could claim to be among the three most successful action movies of the decade; that honor instead goes to Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi, Raiders of the Lost Ark, and Beverly Hills Cop. Despite this, a number of scholarly volumes point to the physically large, aesthetically spectacular, bodies and the equally large action films of the 1980s that feature them, like Rambo: First Blood Part II, Rocky III, Conan the Barbarian, and Predator, as evidence of a prevailing, decade-dominating trope. Academic works like Action Figures: Men, Action Films, and Contemporary Adventure Narratives, Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in the Hollywood Cinema, and Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema approach their subsequent studies by identifying the bodies of interest first and exploring the films that feature them second. In contrast, this dissertation explores the top-grossing films of the decade first and identifies the bodies that populated them second. This alternative method has led to a fascinating discovery; while large, bodybuilding, aesthetically spectacular male physiques may not be present in the highest-grossing action films of the 1980s, a different kind of spectacular male body is—the kinesthetically spectacular male body.

This chapter will analyze the top two highest grossing films of the 1980s—Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi and Raiders of the Lost Ark—and identify them as works defined
by kinesthetic spectacle. Furthermore, I will demonstrate that the general principles of spectacle, as defined in the previous chapter, are applicable to both lean, quick bodies and bulky, large bodies, with subtle, but important, differences. A further exploration of the kinesthetic body, in contrast to the aesthetic body, will take place after a brief literature review, which will serve to both illuminate the aesthetically spectacular body and outline popular conceptions regarding 1980s body spectacle.

**Academia, Scholarship, and the Cultural Role of Male Action Stars of the 1980s**

Unsurprisingly—give the cultural turmoil of the decade—the 1980s has produced the most scholarship concerning bodies, spectacle, and the action film. Mark Gallagher’s *Action Figures: Men, Action Films, and Contemporary Adventure Narratives*; a volume of essays entitled *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in the Hollywood Cinema*; and Yvonne Tasker’s *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema* are among the preeminent volumes that investigate the intersection of male bodies, spectacle, and the action genre. *Screening the Male* contains two works that are of particular interest to this study: Tasker’s “Dumb Movies for Dumb People” and Susan Jeffords’s “Can Masculinity be Terminated?” Jeffords’s article is of central relevance to this study and serves as the impetus for this project’s exploration of the spectacular body in action films during the 1980s and beyond. Her article explores the blockbuster action films of the 1980s and, in particular, the bodies that populate them as a manifestation of a wider resurgence of conservative masculinity embodied by the Ronald Reagan administration and its foreign and domestic policies. As Barna William Donovan argues, “criticism and scholarship has long identified the action film as a theater of gender concerns and conflicts, an art where late twentieth-century manhood tries to find its place in a quickly changing, feminizing society.” This study is no different; it regards the action-adventure
films as a mirror that reflects the mood, tenor, cultural psyche, neuroses, and insecurities of the culture that bore them. This reflection is particularly androcentric and reveals not only internal masculine struggles, but also thoughts on politics, women, and other sociocultural concerns.

The 1980s was a golden age for action films and aesthetically spectacular on-screen physiques. Between 1980 and 1990, action blockbusters with aesthetically spectacular bodies appeared in the top ten highest grossing films of the year six times—1980, 1983, 1987, and 1989 are the exceptions. From 1980 to 1990, twenty-one action films featuring an aesthetically spectacular body or bodies were among the top 200 highest grossing films. Additionally, the actors sporting these spectacular bodies also became household names—they continue to pull in audiences even as they advance in age. The success of the action-adventure genre in the 1980s is even more impressive considering a majority of the films featuring aesthetically spectacular bodies during that time were released with an R rating. Thus, scholars like Jeffords, Gallagher, and Tasker have each penned investigations that explore the decade’s sudden emergence of aesthetically spectacular bodies on film. Each text offers a unique perspective on the phenomenon. And, each text points to an origin for the phenomenon.

Calling the 1980s a time of “codification of the action genre’s dominant narrative conflicts and conventions of visual style,” Gallagher contends that the contemporary action-adventure film is “the most visible site of male conflict and identity formation in popular global cinema.” He writes that the contemporary action-adventure film, specifically, is often employed as a place to “respond to cultural crises about masculinity and make social roles.” His work is a thorough exploration of popular texts—a bulk of which originates in the United States—that represent masculinity, in some way. In addition to film, Gallagher’s text examines television programming, magazines, novels and nonfiction books, and films from the 1960s into the 1990s.
Of particular interest to this dissertation is the volume’s third chapter entitled “I Married Rambo: Action, Spectacle, and Melodrama.” Gallagher’s approach to the 1980s in this chapter is to elucidate what it shifts away from as the decade passes on as opposed to exploring what it was in the moment. He does this by mapping the changing representations of masculinity—and the shifting masculine concerns present in the narrative conventions and film style—in the action-adventure film genre as it transitioned from the 1980s into the 1990s.

In regard to narrative conventions, Gallagher argues that the action film began incorporating aspects of the melodrama in order to reach both a male and female crowd in response to the waning influence of the politics of the Reagan administration and a strong resurgence in the feminist movement in the United States. This, in turn, points toward a 1980s action-adventure genre that was one-dimensionally male in terms of narrative. Additionally, invoking the work that Jeffords has done on the decade in regard to action-adventure films and masculinity, Gallagher argues that the 1990s witnesses a shift in masculine representations “that provide a space for more interiorized and emotive male heroes.” He concludes “that 1990s action films more frequently did narrate the exploits of psychologically and emotionally complex males but still privileged the exteriorized male body.”

Gallagher’s conclusions run parallel to the popular notion among scholars who have examined the intersection of the 1980s, action films, and male bodies; namely that large, exteriorized, aesthetically spectacular male bodies dominated the genre throughout the decade. And while there certainly was a rise in aesthetically spectacular male physiques on-screen in the 1980s, the idea that they universally dominated the action-adventure landscape is not entirely accurate.

*Screening the Male*, a chronological genealogy of masculinity as it has been represented in Hollywood since the 1940s, runs parallel to Gallagher’s work on the 1980s. It investigates and
emphasizes the hypermasculinity in the 1980s by contrasting it with the shifting representations of manliness as the decade came to a close. This collection of essays is meant, according to editors Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, to disrupt the idea that filmic masculinity is a colossal and immutable patriarchal force: “Instead of the unperturbed monolithic masculinity produced by a de-contextual-ized psychoanalysis, this volume portrays filmed men and male film characters overtly performing their gender, in neurotic (and even psychotic) relationships to it, or seeking alternatives to masculinity as their culture defines it.”  Although the articles contained within Screening the Male cover a number a number of film genres and decades, they all tend to approach masculinity on-screen from a similar feminist perspective; namely, one that allows for the possibility that masculinity—and its on-screen representations—are susceptible to, and affected by, cultural shifts in patriarchy. Cohan and Hark argue that cultural studies in general and film studies in particular tend to ignore what they call “masculine spectacle,” which, in turn, reinforces the “apparent effacement of the masculine as a social construction in American culture.”  They argue that this effacement is both propagated and exposed by Hollywood productions: “The male’s seeming exemption from visual representation may work very hard to preserve the cultural fiction that masculinity is not a social construction, but American movies have always served as one of the primary sites through which the culture, in the process of promulgating that fiction, has also exposed its workings as a mythology.”  Screening the Male ultimately makes theoretical allowance for on-screen masculinity to be viewed through the lens of patriarchal control and to be altered and affected by cultural shifts, not unlike on-screen feminine representations and identities. This is an allowance that paves the way for this dissertation; it views the masculine body on display in action films not as a static, immutable manifestation of the established patriarchy, but as a culturally constructed representation that is
complex in its creation and sensitive to external social forces that act upon its creation. This allowance ultimately provides room for the question: Why this body, in this film, at this time?

The fourth section of *Screening the Male*—a convergence of bodies, masculinity, culture, and action-adventure films—is particularly salient to this dissertation. It is also relevant to the idea that on-screen, externalized masculinity is a cultural construction. The aptly titled section “Muscular Masculinities” consists of three articles, including Tasker’s “Dumb Movies for Dumb People: Masculinity, the Body, and the Voice in Contemporary Action Cinema” and Jeffords’s “Can Masculinity be Terminated?” These articles both contrast the late 1980s and early 1990s with the early and mid-1980s by examining the films of Schwarzenegger, Stallone, and Bruce Willis. And it is through the exploration of their later films, and the shifting representations and identities within those films, that the hypermasculine, aesthetically spectacular body of the 1980s comes into focus. Both texts ultimately posit that the aesthetically spectacular bodies embedded in the action-adventure films of the 1980s are a response to male anxieties brought upon by shifts in politics and culture interpreted as threats to the white, male, patriarchal order of things. Tasker and Jeffords argue that the hypermasculine bulk of the action star and the rigid, narrow definition of masculine as it appears in the 1980s are a direct response to such threats. However, both Tasker and Jeffords argue that masculinity, both on-screen and off, is an amorphous, culturally defined concept that was already shifting away from exteriorized bodybuilding physiques to more internalized, emotional characters as the decade drew to a close.

Tasker argues that Stallone in particular went through a deliberate, and public, metamorphosis that shifted both the characters he portrayed and the body he developed. Tasker writes that after the disappointing return on *Rambo III* (1988), being criticized for not attending the Cannes Film Festival amidst fears of terrorism, and facing accusations that he dodged the
draft during the Vietnam War, Stallone debulked and began choosing roles that weren’t as hypermasculine: “With a spectacular economy Stallone’s image absorbed the wimp tag, using the associations to distance the star from his Rambo persona and present him as a softer, more likeable guy both in ‘real life’ and his films.”\(^{12}\) In other words, Stallone began to reject his role as an aesthetic spectacle in favor of becoming a more kinesthetic spectacle. The roles he chose in the 1990s—most notably, *Cliffhanger* (1993), *The Demolition Man* (1993), *Judge Dredd* (1995) and *Copland* (1997)—speak to that transition. *Cliffhanger*, in particular, signaled a monumental shift in Stallone’s on-screen identity from a massive bruiser to a more nimble man of action.

Like Tasker, Jeffords considers the 1980s an era when “the male body—principally the white male body—became increasingly a vehicle of display—of musculature, of beauty, of physical feats, and of a gritty toughness.”\(^{13}\) The hypermasculinity of the 1980s, she argues, manifested in physical spectacle where even the “external spectacle—weaponry, explosions, infernos, crashes, high-speed chases, ostentatious luxuries—offered companion evidence of both the sufficiency and the volatility of this display.”\(^{14}\) This focus on the external, she argues, “confirmed that the outer parameters of the male body were to be the focus of audience attention, desire, and politics.”\(^{15}\)

Jeffords argues that the politics at play on the muscular, on-screen male body were those of a conservative and hawkish Ronald Reagan administration. However, as the 1980s came to a close, the hypermasculine, aesthetically spectacular male bodies on-screen were forced, by cultural backlash against the depiction of maleness as volatile physicality, to slim down and strike a more introspective pose. Running parallel to the popular narrative concerning the 1980s action-adventure film’s transitional journey into the 1990s, Jeffords argues that Schwarzenegger’s own on-screen persona went through a shift similar to the one experienced by
Stallone and outlined by Tasker. Schwarzenegger’s transformation, she argues, becomes apparent when one compares his contrasting roles as the Terminator in *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. Jeffords contends that the Terminator in the first film is the epitome of externalized masculine spectacle of the 1980s while the Terminator in the second film is more of an internalized, slightly less barrel-chested, emotionally nouveau riche entity preparing for a new decade:

The Terminator offers the ostensible explanation for why men of the 1980s are changing their behavior: they learned that the old ways of violence, rationality, single-mindedness, and goal-orientation (there is no one more goal-oriented than the first Terminator; as Reese [Michael Biehn] says to Sarah Connor [Linda Hamilton], “He’ll never stop. Not until he kills you!”) were destructive, not only for individual men, but for humanity as a whole. And the solution to this dilemma? According to this film, for the 1980s man to learn from his past (future?) mistakes to produce a change in character, a “new,” more internalized man, who thinks with his heart rather than with his head—or computer chips.\(^\text{16}\)

Jeffords argues that this transition is not a sign of real progress, or masculine reform, but an exercise in finding new ways to address “anxieties about the ends of masculinity/territory,”\(^\text{17}\) while justifying and lamenting the masculinity on display in the 1980s. Jeffords contends that this is most apparent in the Terminator’s self-sacrifice, explaining, “The Terminator had to sacrifice itself, not because it was ‘bad’ or harmful or even useless, but because others around it misused its components. Comparably, audiences can conclude that the aggressive and destructive 1980s male body that became the target for both ridicule and hatred may not have been inherently ‘bad,’ but only, in some sociologically pitiful way, misunderstood.”\(^\text{18}\) Jeffords
ultimately concludes that action film stars and the spectacular bodies they inhabit are culturally constructed responses to social conversations, anxieties, and codes. And while the responses seem to shift in the 1990s, Jeffords argues they only look different on the surface—exterior to interior; the core message of the responses is still overwhelmingly patriarchal and hypermasculine.

It should be noted that this dissertation is not unaware of Laura Mulvey, nor is it unaware of authors like Carol Clover or Ann Kaplan who have refined Mulvey’s foundational concepts. However, Mulvey’s conception that women on film manifest exclusively as objects to be looked at by the camera, the viewer, and the diegetic characters that surround them is in some ways antiquated. In no way does this work wholly reject the notion that both the cinematic camera itself, and men on-screen or off, are capable of gazing wantonly or fetishistically. One need only to look for a few examples of this gaze: prolonged scenes of rape as seen in I Spit on Your Grave (1978) and Irreversible (2002) or point-of view shots of male-on-female violence in slasher films like Halloween (1978) and Psycho (1960) provide such examples. Even assaultive camera techniques that contain, constrain, and derive sexual pleasure from the female body continue to be utilized. Promotional material for Sin City: A Dame to Kill For (2014) segments Eva Green’s form; her lips, eyes, and breasts are separated from the rest of her body with horizontal shafts of light while her vibrant, manicured nails and fire-engine-red lips are set in stark contrast to the nearly washed-out, gray-scale surroundings. Mulvey’s contributions are not without merit, but this project presupposes the existence of a female gaze and another kind of male gaze that eroticizes and fetishizes the male form, both of which are denied or limited by her framework. David Gauntlett is particularly critical of Mulvey:
Perhaps a bigger problem with Mulvey’s argument is that it denies the heterosexual female gaze altogether. Within her model, the audience, both male and female, is positioned so that they admire the male lead for his actions, and adopt his romantic/erotic view of the women. There is value in the idea that women come to learn to view themselves and other women through the “male gaze,” given the dominance of male-produced media; but to deny the “female gaze” altogether does little service to women.21 Instead, Gauntlett argues that there has been a long history of female gazing in Hollywood: “Since their earliest days, movies have included and often celebrated physically attractive men, whose sexual allure has surely drawn women into cinemas.”22 William Donovan’s sociological treatise on spectatorship and action-adventure films reaches a similar conclusion: “Very fit men, especially in films where the fetishizing gaze of the camera is set upon their muscular bodies, are an attraction for a lot of female viewers.”23 In addition, there is the newly embraced concept of the gay gaze—a theory popularized by Steven Drukman—and the more generalized queer gaze that allows for any number of counterhegemonic views.

Ultimately, this project is indebted to Mulvey for the concept of the gaze, in general, and the concept that “male viewers identify with the (male) protagonist,” via the gaze, in particular.24 However, the gaze—both Mulvey’s conception and Gauntlett’s redefinition—is relevant to this project only insofar as it positions the on-screen male form as an object of desire, either platonic or erotic. In simple terms, this project embraces the idea that the male action-adventure hero is an object of desire for both men and women (regardless of sexuality) and an integral part of spectacle.

Mulvey aside, what Tasker, Jeffords, Cohan and Hark, and Gallagher have in common is a conceptual picture of the 1980s as a time when the physique of the action hero grew to
enormous proportions. These proportions, they argue, were in direct response to then-
contemporary political and cultural shifts and nascent anxieties about what it meant to be a man
and what constituted masculinity. While it is entirely plausible, even likely, that Stallone and
Schwarzenegger—and their aesthetically spectacular physiques—are a response to a
conservative shift in politics and a direct resistance to the resulting liberal backlash, their films
and their bodies are not wholly representative of the 80s action-adventure genre. This quintet of
scholars also, in one way or another, identifies the liminal space between the 1980s and 1990s as
time during which the action-adventure genre, and its subsequent audience, was shifting its focus
away from aesthetically spectacular male bodies and embracing kinesthetically spectacular ones.
Tasker, in particular, offers Stallone’s rebranding as emblematic of the 1980s/1990s transition
from swollen to svelte. However, the aesthetically spectacular body was not the dominant
masculine body type of the action-adventure genre in the 1980s. In terms of the franchises that
they were associated with in the 1980s, far more money was made by Hamill, Ford, and
Murphy’s kinesthetically spectacular bodies.

Not only will this chapter outline the characteristics of the kinesthetic body, it will—
through the application of the two dimensions of spectacle—explain how the kinesthetic body is
a spectacular body. And finally, this chapter will, with attention paid to the cultural dimension of
spectacle, answer the question: Why, in spite of the popularity, press, and scholarship
surrounding the aesthetically spectacular action hero in the 1980s, did the kinesthetically
spectacular male physique rise to the top of the box-office heap?
How the Kinesthetic Body Creates and Contributes to Spectacle

While aesthetic and kinesthetic bodies are both spectacular, each type combines the technical dimension and affective dimension of spectacle in disparate ways. This section will be a walk-through of the kinesthetically spectacular body, terminating in a baseline definition of kinesthetic spectacle. This baseline will allow for an informed exploration of the two primary films in this chapter, Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi and Raiders of the Lost Ark, with emphasis on the technical dimension of spectacle. A close inspection of the technical dimension of spectacle, and how it pertains to body spectacle, reveals three distinct subcategories: scope, framing and editing, and technology.

The first subcategory that makes up the technical dimension of spectacle is scope. Scope is the literal and figurative proportions of the exhibition-screens; the increased horizontal size, as has become standard in moviemaking and movie exhibition, makes it possible to capture, in one frame, exotic locations and sprawling landscapes, and create a physical sense of immersion. The second subcategory, framing and editing, is simply cinematography and postproduction editing. However, as the heart of filmmaking and film consumption, editing and cinematography is further broken down into five elements that include cut frequency, camera perspective, camera movement, opposite movements, and afterimage. The third subcategory is film technology, which includes the idea of competitive excess and the industry-inherent pursuit and utilization of the latest filming and special effects technologies. The kinesthetically spectacular body ultimately utilizes all three of these subcategories in order to accentuate its agility, flexibility, and speed; this is in contrast to the aesthetically spectacular body that utilizes these subcategories to bring to the fore strength and size.
How Kinesthetically Spectacular and Aesthetically Spectacular Bodies Alter and Augment Cinematic Scope

While potentially unassuming at first glance, scope is integral in defining and differentiating both the kinesthetically and aesthetically spectacular body. In contrast to the utilization of panoramic screens to capture the wideness of aesthetically spectacular bodies—such as the framing of pectorals, shoulders, and massive, outstretched arms holding big guns—the kinesthetically spectacular body uses the increased screen dimensions to convey a sense of speed and spatial dominance through mobility, not strength and size.

For example, in *Batman*, Batman (Keaton) occupies or travels to and from every edge of the screen in a single scene on multiple occasions. In the rooftop scene where two pickpockets discuss the hospitalization of one of their compatriots—possibly at the hands of a vigilante—Batman first appears far in the background, far upstage; he descends from the top edge of the screen. After Batman spreads his cape, just touching each edge of the frame, the scene cuts to a medium-wide shot of the pickpockets, then to a point of view (POV) that spies the pickpockets from above, and then back to Batman, who this time, right above them, occupies the entirety of the screen with his outstretched cape. As he jumps toward the bottom edge of the screen from his perch above the pickpockets, the scene cuts to Batman landing and occupying the foreground. At this point, Batman physically engages the pickpockets; his foot travels from screen right to screen left, the scene cuts and the foot connects, sending the first pickpocket through a door at screen left. Batman then pulls out his grappling hook and throws it from screen left to screen right, entangling the second pickpocket and dragging him from screen right to screen left—in between the throw and the drag is a medium-wide shot of Batman at the left edge of the screen, the pickpocket at the right edge of the screen, and the line of the grappling hook in the center
connecting the two (see figure 1). With both pickpockets subdued, Batman finally exits the scene by jumping off the building and toward the bottom frame. In less than two minutes of screen time, Batman’s kinesthetically spectacular body appears in the background at the top edge of the screen, occupies the foreground at the bottom edge of the screen, subdues one pickpocket from screen right to screen left, dispatches the second pickpocket from screen left to screen right, and finally exits through the bottom edge of the screen.

In contrast, the pickpockets are relatively still throughout the scene; most of their movements are a result of Batman’s manipulation—punches, kicks, pushes, and pulls. Their movement, as a result of Batman’s body, speaks to his domination over the diegetic space and the dimensions of the frame; the frame is his space and he controls what populates it and when, from edge to edge. The scope of the wide-screen format ultimately allows for Batman’s kinesthetically spectacular body to travel significant distances in a short amount of time without the need for a long shot—the medium and close-up shots that make up the rooftop scene preserve the speed and action typical of an action-adventure film, while the wide horizontal dimensions of the screen allow for a sense of distance, and thus, a sense of distance traveled. The kinesthetically spectacular body—in this case, Batman—is impressive due to its ability to move deftly, dominate the diegetic space (including other bodies), and fill the boundaries of the frame through speed rather than size. This kind of kinesthetic dominance can also be seen in The Gotham Cathedral scene at the end of Batman. Other examples of this in the 1980s include Superman II (1980), Octopussy (1983), Romancing the Stone (1984), and The Karate Kid Part II (1986)—all of these films utilize the scope of the wide-screen format to highlight the agility, deftness, and speed of a kinesthetically spectacular protagonist. In Superman II, Superman (Christopher Reeve) frequently flies from one edge of the screen to the other, often against the
backdrop of the Metropolis skyline. This demonstrates incredible speed as the scope is, in this case, massive. In the films Octopussy and The Karate Kid Part II, the scope of the wide-screen frame is used to accentuate the quickness of the characters—James Bond (Roger Moore) and Daniel (Ralph Macchio) use their proficiency in the martial arts to elude, evade, create distance, and quickly strike their opponents from the edges of the frame. In Romancing the Stone, Jack T. Colton (Michael Douglas) often vanquishes opponents by quickly closing gaps, moving from one edge of the screen to the other. In one particularly salient example, Colton rides on the hood of a car as it chases down Ralph (Danny DeVito), the film’s antagonist; the car travels from the right edge of the screen to the left edge of the screen. Once the car catches up, there’s a cut and Colton flies in from the left edge of the screen and tackles Ralph, taking him to the right edge of the screen (see figure 2).

Figure 1. Batman on the left, thug on the right, grappling hook in the middle, Batman (1989).
The utilization of the wide aspect ratio to convey agility is in direct contrast to the aesthetically spectacular action-adventure star that “demonstrates power most comprehensively through a lack of motion,”25 and instead utilizes the extra dimensions to capture sculpted muscles. An excellent example of this is found in the opening scene of Predator when the camera lingers on a shot of Schwarzenegger’s trapezius, capturing it from edge to edge in all of its muscular glory (see figure 3). Gallagher asserts that this “stasis” is directly related to connotations of power and omnipotence:

In male-oriented US film genres throughout the twentieth century, male protagonists paradoxically assert their agency and control over narrative events through physical stasis. The suggestion of male invulnerability demands physical inertness. Physical and linguistic signifiers of hardness or density—the chiseled faces of Schwarzenegger, Charlton Heston, or Kirk Douglas, with their square jaws and accentuated cheekbones; the deep voices and measured delivery of John Wayne and Sylvester Stallone; even suggestive names such as “Brick” or “Rocky”—connote indomitable power.26

Figure 2. Colton tackles Ralph, Romancing the Stone (1984).
Again, this is a direct contrast to the likes of Batman, Superman, Daniel, James Bond, and Jack T. Colton who express dominance and power through kinesthetic prowess, not size and strength. The dexterity and speed of the kinesthetically spectacular body, and its ability to deftly traverse the boundaries of any given surrounding and frame, meets the criterion of scope necessary for the framing and editing subcategory comprising the technical dimension of spectacle. However, it lies in direct opposition to the aesthetically spectacular bodies commonly associated with the action-adventure film, thus making it necessary to draw a distinction between body types appearing on-screen in the action-adventure films of the 1980s.

Figure 3. Schwarzenegger’s back muscles, *Predator* (1987).

**The Original Star Wars Trilogy and Scope**

The original Star Wars trilogy—*Star Wars* (1977), *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back*, *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi*—is, by the numbers, one of the most financially lucrative franchises of all time and was a dominant box-office success in the 1980s. *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi* and *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back*
were the second and third highest grossing films of the 1980s, respectively, and were only surpassed by *E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial* in domestic gross income, making them the highest grossing action films of the decade.27 *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi* and *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* each significantly outearned the gross returns of *Rambo: First Blood Part II* and *Rocky III*; more than doubled the earnings of *Rocky II, Rocky IV*, and *Predator*; and more than quintupled the earnings of *Conan the Barbarian, Cobra* (1986), *Rambo III*, and *Commando*.28 Its stars, Hamill and Ford, were not bodybuilders, nor were they particularly large in stature. Instead, both of these actors were kinesthetically spectacular and the scope of the films framed them as such.

After the requisite opening shot of any film in the Star Wars franchise—the offscreen entrance of a spaceship in orbit above a planet—*Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* reintroduces Luke Skywalker (Hamill) for the first time by positioning him on the right side of a faraway establishing shot. Skywalker is seen riding a Tauntaun at a brisk pace over a barren landscape; he quickly moves from the right side of the screen toward the left. Not only is this establishing shot used to capture the desolate, incredible landscape of the ice planet Hoth, it also establishes Skywalker’s body as a small but quickly moving body, not a lumbering and immovable body (see figure 4). Interestingly, the only people ever seen riding Tauntaun in *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* are Skywalker and Han Solo (Ford); soon after the viewers see Skywalker traipsing across the snow on his Tauntaun, they watch Solo sprint across Hoth on his own Tauntaun in search of the missing Skywalker. In both cases, the body is framed in a long shot or a medium shot, with only a few medium-close shots peppered in; Solo and Skywalker are frequently seen moving laterally from one side of the screen to the other in both *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* and *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi*. 
In *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back*, specifically, the Tauntaun, the lateral movement, the camera distance, and the wide-screen format all converge to convey a sense of mobility, agility, and quickness not dissimilar to the way in which the anamorphic ratio was used in the *Batman* example above. In both *Batman* and *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back*, the scope is used not to capture a body in as much detail as possible, but to highlight a body’s ability to quickly traverse the substantial proportions of the frame; this concept is particularly true in regards to the lightsaber duels present in both *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* and *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi*.

![Figure 4. Skywalker—near the bottom right—is a speck on an icy landscape, Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back (1980).](image)

In both *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* and *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi*, Skywalker participates in several lightsaber duels that dominantly consist of medium shots that frame the actors from at least the thigh up. Like Bond, the Karate Kid, and Batman, Skywalker travels the distance of the frame several times during the course of each fight. In *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back*, Darth Vader (David Prowse) and Skywalker engage in a single duel that spans four nonconsecutive scenes. In the first scene,
Skywalker enters the refrigeration room (where Solo was encased in carbonite moments before) and Vader is waiting. Skywalker emerges from the bottom edge of the frame via an automated lift—this entrance is similar, but reversed, to the one Batman makes in the rooftop scene (see figure 5). Once he is inside, Skywalker approaches Vader, traveling from the left side of the screen to the right; Vader stands completely still. Once Skywalker and Vader begin dueling, it is Skywalker who is responsible for a bulk of the body movement. Skywalker continuously steps in (from left to right) toward Vader, who reluctantly and calmly gives up ground in response to the flurry of strikes. At one point, Vader pushes Skywalker away toward the left side of the frame, but Skywalker regains his footing and continues his assault, which includes a 360-degree spin.

Figure 5. Skywalker emerges from the bottom of the frame, *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* (1980).

At the beginning of the second part of the duel, Skywalker parries a slow but particularly strong blow from Vader, circles his opponent (which puts him, once again, on the left side), and backpedals. Soon after, Skywalker again advances toward Vader, but is disarmed. Skywalker evades a follow-up blow by dodging toward the left side of the screen, at which point the scene cuts and he is seen tumbling down a set of steps toward the right side of the screen. Vader slowly
follows him and Skywalker once again dodges farther toward the right. It is at this point that Darth Vader slowly backs Skywalker into the refrigeration unit that froze Han Solo—a large hole in the floor—and Skywalker falls in. Just as Skywalker is about to be frozen himself, he jumps up from the hole, rocketing from the bottom of the frame toward the top of the frame, where he disappears outside of the frame (see figure 6). The scene cuts, and Vader finds Skywalker scrambling up cables, again toward the top of the frame. Skywalker does a backflip off the cables, hits Vader with a blast of steam, reaches out for his lightsaber, and advances once again—this time advancing from the right side of the screen toward the left. Skywalker then does a front flip over Vader—this positions him on the left side of the frame—circles around—this positions him on the right side of the frame—pushes Vader over the edge of the refrigeration platform, and then jumps off the platform himself, exiting the scene through the bottom of the frame.

Figure 6. Skywalker is a blur as he jumps out of Vader’s carbonite trap, Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back (1980).
In the third part of the duel, Skywalker once again enters from offscreen—this time he enters from stage left—and walks toward the right edge of the frame. Vader appears, strikes out toward Skywalker, and breaks a large window. The decompression from breaking the window sucks Skywalker out through the window and forces him to exit through the right side of the frame.

In the fourth and final part of the duel, Skywalker dodges a surprise attack by Vader but is continually backed up toward the right side of the frame; Skywalker even turns around and runs at one point. In one particular sequence, when the camera is farther away from the action than at any part in the duel, audiences see Skywalker backed up across a catwalk; the scene cuts closer and Skywalker is knocked to the ground. At this point, Skywalker swipes at Vader’s lightsaber, rolls toward the left side of the frame, and disappears offscreen. The scene cuts and Skywalker is seen scrambling to his feet before the two continue to duel. Skywalker is forced off the catwalk but lands a blow before Vader lops of his hand. The duel ends.

This protracted battle has all of the same elements of scope that the rooftop scene in *Batman* has. Skywalker, like Batman, enters from offscreen and travels the height and width of the frame several times by his own kinetic energy. What separates this sequence in *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* to the one in *Batman* is Skywalker’s acrobatics and Force-enhanced speed. Not only does Skywalker travel from one edge to another, he does so with, at times, tremendous speed; his leap from the refrigeration pit (which carries him outside the bounds of the frame) is especially crafted—he’s nothing more than a blur of movement—to emphasize a sense of lithe quickness. Likewise, Skywalker’s flips and spins convey a sense of control over the space inside the frame through agility and sprightliness, not brute strength.
All of Skywalker’s flips, spins, leaps, speed, and agility are also featured in *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi*. Skywalker manages to flip, spin, and leap through both the sail barge fight scene and the final duel with Vader and Emperor Palpatine (Ian McDiarmid). In the sail barge fight scene, Skywalker is made to walk the plank of a desert skiff as Jabba the Hutt looks on from his sail barge. However, just as Skywalker is about to be pushed over the edge, he walks off the plank, spins around, and grabs the edge of the plank, using it to spring himself into a flip before he lands back onto the boat and catches his lightsaber out of midair. Once armed, Skywalker travels the length of the desert skiff, repelling his captors. Taking fire from a placement gun on the sail barge, Skywalker once again runs the length of the desert skiff, only to leap onto a second desert skiff closer to the sail barge. There is a particularly magnificent frame that captures Skywalker’s leap, the two desert skiffs, and the sail barge all in one shot: it is only a medium shot, yet the anamorphic ratio allows for the action and movement of Skywalker’s body to be clearly visible while still capturing the skiffs, the barge, and the sweeping dunes of Tatooine (see figure 7). Skywalker manages to clear the second skiff of bad guys whilst jumping, dodging, and otherwise avoiding attacks until he, once again, takes to the air to leap from the skiff to the barge. After Skywalker dispatches the stationary gun and scoops up Leia Organa (Carrie Fisher), who has ensured that the barge will be destroyed, he swings from a cable across the frame to another waiting skiff that take him and his compatriots out of the desert (see figure 8).
Figure 7. Skywalker leaps through the air, *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi* (1983).


The image of Skywalker swinging from one edge of the frame to the other should be familiar to fans of the franchise; this appears in all three films of the original trilogy. In *Star Wars*, Skywalker swings from a grappling hook—as Leia hangs on to him—in order to cross a retracted bridge encountered as they try to escape the Death Star (see figure 9). In *Star Wars*: 
Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back, Skywalker, with Yoda (Frank Oz) on his back, swings across the screen from a vine; Skywalker also manages to dismount from the vine with a flip.

Figure 9. The swinging scene in Star Wars (1977).

Again, all of these flips, swings, and leaps, combined with the scope of the wide-screen format, cultivate an image of the character as nimble, agile, and quick. In Star Wars, Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back, and Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi, not once is the anamorphic wide-screen used to capture a muscled landscape, broad shoulders, or chiseled jaw. Instead, the scope of the film is used to capture the hero leaping and swinging great distances or traveling the height and breadth of a given frame.

How Kinesthetically Spectacular and Aesthetically Spectacular Bodies Alter and Augment Framing and Editing

The second subcategory that makes up the technical dimension of spectacle is framing and editing, or cinematography—in short, the way the film is shot and stitched together. Arguably the most important of the three subcategories that define the technical dimension of spectacle, editing and cinematography run parallel to scope in the way that they are used to highlight the kinesthetically spectacular body’s speed, flexibility, fitness, and ability to utilize the
surrounding environment. As it was with scope, cinematography and editing is broken down into smaller parts, including cut frequency, camera perspective, camera movement, opposite movements, and afterimage—all of which are, in general, common to technical spectacle. This section will explain how these constituent parts are utilized in slightly different ways when filming smaller, nimbler bodies as opposed to bigger, stronger bodies. All of the cinematographic and editing techniques familiar to the action-adventure genre are present in films that feature kinesthetic bodies, but they emphasize mobility, flexibility, and fitness as opposed to emphasizing the strength, size, and bulk of aesthetic bodies.

From a cinematography and editing perspective, the kinesthetic body is shot in ways that frame the entire actor; this is in contrast to the way aesthetically spectacular bodies are shot and edited as segmented close-ups of various muscle groups. The training montage in Rocky II is emblematic of the way aesthetically spectacular bodies are framed—for most of the montage, Stallone is framed from the waist up, allowing the audience to see in fine detail his abs, shoulders, and arms (see figure 10). In contrast, the climactic fight scene between Gibson’s Martin Riggs and Gary Busey’s Joshua in Lethal Weapon is shot at more of a distance so that one can see Riggs’s entire body. Although a number of staccato close-ups of fists are scattered throughout the scene—a technique used to convey rapid, dramatic action—the majority of the sequence is made up of medium shots that frame Riggs from at least the middle of the thighs and higher. Shots that capture Riggs’s entire body are used almost exclusively for sequences in which Riggs has the upper hand. For instance, the first time Riggs knocks Joshua to the ground—with a kick no less—the camera cuts to a medium, worms-eye view of Riggs’s entire body bouncing from foot to foot as he hovers over Joshua (see figure 11). In this particular sequence, the worms-eye view—used in action-adventure cinema to resize objects, most
commonly bodies—enlarges both men. However, due to his position in the foreground, Joshua
benefits most from the illusion despite his being on the ground. This is in stark contrast to films
like Rambo: First Blood Part II and Predator, whereby the worms-eye view in combination with
a close, waist-up framing is used almost exclusively to enlarge the protagonist and the
protagonist alone (see figure 12). Riggs’s entire bouncing body, shot from a very low angle and
staged in the background, runs against the grain in terms of filming aesthetically spectacular
bodies but utilizes the same technique in similar ways—the framing and editing of the sequence,
particularly the worms-eye view, ultimately creates a “David and Goliath” allusion. This visual
triumph over a bigger opponent—Joshua is significantly larger, both in terms of height and
musculature—is kinesthetically spectacular.

Figure 10. Rocky’s abs, Rocky II (1979).
Figure 11. Riggs being nimble, *Lethal Weapon* (1987).

Figure 12. Worms-eye view enlarges the protagonist, *Predator* (1987).

The camera also pulls back to create a wide angle when Riggs begins avoiding Joshua’s attempts to hit him with a metal pole; Riggs is seen head-to-toe, ducking, juking, and sidestepping blows. This wide angle allows the audience to see Riggs’s full range of motion, his kinesthetic agility, and his quick reflexes. This moment in the scene is directly proceeded by Roger Murtaugh (played by Danny Glover) tossing Riggs a police baton with a perpendicular
handle for defense against Joshua’s polearm. Riggs’s wielding of the baton, and his subsequent offensive attack against Joshua, is primarily shot using a medium angle that frames Riggs from the middle of the thigh up. This framing is not much different from the framing seen in the Rocky II montage, but it is pulled back just enough to witness Riggs’s proficiency with the weapon—he twirls the baton back and forth by the handle on a horizontal plane—and his quick, nimble lateral movements.

The camera angles and cut frequency of this fight scene in Lethal Weapon—staccato editing, worms-eye views, and medium shots—are in line with the general principles of technical spectacle. However, the inclusion of several wide-angle shots set it apart from the way aesthetically spectacular bodies are framed, making it uniquely kinesthetic. This heightened emphasis on the entire body highlights the agility, speed, and deftness of the kinesthetically spectacular body. In addition, the worms-eye view—another general element of technical spectacle—creates a size transformation, as intended, but makes the antagonist larger, alluding to a “David and Goliath” paradigm. This view, and the paradigm it creates, can also be seen in The Karate Kid (1984), Lethal Weapon II, and Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom—all of which utilize the worms-eye view to enlarge an antagonist that is squaring off against a kinesthetic protagonist.

How the Kinesthetically Spectacular Body Is Framed, Filmed, and Edited in the Original Star Wars Trilogy

Just as it is in Lethal Weapon II, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom, and The Karate Kid, Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back and Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi are framed and edited to accentuate the kinesthetically spectacular nature of the male protagonists, in particular Solo and Skywalker. Solo and Skywalker are often framed from at
least the thigh up, and this medium or medium-close framing runs contrary to the closer framing that is the norm in action-adventure movies that star aesthetically spectacular bodies. Where action-adventure films that feature aesthetically spectacular bodies use a litany of close-up shots, specifically close-ups of body parts, Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back and Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi favor shots that place the camera farther away from the subject.

The longer, wider shots favored in both Star Wars films are predominantly used to capture the protagonists in positions that highlight their mobility and agility. Skywalker is particularly favored when it comes to wider shots. A representative instance of this can be seen during the Hoth battle scene in Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back. After crash-landing his snowspeeder, Skywalker finds himself underneath an All Terrain Armored Transport, or AT-AT walker; the preceding sequence consists of two long shots, four medium shots, and an extreme long shot. The first shot of the sequence is a long shot of Skywalker running with the AT-AT (see figure 13). The second shot is a medium shot of Skywalker looking up toward the belly of the AT-AT; Skywalker is framed from the waist up. The third shot is a medium shot that captures Skywalker’s magnetic grappling hook making contact. The fourth and fifth shots are a long shot and an extreme long shot, respectively, that show Skywalker ascending the grappling hook cable (see figure 14). And the sixth and seventh shots are medium shots that show Skywalker hanging from the cable attached to the underside of the AT-AT. While dangling, Skywalker uses his lightsaber to cut away a hatch and tosses a thermal detonator into the resulting gap (see figure 15).
Figure 13. Skywalker runs alongside the AT-AT, *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* (1980).

Figure 14. Skywalker grapples the AT-AT, *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* (1980).
Solo is also frequently captured in medium and long shots striking a gunslinger pose. Appearing in all three films, and even in promotional material for the film—including lobby cards and posters—Solo’s gunslinger pose is struck with neck outstretched, head slightly down, shooting arm extended, a substantial bend in the knees, a wide stance, and a slightly crooked non-shooting arm held out behind the back (see figure 16). While not a perfect facsimile, the pose does bear a striking resemblance to silver-screen cowboys played by the likes of John Wayne and Clint Eastwood, actors who are, arguably, forerunners of the kinesthetically spectacular bodies seen in the action-adventure movies of the 1980s (see figure 17)—after all, the original Star Wars trilogy used a number of themes, tropes, and plot devices from the Western genre.\(^9\) Regardless, this pose, only made possible by a long or medium shot, conveys a sense of movement despite a lack of motion. Solo’s gunslinger pose is an active pose that communicates dynamic, kinesthetic energy, not dissimilar to a runner in midstride. Solo’s active pose is in direct opposition to the poses struck by characters like Rambo, John Matrix, and the Terminator, all of whom strike a rigid pose when handling a weapon. In the action-adventure
films of the 1980s, aesthetically spectacular bodies tend to hold large weapons tucked into their sides with two hands, arms crooked; this allows for an unobstructed view of the protagonist’s biceps, which are stressed into a flex by the pose. Additionally, the pose is struck with a straight back, a straight neck, and knees only slightly bent. Unlike Solo’s pose, the pose struck by the aesthetically spectacular bodies on-screen in the 1980s is one that is actively trying to be tall, rigid, and physically stoic; Solo, even though still, seems to be slinking while Rambo, Matrix, and the Terminator look more like formidable sentinels.

Figure 16. Promotional image of Harrison Ford as Han Solo from the original run of *Star Wars* (1977).
Both Solo and Skywalker are dramatically different from the aesthetically spectacular bodies of the 1980s due in large part to the framing and editing of their kinesthetic bodies. The long and medium shots used to capture Solo and Skywalker highlight their agility and their speed. This lies in direct opposition to the action-adventure films of the 1980s that showcase aesthetically spectacular bodies; the framing and editing in these films favor close and medium-close shots of pectorals, arms, backs, jaws, and abs.

Two other important facets of framing and editing are camera angles and blocking. As explained in the previous section detailing the Riggs and Joshua fight in *Lethal Weapon*, a popular camera angle in spectacular action-adventure films is the worms-eye view. And while the worms-eye views used in *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* and *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi* work in a similar fashion to those same views in action-adventure
films featuring aesthetically spectacular bodies as a whole—namely, making a protagonist appear larger—the bodies that appear together on-screen are significantly different. It is through a combination of worms-eye view shots and an imbalance in the respective bodies on-screen that make the Riggs and Joshua fight in *Lethal Weapon* a thinly veiled allusion to the battle of David and Goliath. Simply put, blocking two or more incongruently sized bodies on-screen, in the same frame, at the same time is a specific technique seen in films with kinesthetically spectacular protagonists. In the Riggs and Joshua fight in *Lethal Weapon*, Riggs is consistently sharing a frame with Joshua. Joshua is significantly larger than Riggs and by placing them both in the same frame at the same time the size difference becomes easily discernible. This is seen in reverse in films that star aesthetically spectacular bodies like *Commando* where Schwarzenegger as the protagonist is paired with the much slighter Dan Hedaya who plays the film’s antagonist Arius (see figure 18).

![Image](image.png)

Figure 18. Body sizes are reversed in movies that highlight aesthetically spectacular bodies, *Commando* (1985).
In *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* and *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi*, it is the simultaneous appearance of Skywalker and Vader, combined with medium-long shots and longer takes, that create the “David and Goliath” narrative. Skywalker takes on the role of David, while Vader takes on the role of Goliath. There are very few shot-reverse shot sequences featuring Skywalker and Vader. Instead, the pair is often captured in the same frame. This obvious imbalance in stature—Prowse is significantly larger than Hamill, especially in the bulky Vader armor—conveys a sense of immense struggle and invokes an allusion that frames Skywalker as the underdog hero locked in battle against the enormous Vader, who represents both the dark side of the Force and the tyrannical Empire.

Although this imbalance appears in all three of the original films, one of the most salient examples of this is seen in *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi*. Near the conclusion of *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi*, after Skywalker gives himself up to the Empire, Vader brings him before the Emperor. The scene begins with a long shot of the Emperor’s chamber—the shot is perfectly centered and balanced, with the Emperor, in the background, sitting on a throne that bisects both the horizontal and vertical axis of the frame. Vader and Luke enter from behind the camera and walk toward the Emperor side by side; Luke is slightly ahead of Vader. This particular shot is held for ten seconds and allows time for Vader and Luke to move from the foreground to the middle ground and almost into the background before a cut is made (see figure 19). The blocking of the shot, the pair’s transition from foreground to background—which effectively changes the shot from a close to a medium to a long—and Luke’s ever so slight lead on Vader combine to create an effect that makes Vader look as if he is towering over Luke. This effect is only made stronger by the fact that Vader embodies a number of characteristics that go into defining an aesthetically spectacular body. Prowse, like other
actors with aesthetically spectacular bodies, was a professional bodybuilder turned actor. Also similar to other actors with aesthetically spectacular bodies (specifically Schwarzenegger and his experience with *Hercules in New York* [1970]), Prowse was selected for his body alone, not his acting, his voice, or any other quality required for acting; James Earl Jones recorded Vader’s lines. And finally, when fighting, the character of Vader is consistently in stasis, often letting Skywalker come to him.

![Figure 19. Vader towers over Skywalker, Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi (1984).](image)

While the blocking in *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* and *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi* may seem to simply reinforce the “David and Goliath” allusion plainly present in the dialogue, they also visually define Luke as a character that possesses a kinesthetically spectacular body. Frequently pairing him, in the same frame, with an aesthetically spectacular body only serves to define him as a quick, agile, and lithe character.

**Dutch Angles and Opposite Movement**

In addition to the framing and editing of the action-adventure film, the way the camera moves is utilized in subtly different ways when filming a kinesthetically spectacular body. In
particular, the Dutch angle—a technique used in action-adventure films to both create confusion and, more contemporarily, simulate a handheld camera—is used in the *Lethal Weapon* fight scene to highlight Riggs’s agile triumph over Joshua. Throughout the scene, unstable camera angles, including Dutch angles, are used to give the scene an immersive, authentic feel. A significant amount of the shaky footage in this particular scene is also a suggested POV that follows police officers coming to the fight (see figure 20). This shaky POV technique adds a level of grittiness and frenetic energy to the already flowing action, and ultimately connotes documentary filmmaking, which, as was discussed in the previous chapter, puts the viewer in the middle of the action, as if they themselves were filming. The viewer is engrossed. The scene’s *realness* is heightened. However, what sets this scene apart from both the general principles of spectacle, and from how aesthetically spectacular bodies are framed and shot, is the Dutch angle at the conclusion of the Riggs and Joshua fight. With the frame square, Riggs positions himself below Joshua, grapples with him, and then wraps his left leg under Joshua’s arm and around his neck while his right leg is wrapped around Joshua’s neck alone. With ankles locked and lying on his back, Riggs lifts himself up with his shoulders as the camera cants to capture Riggs’s entire length from head to toe (see figure 21). This Dutch angle not only allows Riggs’s entire body to be seen, but also calls attention to the flexible and agile attack that finally subdues Joshua—it’s as if the camera itself helps Riggs perform the leg lock. As such, while the Dutch angle and unstable filming in the bulk of the scene runs parallel to techniques generally used in action-adventure spectacle, it, in the end, winds up conforming to the kinesthetically spectacular body.
As discussed in the first chapter, the theory of opposite movements—a theory explored and popularized by Steven Sharff—is the concept that a sensation of speed and tension can be achieved by editing two moving bodies that are supposed to be going in the same diegetic direction to appear as though they are going in opposite directions. By editing for opposite
movements, a sense of imminent collision is created that increases both tension and apparent speed, despite the fact that viewers consciously understand that the bodies in motion are going in the same direction. This opposite movements concept is in direct opposition to the rule of physical stasis present in the action-adventure films that star aesthetically spectacular bodies, and therefore its utilization is relatively sparse—even the famous dump truck chase scene in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* does without it.

Films that star kinesthetically spectacular bodies are often edited for opposite movements; this is true even when, on the rare occasion, these bodies are in actual stasis. An excellent example of kinesthetically spectacular bodies edited for opposite movements can be seen in *For Your Eyes Only* (1981); a frenetic battle scene on a container ship near the climax of the film—which mixes gun battles with fist fights—utilizes a staccato rhythm of opposite movements. The scene opens with James Bond (Roger Moore) climbing onto the ship and firing his gun toward the left side of the screen while standing screen right; the scene cuts, and a thug emerges from a door, moving left to right. At this point, Bond knocks the thug off the boat, and once the thug goes over the railing, the scene cuts again and Bond runs from screen right to screen left; the scene ends with Bond jumping down to the deck below. After landing on the deck below, Bond once again runs from screen right to screen left and enters the melee; the scene cuts and a thug is seen firing toward the right side of the screen at Bond while positioned screen left. Again, the scene cuts and Bond’s friend throws a knife from screen right to screen left, killing the gunmen. Bond even waves thanks from the right side of the screen toward the left when the scene cuts, and his ally, in return, gives an acknowledging wave from the left side of the screen toward the right. This rhythm of opposite movements continues for more than three minutes and
conveys a sense of speed and motion not usually seen in action-adventure films with aesthetically spectacular bodies.

Other examples of this opposite movements editing can also be seen in both *Batman* and *The Karate Kid*—*Batman* even features scenes edited with opposite movements despite Batman being relatively still. In one such scene, Batman squares off against a sword-wielding henchman in an alleyway; the scene unfolds in rapid opposite movement shots as Batman and the henchman lock into close-quarters combat. Once the henchman appears on the scene, he charges Batman, moving from the right side of the screen to the left. Batman stands still as the henchman approaches, but occupies the left side of the screen and punches and kicks toward the right. The entire fight consists of a series of opposite movement shots with Batman standing on the left and attacking toward the right and the henchman standing on the right and attacking toward the left. The fight concludes after Batman pushes the henchman away: Batman forces the henchman to stagger, the henchman charges Batman from right to left, and Batman lashes out with a savage kick that moves from left to right. In some ways, this scene resembles a shot-reverse shot montage typically used when filming conversations. In this scene, the opposite-movements editing—and its similarity to shot-reverse shot montage editing—ultimately conveys a sense of not only speed, but also a visual complexity of progression and movement not seen in the editing and framing of aesthetically spectacular bodies. In this particular scene, the similarity between opposite-movements editing and shot-reverse shot conversations invokes a sense of progression and active participation, because in contemporary dramas it is conversation that makes characters active agents that push events forward. Batman and the sword-wielding henchman engage in a visual conversation that, while simple in subject, is more complex than simply punching toward the camera.
In sum, the technique of opposite-movements editing is present in films that feature both aesthetically and kinesthetically spectacular bodies—after all, opposite movements are a key criterion that forms the technical dimension of filmic spectacle. However, the frequency of this technique and the impression it leaves on the viewer are radically different depending on the type of body being filmed. Simply put, the opposite-movements technique is utilized more frequently in films that feature kinesthetically spectacular bodies, and the impression it imparts to the audience is one of speed. In contrast, when used in films that feature aesthetically spectacular bodies, the opposite-movements technique emphasizes tension and the sense of impending collision. This runs parallel to the scholarly notion that large action-hero bodies generally remain in stasis, conveying a sense of impenetrability, solidity, and bulk.

**How Dutch Angles and Opposite Movement Highlight the Kinesthetically Spectacular Bodies in the Original Star Wars Trilogy**

There are no true Dutch angles in any of the original Star Wars films—the cinematography features a consistent, level frame. However, through careful screen composition a suggested Dutch angle is achieved in several sequences throughout the trilogy. I contend that the effect of a Dutch angle—immersive action and a sense of confusion—can be *suggested* by carefully composing the objects on-screen and filming them at a medium or medium-long range. This effect can be seen in any of the many space battles featured in the first three Star Wars films—space has no horizon, and by filming the warring ships at a medium-long range and giving them different roll angles, it becomes impossible to discern one, thus creating a visual suggestion of an oblique frame. An example of this technique can be found in *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back*, right after the rebels abandon Hoth. One particular four-second sequence shows the Millennium Falcon fleeing from four TIE fighters; not only are the
ships flying at the camera through a backdrop of stars and empty space, every ship is canted at a
different roll angle (see figure 22). The background and the contrasting ship angles don’t
eradicate the horizon, but instead create multiple horizons that, in turn, suggest a Dutch angle.
This is, cinematically speaking, appropriate for the movie’s space battles given that (true) Dutch
angles are a common trope in sequences that feature war in particular, and a staple in action-
adventure films in general.

Figure 22. An artificial horizon creates a suggested Dutch angle, *Star Wars: Episode V - The
Empire Strikes Back* (1980).

The suggested Dutch angles in *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* and *Star
Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi* don’t just convey the traditional sense of confusion, action,
and immersive *realness* typically conveyed by Dutch angles in action-adventure films. There are
several instances in *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* that suggest the Dutch
angle is used to communicate Skywalker’s deft, physical ability—not unlike the way the Dutch
angle was used to showcase Riggs’s leg lock in *Lethal Weapon*. One such example can be seen
in *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* when Skywalker is training with Yoda on
Dagobah; Skywalker is filmed at a medium-long range performing a handstand with Yoda
perched on his right foot. Skywalker moves into a one-handed handstand and positions his left leg and right arm at oblique angles. Skywalker’s inversion and various limb angles, combined with the litany of oblique lines—vines, trees, branches, rocks—that make up the Dagobah set, obfuscate the horizon and suggest a Dutch angle.

Twice more in *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* is Skywalker inverted, and twice more is the inversion captured with a suggested Dutch angle. Skywalker’s first body inversion occurs in the Wampa cave. Captured by the Wampa, Skywalker is seen in a medium shot hanging from the ceiling of the cave, his feet frozen in ice. And just as it was with the Dagobah scene, the Wampa cave is made up of oblique lines—in this case, a multitude of stalactites and stalagmites at various, skewed angles. This particular series of frames precipitates a closer shot of the inverted Skywalker waking up and bending at the torso to take stock of his situation (see figure 23). The tight frame, combined with the soft white background of the cave, the gently curving lines of the rimed walls, and the angle of Skywalker’s torso combine to form another suggested Dutch angle.

Figure 23. Positioning of elements in the scene suggests a Dutch angle, *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* (1980).
Skywalker’s final inversion in *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* occurs after his duel with Vader. After confronting his father and losing his hand, Skywalker finds himself underneath Cloud City, hanging from an antenna array (see figure 24). Skywalker is filmed at a medium-close distance hanging from the antenna by his knees; the antennae surrounding him, as well as the one from which he hangs, are slightly askew and the background is made up entirely of fluffy, rolling clouds. With his injured arm tuck into his side, his knees bunched up, and his hand holding on to the antenna, even Skywalker’s body is a collection of not-quite-level angles.

![Image](image.png)

Figure 24. The collection of angles in this scene connotes a Dutch angle, *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* (1980).

All of the suggested Dutch angles in *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* that feature Skywalker occur before or after he uses the Force—in the Wampa cave he retrieves his lightsaber, on Dagobah he has a premonition, and on Bespin he communicates with Leia telepathically. In all three films, Skywalker’s deftness and agility are closely linked with the Force—one only has to see him leap out of the refrigeration unit on Bespin. Aligning the suggested Dutch-angle technique with the narrative theme of the Force only serves to
demonstrate the distinction between the Dutch angle’s function in films featuring aesthetically spectacular bodies and its function in films featuring kinesthetically spectacular bodies—namely the focus on sprightliness over brute strength. In the Star Wars canon, the light side of the Force is a ubiquitous energy that encourages grace and dexterity, not raw power. In short, the Dutch angle—suggested or not, narratively linked or not—conveys a different meaning in sequences that feature kinesthetically spectacular bodies as opposed to aesthetically spectacular ones, namely flexibility, agility, and supple athleticism. This is in sharp contrast to films featuring aesthetically spectacular bodies where the Dutch angle is used almost exclusively to convey chaos and grit. This only reinforces the idea that the body on film (in the case of the Star Wars or Lethal Weapon franchises, the kinesthetically spectacular body) seems to drive the editing, staging, blocking, and framing.

**Shot-Reverse Shot Action Sequences and the Afterimage**

Opposite-movements editing is not the only technique that is connected, in some way, to shot-reverse shot filming and editing. The afterimage as a by-product of the shot-reverse shot technique is another important part of the framing and editing dimensions analyzed here. Sharff argues that the afterimage (which I argue is linked to the Kuleshov effect) is a consequence of the way in which shot-reverse shots are perceived by audience members; in short, the rotation of two similar images in a shot-reverse shot sequence leaves a figurative shadow on each image. It can be further explained by a simple illustration: Participant A and Participant B are having a conversation, and it is being filmed as a shot-reverse shot sequence whereby Participant A is shown speaking, the scene cuts and then Participant B is shown speaking, then the scene cuts again and Participant A is shown speaking, and back and forth it goes. Sharff contends that when Participant A is on-screen the *shadow* of Participant B is present, and vice versa—when
Participant A is on-screen, Participant B’s presence is there like the outline of a bright light after a person closed his or her eyes. The audience is consciously aware of both participants despite only one participant being on-screen at a time. This concept is particularly applicable to the general principles of spectacle when one considers that a stronger visual figure leaves a more potent afterimage. And thus, it only stands to reason that bodies on-screen have the potential to be stronger or weaker figures, which in turn makes for stronger or weaker afterimages.

The shot-reverse shot sequences involving aesthetically spectacular bodies are extremely similar to the shot-reverse shot sequences involving kinesthetically spectacular bodies—in fact, the afterimage theory is the aspect of framing and editing that is the subtlest in regard to the differences between aesthetic and kinesthetic bodies. Regardless of the body type on-screen in a spectacular action-adventure film, the afterimage favors the protagonist—Superman (Christopher Reeves) in his bright blue and red costume leaves a potent afterimage in comparison to the black-clad Kryptonian criminals in Superman II, as does Dutch’s naked, muscular chest when compared to the nameless, drab-clad jungle guerillas in Predator. Time and time again in the 1980s, viewers are exposed to shot-reverse shots that produce virile afterimages of strong, recognizable protagonists; Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom, Rocky II, Rocky III, Commando, Romancing the Stone, and Superman III all feature shot-reverse shot sequences of their protagonists that favor their image over the images of their named or nameless antagonists. The only possible exceptions to this appears in Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom and Rocky III—Jones is involved in a sequence with the heart-removing high priest Mola Ram (Amrish Puri), while Rocky’s shot-reverse shot sequences feature Clubber Lang (Mr. T). In these two examples, the antagonists are, in some ways, carnivalesque or grotesquely exotic, which leaves a very potent afterimage. However, these figures are so strongly coded as villainous that
there is a kind of relief in seeing the protagonist; I would argue that Jones’s and Rocky’s
recognizable visages are held onto steadfastly, mentally speaking, as a way to balance the
uncomfortable, exotic visages of Clubber Lang and Mola Ram. Audiences want Jones and Rocky
to overcome these antagonists so much that the protagonists’ afterimages are as strong, if not
stronger, than the antagonists’ that they face. It also helps that *Indiana Jones and the Temple of
Doom* and *Rocky III* are not the first films in which these protagonists appear, making their
images potent.

Despite the similarities in intention and execution, there are subtle but important
differences between shot-reverse shot sequences that feature the aesthetically spectacular body
and those that feature kinesthetically spectacular bodies. The sequences that feature kinesthetic
bodies seem to consist of shots that have slightly longer durations and tend to feature
conversation, even in the midst of physical action or combat. In *Indiana Jones and the Temple of
Doom*, notable action scenes, like the one in which Mola Ram removes the heart of a live
sacrifice, or the one in which Short Round (Jonathan Ke Quan) saves Jones from hypnotism,
have clear antagonist/protagonist shot-reverse shot sequences. For instance, when Mola Ram is
preparing the sacrifice, Jones, Short Round, and Willie Scott (Kate Capshaw) are observing from
a hiding spot well above him. Despite this distance and the state of concealment, Jones and Mola
Ram are involved in a shot-reverse shot sequence—Mola Ram talks to the crowd of cultists, the
scene cuts, and then Jones is talking to Short Round and Willie. Later in the film, when Jones is
under the influence of Mola Ram’s hypnotism, Short Round attempts to snap him out of it; Short
Round and Jones physically struggle, but still participate in a shot-reverse shot dialogue
sequence. These scenes are steeped in action, yet the shot-reverse shot filming and editing
technique is used as an opportunity for verbal exposition.
By contrast, in *Total Recall*, when Hauser (Schwarzenegger) is first running away from Richter (Michael Ironside), a shot-reverse shot sequence is used; there is a medium-close shot of Hauser running up an escalator, at which point the scene cuts and nameless bad guys are shown in another medium-close shot approaching the top of the escalator. The scene cuts again to a close-up of Hauser before the scene cuts once more, and another cadre of bad guys—including Richter himself—are seen in a medium-close shot approaching from the bottom of the escalator. This shot-reverse shot sequence continues throughout the ensuing gun battle. There is no dialogue except for the spitfire of submachine guns and pistols—the sequence is all action. This wordless version of the shot-reverse shot sequence can be found in the showdown between the two terminators in the back hall of the shopping mall in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* and the stick-fighting scene in *Rambo III* (except for the occasional grunt). When filming and editing aesthetically spectacular bodies in action, the shot-reverse shot sequence is predominantly silent, routing all attention to the body or bodies.

How Kinesthetically Spectacular and Aesthetically Spectacular Bodies Alter and Augment Cinematic Inserts

In addition to dialogue, or the lack thereof, the afterimage itself is subtly different depending on the type of body being filmed and edited. In films that feature aesthetically spectacular bodies, the shot-reverse shot action sequences often contain a number of inserts that convey virility, potency, and violence. A screenwriting term, “insert” is a narrative device that instructs the filmmaker to stitch in a close-up of a, usually inanimate, object that is of some import: “The INSERT (also known as the CUTAWAY in some shooting scripts) is used to bring something small into full frame. This can be a book, news headline, sign, contract, letter or a leather pouch filled with mints.”30 An insert can be used in a variety of different ways, from a
close-up shot of a clock between shots of someone sleeping, or a close-up shot of a lucky penny falling out of a pocket sandwiched between shots of someone walking down the street. In both examples, the insert provides an important narrative function—because one character is missing an important meeting and another has lost his grandfather’s lucky coin, sparking a mad search, a series of events that carries the narrative of the entire film is set off. Typically, a shot-reverse shot consists of people/characters, but in shot-reverse shot action sequences with aesthetically spectacular bodies, objects and actions are often involved in the back-and-forth editing. Movies that feature kinesthetically spectacular bodies often use shot-reverse shot action sequences without inserts, maintaining a traditional person-to-person pattern.

In shot-reverse shot action sequences featuring aesthetically spectacular bodies, the inserts are typically weapons or explosions. Explosions are not commonly considered inserts, but in the following examples they are treated as such. The escalator fight scene in *Total Recall* is again representative: when the shooting begins and Hauser starts shooting up bad guys, the sequence is Hauser, cut; bad guys, cut; Hauser, cut. However, as the sequence unfolds, one of the anticipated Hauser shots is instead a head-on, down-the-barrel, close-up shot of Hauser’s pistol, which creates this sequence: Hauser, cut; bad guys, cut; insert of gun barrel, cut; bad guys, cut; Hauser, cut. This single insert creates a significant afterimage that connects Hauser to the pistol, the pistol to graphic gunshot wounds, and then the graphic gunshot wounds back to Hauser. Similarly, an insert of a handheld, triggered detonator, and inserts of the subsequent explosions are stitched into a shot-reverse shot action sequence in *Commando*—this type of sequence, one that features inserts of explosions, can also be found in *Rambo: First Blood Part II*. Sometimes, these inserts are used in pairs. A gun barrel insert and an explosion insert occur in the same shot-reverse shot action sequence in *Predator*, for example, linking one of the protagonists to both the
barrel of his grenade launcher and the violent explosions it causes. In all of these examples, the afterimage that these inserts produce link the protagonist or protagonists to heavy weapons and acts of incredible destruction, thus conveying a sense of dominance, power, and physical force.

The lack of potent afterimages, in addition to the increased dialogue present in shot-reverse shot action sequences that feature kinesthetically spectacular bodies, create more nuanced expressions that simply aren’t present in films that feature aesthetically spectacular bodies. One may argue that the inclusion of inserts into shot-reverse shot action sequences is more complex, not less. In part, this is true; the inserts create a more visually complex sequence. However, I argue that the inserts also create simple statements: Rambo, gun, Rambo, explosion. Because the consistent stasis of the aesthetically spectacular body conveys stalwart, physical power and immutability, the inserts create visual shortcuts associating the aesthetically spectacular body with simple, recognizable images conveying power, destruction, and explosiveness—sometimes literally. The idea that gaudy weaponry is often an extension of or stand-in for the action-adventure protagonist is not new. In fact, Eric Lichtenfeld dedicates an entire chapter in *Action Speaks Louder* to the concept, concluding, “If their bodies represent and reinforce the destructive power the characters wield, then the bodies of another stable of stars, working concurrently, are the instruments themselves.”

Schwarzenegger, Stallone, Ventura, Lundgren, and Weathers don’t speak; they let their guns speak for them. Ultimately, the costuming, props, special effects, action sequences, inserts, and lack of dialogue all go toward framing the aesthetically spectacular action hero as a stoic colossus:

Shielding Schwarzenegger’s eyes from view, the addition of the sunglasses to the Terminator’s outfit removes one more level of expressiveness—and therefore, adds one more layer reinforcing his juggernaut presence. Schwarzenegger delivers a minimum of
dialogue, and in two of the instances where the cyborg does talk, it does not use Schwarzenegger’s voice. Instead, it speaks with the electronically sampled voices of a police officer and of Sarah’s mother to further its aims. In Schwarzenegger’s voice, one of the Terminator’s most extensive dialogue runs is merely the list of weapons he recites to a gun store proprietor.\textsuperscript{32}

 Inserts of various weapons that aesthetically spectacular action heroes carry—and the destruction those weapons cause—are meant to provide quick, strong associations that help audiences identify what kind of characters they are. In the case of characters like Dutch, Rambo, and Dillon and Blain, that identity is one of simple, silent power and strong, masculine virility. This is all in lieu of any real character development.

 **How Kinesthetically Spectacular and Aesthetically Spectacular Bodies Alter and Augment Dialogue**

 In contrast, characters like Jones’s and Riggs’s dialogue factors more heavily in their films as a whole and their shot-reverse shot action sequences in particular. For example, in the *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* sacrifice sequence referenced earlier, Jones explains to Willie and Short Round what they are witnessing:

 Jones: It’s a Thuggee ceremony. They’re worshiping Kali, the Goddess of Death and Destruction.

 Willie: I’ve never seen anything like this before.

 Jones: Nobody’s seen this in a hundred years.

 At this point, the sacrifice emerges, is shackled into a cage, and Mola Ram removes his heart; Willie turns away screaming and Short Round gasps. Jones keeps looking and describes the scene with quiet, but visible, panic. “He’s still alive,” Jones says.
The sacrifice is lowered into a swirling pit of lava. The music swells. The cuts come fast and furious. Jones looks on, but is visibly shaken by the unfolding events below him. Jones is not just passive, he’s afraid. However, even in the face of intense, violent action, he dispenses knowledge and participates in a dialogue with those around him. This is in direct contrast to the silent stoic characters the likes of which have been played by Schwarzenegger and Stallone. In fact, Jones also talks throughout the rope bridge showdown with Mola Ram and in the scene where Short Round saves him from Mola Ram’s hypnotism.

Riggs is also remarkably chatty even through the most action-soaked (often bloody) scenes, an updated reference to the slapstick tradition of early film. Riggs’s constant talking, and the reference to vaudevillian physical comedy, exemplifies the levity present in the action-adventure films that feature kinesthetically spectacular bodies in the 1980s. And, traditionally, comedy is often a complex medium that has been regarded as “notoriously difficult to define, let alone explain.” This complexity, coupled with comedy’s roots in antiauthoritarianism, makes for more agile, more flexible narrative content that pairs congruently with the kinesthetically spectacular body. For example, in the drug bust scene at the Christmas tree lot in Lethal Weapon, Riggs not only does most of the talking before the bullets start flying, he continues to talk despite the hail of gunfire. After Riggs produces his badge and reveals his true identity, the scene unfolds as follows:

Drug Dealer #1: This badge ain’t real. You ain’t real.

Drug Dealer #2: Hell, you sure are a crazy son of a bitch.

Riggs: You think I’m crazy?

Drug Dealer #3: Yeah.

Riggs: You’re calling me crazy? You think I’m crazy?
Drug Dealer #1: Yeah.

Riggs: Yeah? You wanna see crazy? (pulls out a sidearm) Now, that’s a real badge, I’m a real cop, and this is a real fucking gun.

Drug Dealer #1: Okay, pal.

Riggs: Noses in the dirt, asshole.

At this point in the scene, another thug appears behind Riggs and fires at him with a shotgun. Riggs dives out of the way just in time and the shot kills Drug Dealer #1. Drug Dealer #2 fires at Riggs, and Riggs returns fire. While Drug Dealer #2 writhes around in the dirt, Riggs scrambles over to him, takes his gun, and says, “Where’s your buddy?” Riggs leaves Drug Dealer #1 to frantically pursue Drug Dealer #3. Backup comes onto the scene:

Cop: What do you got, Riggs?

Riggs: There’s three down. There’s one loose in here—he’s got black hair and a red shirt.

Cop: Okay, let’s go. I’ll cover the left side.

Drug Dealer #3 emerges from behind a tree, grabs Riggs, and puts a gun up underneath his chin.

Drug Dealer #3: Give me the gun. How’s that feel, sucker?

Riggs: Hey, shoot ’em.

Cop: Drop it, prick.


Drug Dealer #3: Shut the fuck up.

Riggs: Somebody shoot this prick.

Cop: Freeze.
Riggs: Shoot ’em. Shoot ’em. Someone shoot this prick.

Drug Dealer #3: Shut up.

Riggs turns toward Drug Dealer #3:

Riggs: Shoot me. Shoot me. Shoot me. Go ahead, shoot me.

Drug Dealer #3: Shut the fuck up.

Riggs: Shoot me. Shoot me. Shoot me. Shoot me.

Riggs whirls around, takes the gun from Drug Dealer #3, and shoves it under his chin. Riggs manically mumbles and curses. The backup takes Drug Dealer #3 off the scene. Roughly lasting the same amount of time as the escalator scene in *Total Recall*, this scene features significantly more dialogue, especially from the star protagonist, Riggs. In some ways, the stoicism of the aesthetically spectacular action star—and the contrasting nature of the Riggs character—is highlighted by Drug Dealer #3 incessantly telling Riggs to shut up. It’s as if Drug Dealer #3 and the film itself are both aware that a prototypical action star in the 1980s doesn’t talk so much. But, Riggs not only runs around, shoots his gun, and scrambles through the dirt, he doesn’t stop talking while he’s doing it. Riggs does this throughout *Lethal Weapon*, *Lethal Weapon 2*, and *Lethal Weapon 3* (1992).

Between the increase in dialogue, the subtle differences in afterimage, and the inclusion or exclusion of inserts, the shot-reverse shot technique is quite different depending on the type of body starring in the action-adventure film in question. These differences don’t just signal an artistic or visual difference in style, they also signal a difference in social and cultural messages. While these differences in message will be covered in detail in later chapters, it can be noted now that the inverse of the stoic, weapon- or explosion-linked, aesthetically spectacular action character is the talkative, culturally attuned, and kinesthetically spectacular action character. In
short, the kinesthetically spectacular body often belongs to an action-adventure character that is more complex and has a social identity that isn’t one-dimensional.

**How Inserts, Afterimages, and Dialogue Highlight the Kinesthetically Spectacular Bodies in the Original Star Wars Trilogy**

There are very few inserts in either *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* or *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi*, and the inserts that do occur are traditional storytelling mechanisms that foreshadow events or call attention to small objects—there are no examples of the kind of inserts that appear in films like *Total Recall*. There are, however, visual sequences in *Star Wars, Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back*, and *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi* that connect the protagonists to their starships. In all three films, but particularly *Star Wars* and *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back*, the ships that Solo and Skywalker pilot are as much, if not more, a part of them as a sawed-off shotgun is a part of the Terminator or the Ka-Bar survival knife is part of Rambo. Where the shotgun and the Ka-Bar convey strength, size, and power, Solo’s Millennium Falcon and Skywalker’s X-Wing convey speed, agility, grace, and maneuverability. And while there are no traditional shot-reverse shot sequences that convey a linkage between character and craft, there are several scenes that are similar in both visual makeup and consequence.

One particularly good example can be found in *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* — immediately following the evacuation of Hoth, the Millennium Falcon is seen fleeing from a Star Destroyer and four TIE fighters; the Millennium Falcon is flying toward the camera when the scene cuts and the same action is seen in reverse. The scene cuts again, this time to a sequence of Solo, Chewbacca (Peter Mayhew), Leia, and C-3PO (Anthony Daniels) arguing in the cockpit. The final frame of the sequence is a medium-close shot of Solo, which is
followed by four shots of the TIE fighters in pursuit of a sharp turning, barrel rolling Millennium Falcon. Once again, the scene cuts to another sequence inside the cockpit of the Millennium Falcon. This is followed by another cut and another shot of the Millennium Falcon evading the TIE fighters. Finally, a shot of Solo lying facedown in the ship’s engine compartment. At this point, the crew of the Millennium Falcon finds itself inside an asteroid field—one of the best-known scenes in any of the three films. In the asteroid field scene, there are several back-to-back-to-back shots that feature a shot of Solo followed by a shot of the Millennium Falcon followed by another shot of Solo—these sequences are sandwiched between shots of the pursuing TIE fighters running into asteroids.

Although none of the above-mentioned scenes or sequences feature a traditional shot-reverse shot technique, the back-to-back-to-back Solo to Millennium Falcon to Solo montages intimately tie Solo to the quick and agile Millennium Falcon. Solo is not only shown as a literal part of the ship—we see him in the guts of the machine—he is visually connected to it by montage editing. Each back-to-back-to-back sequence begins with a close or medium-close shot of Solo, which is followed by an outside-the-cockpit sequence of the Millennium Falcon flying, and concluded with another close or medium-close shot of Solo. This is not dissimilar to the sequence in Total Recall—but both scenes intimately tie their protagonist to an inanimate object. However, Solo’s inanimate object connotes speed and maneuverability, not death, destruction, and brute force. Additionally, these sequences are themselves linked to the evasion and elimination of the pursuing TIE fighters: the Millennium Falcon’s ability to overcome opponents—and by extension, Solo’s ability—is realized through quick and deft movement, not firepower.
Similarly, Skywalker’s X-Wing, especially in *Star Wars*, is a quick and nimble extension of the character, almost identical in effect to the connection between Solo and the Millennium Falcon. Skywalker’s most emblematic moment of connection with his X-Wing comes in another well-known scene, the Death Star trench run scene at the conclusion of *Star Wars*. After the first squadron of X-Wings are either shot down or unable to bring down the Death Star, Skywalker’s squadron is sent in to run the trench, a run that ultimately ends with Skywalker turning off his targeting computer—at the behest of a disembodied Obi-Wan Kenobi (Alec Guinness)—taking his shot, and blowing up the Death Star. The first, of several, visual montages that intimate a connection between Skywalker and his X-Wing occurs at the beginning of this trench run. This sequences opens with a close shot of Skywalker in the cockpit of the X-Wing, followed by a medium-long shot of three X-Wing’s banking, followed by a POV shot showing the dive into the trench. Skywalker is the squadron leader and is positioned at the point of a wedge formation for the duration of the run, thus leading to the conclusion that the POV shot is from Skywalker’s X-Wing’s perspective. There are several more POV shots in the ten-minute sequence, some from inside the cockpit and some from outside the cockpit, but all from Skywalker’s or his X-Wing’s perspective. Altogether, there are five sequences that consist of at least two back-to-back shots of Skywalker and the X-Wing, respectively. The most extensive of these sequences occurs shortly after Skywalker enters the Death Star trench. The sequence begins with a medium profile shot of the X-Wing evading laser fire and is followed by a close-up of Skywalker, a POV from the nose of the X-Wing, and then another close-up of Skywalker, in that order.

Just like Solo and the Millennium Falcon, the sequences in the Death Star trench intimately tie Skywalker to his nimble X-Wing. And just as Solo is found in the bowels of the Millennium Falcon, making him a part of the machine, the POV shots graft Luke onto the X-
Wing and vice versa; the character and the craft are at times a single, agile entity. And if there is any doubt as to the intended characteristics of the Millennium Falcon or the X-Wing, or Skywalker’s and Solo’s proficiency as pilots, the dialogue itself provides plenty of evidence. For example, right before Skywalker makes his run into the Death Star trench, he offers speed as the solution to the enemy fighters:

Skywalker: Biggs, Wedge. Let’s close it up. We’re going in. We’re going in full throttle. That ought to keep those fighters off our back.

Wedge: Right with you, boss.

Biggs: Luke, at that speed will you be able to pull out in time?

Skywalker: It’ll be just like Beggar’s Canyon back home.

Not only does Skywalker suggest speed as a solution to the problem, he reassures Biggs (Garrick Hagon), Wedge (Denis Lawson), and the rest of the pilots that his long-crafted abilities as a pilot—and by extension, the abilities of the X-Wing—will allow him to indeed pull out in time. The combination of Biggs’s skepticism, the Beggar’s Canyon line, and Skywalker’s decision to turn off his targeting computer to make what Solo calls a “one in a million” shot only serves to reinforce the idea that both Skywalker and his abilities with the X-Wing are beyond an ordinary kinesthetic measure. Skywalker professes as much only a few scenes before the trench run. In the pilot briefing before the attack on the Death Star, a fellow pilot expresses incredulity at the idea of actually being able to hit the small exhaust port the fighters are aiming for. Skywalker rebuffs him, saying, “It’s not impossible. I used to bull’s-eye womp rats in my T-16 back home. They’re not much bigger than two meters.” Ultimately, the X-Wing is Skywalker and Skywalker is the X-Wing. By examining the characteristics of the machine, one can discern the characteristics of
the character. In this case, both the machine and the character are fast, nimble, and extraordinarily capable in terms of maneuverability, agility, and accuracy.

This kind of dialogic connection between man and machine is made between Solo and the Millennium Falcon as well. The first of such connections occurs in *Star Wars*, when Kenobi and Skywalker meet Solo and Chewbacca for the first time:

Solo: Han Solo. I’m captain of the Millennium Falcon. Chewie here tells me you’re looking for passage to the Alderaan system.

Kenobi: Yes, indeed. If it’s a fast ship.

Solo: Fast ship? You’ve never heard of the Millennium Falcon?

Kenobi: Should I have?

Solo: It’s the ship that made the Kessel run in less than twelve parsecs! I’ve outrun Imperial starships—not the local bulk-cruisers, mind you—I’m talking about the big Corellian ships now. She’s fast enough for you, old man. What’s the cargo?

This expression of speed is also made in *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi*, right before the attack on the second Death Star. Solo lends the Millennium Falcon to Lando Calrissian (Billy Dee Williams):

Solo: Look, I want you to take her. I mean it. Take her. You need all the help you can get. She’s the fastest ship in the fleet.

Calrissian: All right, old buddy. You know, I know what she means to you. I’ll take good care of her. She won’t get a scratch. All right?

Solo: Right. I got your promise now. Not a scratch.

Calrissian: Look, would you get going, you pirate.
Not only does this dialogue intimate the speed and kinesthetic ability of the Millennium Falcon, it once again reinforces the bond between Solo and his ship. Like Skywalker and the X-Wing, the Millennium Falcon and Solo are intimately tethered. Interestingly, like the character’s themselves, Skywalker’s X-Wing never seems to breakdown, while Solo’s Millennium Falcon occasionally malfunctions, forcing a brute strength tactic or clever strategy in response to adversity. However, both Solo and the Millennium Falcon are ultimately clever, agile, and quick and predominantly rely on those traits to combat danger.

Finally, both Skywalker and Solo speak more dialogue than what is uttered by aesthetically spectacular bodies. Additionally, the situations during which dialogue is spoken is significantly different when comparing kinesthetically spectacular bodies and aesthetically spectacular bodies. Skywalker and Solo are both seen speaking throughout intense action sequences; a radically different dynamic in comparison to bigger, aesthetically spectacular bodies, who remain nearly silent during such scenes. Interestingly, Vader (a character established as aesthetically spectacular) speaks significantly less than either Skywalker or Solo during battle sequences. Regardless of the film—*Star Wars, Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back,* or *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi*—both Skywalker and Solo maintain a stream of dialogue during battle. One of the first examples of this within the trilogy occurs shortly after Solo and Skywalker escape from the Death Star with Leia. After getting clear of the Death Star, the crew of the Millennium Falcon runs into a line of Imperial sentry ships and have to blast their way through; Solo enlists Skywalker in the defense of the ship with a “Come on, buddy, we’re not out of this yet!” Solo and Skywalker each take a gun port, strap on headsets, and turn on their mounted, computer-assisted cannons. Then Solo again: “You in, kid? Okay, stay sharp!” The scene cuts to Chewbacca and Leia in the cockpit of the Millennium Falcon, then to an insert of
Solo’s targeting insert, and then to a POV shot from the cockpit of four approaching TIE fighters. Leia and Chewbacca raise the alarm, the score swells, and the TIE fighters being to attack:

  Skywalker: They’re coming in too fast!

  Leia: We’ve lost lateral controls.

  Solo: Don’t worry, she’ll hold together. You hear me, baby? Hold together.

Solo and Skywalker each take down a TIE fighter:

  Solo: Ha ha!

  Skywalker: Got him! I got him!

  Solo: Great, kid! Don’t get cocky.

  Leia: There are still two more of them out there!

Solo and Skywalker manage to shoot down the other two in dialogic silence, only speaking again to express relief. Solo sighs, while Skywalker, Chewbacca, and Leia celebrate. In this two-minute sequence, twelve lines of dialogue are uttered (or somewhere around fifteen if one were to count Chewbacca’s grunts and clicks). Skywalker and Solo spoke nine of the lines. This is in direct contrast to the amount of dialogue uttered by protagonists in films like First Blood, Rambo: First Blood Part II, Conan the Barbarian, The Terminator, or Terminator 2: Judgment Day, especially during battles. Conan doesn’t speak much throughout Conan the Barbarian and not at all during action sequences. The same can be said for John Rambo in any of the Rambo films.

  Solo is at his most chatty during the sail barge fight scene in Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi. Despite being temporarily blinded by the effects of hibernation sickness, Solo is a full participant in the battle and manages nineteen lines—121 words—of dialogue in six
minutes. This is more than any other character that appears in the sail barge fight scene, and significantly more than, for example, Rambo in the same amount of time at any point in Rambo: First Blood Part II. In Rambo: First Blood Part II, Rambo delivers approximately seventy-three lines throughout the entire ninety-six-minute film; these lines add up to approximately 396 words, almost half of which are delivered in the last few minutes of the film. In six minutes, Solo manages to utter more than 30 percent of Rambo’s entire word count in Rambo: First Blood Part II. Similarly, in Terminator 2: Judgment Day, the Terminator manages to deliver approximately 110 lines of dialogue in 137 minutes. While his word count is higher than Rambo’s, it doesn’t begin to approach Solo’s in any of the three original Star Wars films, especially during action sequences. Where Rambo and the Terminator are entirely silent during the action, Solo remains loquacious. The same can be said, in part, for Skywalker.

Conclusion

Simply put, the technical half of filmic spectacle is the way a movie is shot, edited, written, acted, and produced to highlight its scale, its tension, and its excitement. And while films like Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom, Rambo: First Blood Part II, and Predator are each shot, edited, and produced in ways that do indeed emphasize spectacle, a closer inspection reveals that these films are technically constructed for and around the bodies of the protagonists. A kinesthetically spectacular body (Ford, Hamill, Keaton, and others) is filmed, framed, and edited differently than an aesthetically spectacular body (Schwarzenegger, Stallone, Weathers, and others). Even the dialogue—its amount and complexity—differ according to the kind of body featured. While the technical dimensions of a film featuring an aesthetically spectacular body visually emphasizes strength and resolve, the technical dimensions of a film featuring a kinesthetically spectacular body
emphasizes speed and agility. Therefore, while the action-adventure films that features these bodies are all spectacular—that is, fit the definition of spectacle as outlined by theorists and scholars—that spectacle is derived from radically different sources in terms of production.

In addition to the traditional definitions of spectacle (big sets, lots of extras, special effects, and the like) and the technical dimension that I have laid out here, there is an affective dimension that will be explored in the following chapter. This affective dimension not only provides additional evidence of a perceptible, significant split between films that feature aesthetically spectacular bodies and films that feature kinesthetically spectacular bodies, it also elucidates the significance of such a split. Where an exploration of the technical dimension reveals differences we can see, an exploration of the affective dimension is more concerned with the difference we experience with our physiological selves. As will become apparent in the following chapters, the technical dimension of spectacle and the affective dimension spectacle ultimately go hand in hand—they are intimately, intricately linked. Accordingly, both of these dimensions shift depending on the kind of body or bodies being filmed—the way a movie is shot and edited or the motifs it manifests change as a result of the featured physique. At first glance, it appears that spectacle is achieved in the same ways from film to film—regardless of the body or bodies on display. A closer look, however, reveals the opposite; the kinesthetically spectacular body and the aesthetically spectacular body radically alter the way in which a film is created and experienced.
Notes


2. It should be noted that Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back is the second highest grossing action film of the 1980s, but it falls behind Star Wars: Episode VI – Return of the Jedi. As such, Star Wars: Episode VI – Return of the Jedi will serve as the primary resource when considering the 1980s Star Wars canon.


5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid., 56.

8. Ibid.


10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.


14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., 256

17. Ibid., 259.

18. Ibid., 261.


22. Ibid.


24. Gauntlett, Media, Gender, and Identity, 42.


28. Ibid.


32. Ibid., 80.

CHAPTER 3: AESTHETIC BODIES, KINESTHETIC BODIES, AND HOW THEY CONTRIBUTE TO THE AFFECTIVE COMPONENT OF SPECTACLE

As it was with the technical dimension of spectacle, the affective dimension of spectacle is common to both the aesthetic and the kinesthetic bodies featured in the action-adventure films of the 1980s. And also as it was with the technical dimension of spectacle, the aesthetic and kinesthetic bodies that populate the action-adventure genre in the 1980s share similarities, but are, decidedly, different in regard to affect—that is, they by themselves are stimuli that initiate an affective process and they support the configuration of stimuli present in their movies in distinctive ways. These spectacular bodies, in films like *The Terminator, Terminator 2: Judgment Day, First Blood, Rambo: First Blood Part II, Predator, Raiders of the Lost Ark, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom, Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, the original Star Wars trilogy, and *Batman* all initiate an affective process. And that affective process may seem to culminate in similar ways—a shortness of breath, a quickened pulse, a variety of similar emotions. However, upon closer inspection, each type of body initiates the affective process by different means, which in turn produces different emotional results for both the characters on-screen and the audiences in the seats. In short, Arnold Schwarzenegger and his aesthetically spectacular body does not tap into or support the same socialization or cultural knowledge—knowledge that shapes the affective process—that Harrison Ford’s kinesthetically spectacular body taps into and supports. As a result, affective responses that universally factor into the spectacle seen in the top action-adventure films of the 1980s—like clenched fists—are tapping into different cultural understandings depending on the type of body featured in each particular film.
In this chapter, the affective dimension of spectacle will be explored with particular attention paid to the different ways the affective process is initiated. As one will discover, the way kinesthetically spectacular bodies contribute to that process will be different from the way aesthetically spectacular bodies contribute to that process. Additionally, the action-adventure films in the 1980s that feature kinesthetically spectacular bodies (not the bodies themselves) initiate the affective process in different ways than those that feature aesthetically spectacular bodies, even though they may be seemingly identical. In regard to kinesthetically spectacular bodies and the affective processes they help initiate, the Indiana Jones trilogy in the 1980s, which includes *Raiders of the Lost Ark, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, will be examined closely, much in the same way that the previous chapter examined the original Star Wars trilogy in relation to technical subcategories. Additionally, chapter 3, again like chapter 2, will invoke a number of films that fall outside the primary source. As for aesthetically spectacular bodies, the work of Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone in the 1980s—more specifically *Predator* and *Rambo: First Blood Part II*—will factor heavily into the examination of affect as it pertains to the physical body. Other top action-adventure films in the 1980s that feature aesthetically spectacular bodies will be referenced and utilized where appropriate.

In order to fully understand the different ways affect manifests in relation to the type of body being filmed, a thorough exploration and elucidation of affect and its subsequent elements must be simultaneously carried out. This chapter will define affect in theoretical terms and apply the concept in analyses of the films under review. The principal theorists considered are Teresa Brennan, Melissa Gregg, Gregory Seigworth, Brian Massumi, Patricia Clough, Nigel Thrift, and Megan Watkins.
A Detailed Definition of Affect Theory

Affect theory is gaining traction within the humanities as an answer to questions still left unanswered by more traditional theoretical approaches. As a mix of social, cultural, physical, and psychological modes of inquiry, affect theory is an attempt to explore and explain the liminal space between sociocultural mechanisms (social institutions, sociocultural constructions of intangible ideas like race and gender, group behavior, and social or cultural mores) and the emotional and physiological makeup of the individual. In short, affect theory argues that society and culture can, and do, have a physiological impact on the self.

Affect can be simply defined as the preconscious physiological response—rendered onto one’s body—to stimuli; a process that is, upon closer inspection, shaped by sociocultural patterns and macro-level socialization. Gregg and Seigworth, invoking Silvan Tomkins and Massumi, parallel this definition, writing, “these wires are by no means fully insulated nor do they terminate with the brain or flesh; instead they spark and fray just enough to transduce those influences borne along by ambient irradiation of social relations.”¹ Similarly, Sara Ahmed writes, “I do not assume there is something called affect that stands apart or has autonomy, as if it corresponds to an object in the world, or even that there is something called affect that can be shared as an object of study. Instead, I would begin with the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds, and the drama of contingency, how we are touched by what we are near.”² Affect is described in both cases in terms of social influence, cultural experience, and the impact that culture (and our being a part of it) has on our physiological functions. In fact, one scholar (Brennan) writes of affect in terms of “energies” that are not self-contained; she ultimately argues that “there is no secure distinction between” individuals and environments.³ The mind and body are intimately entwined with their environments and are unsurprisingly
impressed upon by them. This concept of energy is purely metaphorical and is invoked as a way to envision the interconnectedness of emotions, cultural environs, and social bonds that play on each other. As such, the things, people, and places we know influence our affective experience—that is, our socioculturally shaped, preconscious physiological reaction to configurations of sights and sounds.

Consider the following film: *The Notebook* (2004). *The Notebook* is well known for being emotionally charged and often leaving viewers in tears. And even a cursory Google search using the query “men cry while watching the notebook” reveals that even those who are traditionally socialized against such open displays of emotion are caught up in the spectacle of drama.¹

Why do American men—traditionally conditioned to stymie emotional responses when they experience love, loss, and tenderness—cry when watching *The Notebook*? Affect theory offers an answer. It should be noted that I am not suggesting that men are more susceptible to affect; both men and women will experience affect as result of watching *The Notebook*. However, American males are generally more conditioned (socially, culturally) to resist outward emotional responses, yet they cry, shake, and well with emotion, while viewing of *The Notebook*. According to affect theory, such reactions are not emotions, but preconscious reactions that lie beyond the control of the individual. That’s not to say that affect and emotion are mutually exclusive. Quite the opposite. An emotional response is a conscious, meaning-making process that aims to make sense of an affective reaction. And while they are technically sequential (not simultaneous) the time it takes to experience both is so quick they often appear parallel—tears and sadness, for example, often appear to be simultaneous in their manifestation onto the body. The concept that preconscious affective reactions to film can trump (even for just an instance) one’s conscious, understanding of culture, gender, education, or any combination thereof, speaks
to the potential value of affect theory in film studies. It also goes a long way toward illustrating a symbiotic relationship between film—especially popular film—and culture.

To illustrate, let us revisit this dissertation’s established definition of affect: the preconscious physiological response—rendered onto one’s body—to stimuli; a process that is, upon closer inspection, shaped by sociocultural patterns and macro-level socialization. In the example of *The Notebook*, the preconscious physiological response could be crying, butterflies, tingling, a sense of lightness—all things one might experience or associate with cultural ideas of love, romance, or longing. And while affect is chiefly a physical response, it is so quickly followed by conscious thought that it is often confused with emotion. As such, crying may be quickly followed by sadness, or butterflies and tingling maybe quickly followed by desire. Essentially, *The Notebook* is able to—through a configuration of sights and sounds—trick one’s body into reacting as it might in an actual romantic exchange. This sensation, this affect, is sandwiched between the preconscious processing of well-established, learned, integrated socialization and the reengagement of conscious processing. This is the same for all affect; affect arises as a result of interacting with sensory configurations that convince one’s own mind and body that it has experienced a certain event. Sometimes that event has actually taken place (a funeral) sometimes it has not (a funeral in a movie). In this case, the stimulus, or sensory configuration, is the framing, editing, acting, actions, and objects of *The Notebook* itself.

Affect is influenced not only by our own socialization, but also our relationship with and our consumption of popular culture. A majority of Americans will have a cursory knowledge, whether or not it is intentionally acquired, of one or more Shakespearean romances, *Casablanca* (1942), the concepts of dating and marrying for love, celebrity nuptials, John Hughes and Molly Ringwald, or Taylor Swift and her oeuvre, among other things. What this embedded knowledge
of the zeitgeist does is form a subconscious, culturally specific conception of romance and love. In a traditionally American context (although what is considered traditional is slowly evolving), this conception includes a handsome heterosexual man and a beautiful heterosexual woman, intense emotions, and grand gestures. This conception of love and romance is ubiquitous: it fills airwaves, movie screens, tablets, televisions, and literature. It surrounds us in some sort of cultural ether that gets embedded into our minds. As a result, people are subconsciously conditioned to react to love and romance in certain, traditional ways. Even things like color (black hats and white hats) or sound (minor chords and major chords) influence one’s affective and emotional responses. Cinematography also impacts and shapes affective responses by establishing tropes and conventions—a medium shot of a kiss in the rain, a tight shot of a handsome suitor on one knee, slow cuts, and establishing shots teeming with sunrises and sunsets are but a few of the familiar tropes that help establish a conception of romance in American society’s collective consciousness (see figure 25).

Figure 25. Google Image search for “movie rain kiss.”
And unless one were to remove oneself completely from society, these tropes, colors (light blues and muted greens are common in the romance genre), sounds (soft strings in a minor key), ideas, and ideals (all of which are pervasive) will permeate the psyche and shape physiological, affective reactions regardless of want or intention. As a result, men who are not supposed to cry (as prescribed by the overarching patriarchy), while watching romantic movies, run into an even more powerful mixture of sociocultural conditioning that results in tears.

There are several ways one could approach affect theory, including phenomenology, neuroscience and bioengineering, non-Cartesian philosophical traditions, and psychoanalysis, but this study works with the concept of affect that has been laid out above—a cultural studies understanding of affect and its liminal position between culture and the self. This concept will inform the subsequent analyses.

Lone Bertelsen and Andrew Murphy understand affect as a cistern of “maybes” from which affect is realized. Bertelsen and Murphy explain that “we live the affective carriage of future potential, affect’s transversality through different temporalities—affect’s virtuality.” They ultimately conclude that “the virtual is the pool of relational potential from which the affective event is drawn.” In other words, before conscious thought, before an event, feeling, or action has transpired, there are a limitless number of outcomes. It is in this moment of limitless outcome that affect resides; our preconscious mind (quickly informed by a lifetime of socialization and cultural knowledge) recognizes these outcomes—a deep chasm of potential—before the conscious mind, and our physiological selves react. Patricia Clough describes this exact process, writing, “As implicit form, affect is potential that as soon as it begins to take form dissolves back into complexity across all levels of matter, as quantum effects feed the indeterminacy appropriate to each level—the subatomic, the physical, the biological, and the
Affect is the process by which the preconscious mind recognizes and evaluates the multiplicity of possibilities presented to it through a moment of stimulus, and the body (without a person’s conscious consent) responds to them.

Clough argues that in a matter of nanoseconds, the preconscious mind forms—from the audiovisual evidence presented—a most likely scenario, and the body reacts. In Clough’s configuration, our preconscious minds will take in the casket, the gravestones, and the group of black-clad mourners with eyes downcast; connect those cues (separating them from an endless possibility of other connotations); recognize it as a funeral; and physiologically react with tears, chills, or a sensation of heaviness (see figure 26).

Figure 26. A Google Image search for “funeral in a movie.” Among the results is a picture from an actual funeral held for victims of the Aurora, Colorado, theater shooting (top row, second from the left).

However, some objects, events, or people are more potent (in terms initiating the affective process) than others. For example, in the United States, the American flag is loaded with meaning because it is informed by not only history but also politics, education, religion, the
cultural zeitgeist, personal experience, and upbringing, among other things (see figure 27). In comparison, a pebble on the side of the road may not trigger anything; after all, without a very specific set of circumstances, a rock is simply a rock.
Figure 27. An advertisement for *Olympus Has Fallen* (2013).
As an amalgamation of plots, subplots, characters, character motivations, props, settings, voices, faces, body types, cinematography, and sound design—all of which are traditionally woven into a coherent narrative—movies are rife with configurations of stimuli (potential or otherwise) and, as a result, can easily initiate a number of affective moments. A film’s affect is often intentionally guided in certain directions through the use of specific configurations of stimuli; this process of nudging an audience toward a specific response is understood as the mobilization of affect. Certain common arrangements of sights and sounds are more potent, in regard to affect, than others.

Filmmakers are able to narrow or focus the affective reaction to their film by loading up on powerful, recognizable, audiovisual stimulation. And, by narrowing and focusing that stimulation, filmmakers are able to shape, mold, or otherwise manipulate (often bolster) the emotional connection between consumer and product. This shaping and manipulation of emotion through the mobilization of affective is, by no means, a guarantee of success. As it is with the careful orchestration of advertisements, media saturation, and other factors in the express intention of creating a blockbuster, the mobilization of affect and a careful arrangement audiovisual stimulation is an attempt to hedge bets, not necessarily dictate the future. However, in the same way that failed blockbusters still retain a litany of characteristics that contribute to successful blockbusters, configurations that initiate the affective process remain whether or not they work on the audience as intended. I now turn to the concept of intention versus reception, or Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model of communication.

The main thrust of Hall’s model states that communication is not simply a linear “circulation circuit or loop” involving a sender, message, and receiver, but “a structure produced and sustained through the articulation of linked but distinctive moments—production,
circulation, distribution, consumption, reproduction.” In Hall’s model, messages are not simply sent and received without any data loss, as previous models of communication suggested. Instead, Hall suggests that on each end of the loop there are moments of influence and interpretation. For instance, instead of senders, Hall’s model has producers; this is where communication begins. Unlike senders, producers aren’t merely sending a message, but crafting a message with specific intention; this intention could be, for example, to communicate urgency, to persuade listeners, or entertain viewers. Located on the other end of Hall’s model are consumers engaged in reproduction, not just simple receivers; these consumers negotiate, interpret, and otherwise reproduce the intended message. In the process of reproducing the message, consumers often read the sent message in ways not intended by the producer of the message. For example, a politician may produce a message that is intended to be a rallying cry for immigration reform and increased tolerance, but some consumers may receive and reconstruct the message as disingenuous pandering to minority demographics. Hall’s model provides a theoretical framework for any conversation concerning intention versus reception.

Ultimately, this dissertation is more focused on the intention end of Hall’s model. What are action-adventure filmmakers in the 1980s communicating? How are they communicating it? Why are they communicating it? The reception end is, in part, accounted for. After all, the films in this study made a lot of money, which means that they were consumed en masse. And en masse consumption suggests a consensus reception of some kind. In other words, we can assume that the reproduction of the intended message was largely reconstructed in ways that resonated; consumers reacted positively to what the producers of the message were communicating. Additionally, the intention on the producer end of Hall’s model is quite discernible when one considers the history of American filmmaking. American filmmaking has traditionally been
about consistency of product; too much variation in a single product historically nets financiers a smaller return on investment. One only has to remember Coca Cola’s infamous new formula. A predictable product, with a proven return, is preferred by entertainment investors every time; that is why sequels, spoofs, and genre films saturate the market. How do producers make sure that their product is predictable? Repetition. American filmmaking is notorious for committing to predictable patterns and familiar tropes: the hero always wins, the bad guy always wears black, and the guy always gets the girl at the last possible moment, usually in an airport. While this doesn’t make for varied storytelling, it does make for recognizable patterns—recognizable patterns that are both technically spectacular, affectively spectacular and, ultimately, culturally revealing for participants on both ends of Hall’s model.

The second chapter of this study—the technical dimension of spectacle—outlines a number of technical components (framing and editing) that contribute to spectacle and are common to action-adventure films produced in the 1980s. These technical components can and do help initiate the affective process, but this chapter in general, and the succeeding sections in particular, are going to move toward content (people, things, music, color, symbols, icons) that also help initiate the affective process.

Also vital to the creation and mobilization of affect is the transmission of affect, a process by which physiological events are generated by, and shared among, individuals. The transmission of affect is important to this project, as the human body (in my conception of film and affect) plays a substantial role in its creation. In short, kinesthetically spectacular bodies and aesthetically spectacular bodies generally help movies initiate affective processes.

Analogous to literal forms of energy, which is often used as a metaphor, affect can be stored, released, transmitted, shared, and passed from one body to another, so to speak. In several
works on affect, energy often stands in as both a metaphysical understanding of and a metaphor for affect. To transmit affect is to radiate and share culturally constructed energies that have physiological effects on one’s self and others. Brennan identifies the transmission of affect as a process that is social in origin but biological and physical in effect. The origin of transmitted affects is social in that these affects do not only arise within a particular person, but also come from without. They come via an interaction with other people and an environment. But they have a physiological impact. By transmission of affect, I mean simply that the emotions or affects of one person, and the enhancing or depressing energies these affects entail, can enter into another.\(^9\)

Again, it should be noted that in most accepted conceptions of the theory, affect lies alongside emotion, it is not synonymous with it: “At present, the literature treats feelings as a subset of affects, along with moods, sentiments, and emotions.”\(^{10}\) Confusing matters further is the fact that affect is simultaneously the name given to the process and the outcome of the process. An emotional response, however, is the end product of affect—ultimately, a recognizable and definable (if not culturally constructed) feeling. Emotion is, by most accounts, a conscious identification of the physiological event. Brennan refers to this as “sensations that have found the right match in words.”\(^{11}\) Affect can be circulated, received, communicated, and experienced. Again, an energy metaphor is extremely useful in explaining the modes and movements of affect. However, the transmission of affect is ultimately about the certainty that culturally informed, physiological states of being, can, and do, circulate between people as if autonomously deriving from the subjects themselves:
The transmission of affect, whether it is grief, anxiety, or anger, is social or physiological in origin. But the transmission is also responsible for bodily changes; some are brief changes, as in a whiff of the room’s atmosphere, some longer lasting. In other words, the transmission of affect, if only for an instant, alters the biochemistry and neurology of the subject. The “atmosphere” or the environment literally gets into the individual. Physically and biologically, something is present that was not there before, but it did not originate sui generis: it was not generated solely or sometimes even in part by the individual organism or its genes.\textsuperscript{12}

In other words, the affective is initiated by social or cultural matrices that exist outside of one’s own body and that affect can transfer, with physical effect—additionally, affect can spread from one body to another. This concept of transmission even has a place among idioms in the English language: “spreading cheer,” “you can cut the tension with a knife,” and “that person’s smile is infectious” are but a few examples of this.

The acceptance of affect as a legitimate phenomenon even works its way into popular comedies, which have often been regarded as vehicles of truth-telling.\textsuperscript{13} One particularly representative example of this appears in the form of an oft-quoted scene in the film \textit{Step Brothers} (2008).\textsuperscript{14} In the film, Dale (John C. Reilly) arrives home to find Brennan (Will Ferrell) sprawled out on the couch, sweaty, winded, and watching television. Dale, worried that Brennan may have played his drum kit while he was gone, asks Brennan, “Why are you so sweaty?” Brennan calmly replies, “I was watching \textit{Cops}.” And it isn’t until Dale realizes that \textit{Cops} hasn’t come on yet that he questions Brennan’s response. In other words, it was reasonable to both Dale and Brennan that even through recorded media, the officers, criminals, and suspected criminals on \textit{Cops} (not to mention the way the show is shot and edited) could transmit their emotions and
energies (excitement, fear, adrenaline) to viewers at home. And while this particular exchange is comedic, it is funny because it resonates with audiences on an affective level—audiences laugh at the transmission of affect, a transmission they themselves may have experienced in one form or another at some point. Those who laughed at this quip laughed, in part, because they understood, on some level, affective transmission and had, at one point, experienced something similar themselves. Regardless of the way in which it is defined, moods, affects, and emotions are transferrable from that body to another.

Additionally, objects, not just people, can be imbued with meaning and can transmit affect as if they themselves were people. In *The Transmission of Affect*, Brennan argues that affect can be stored, released, and transmitted by inanimate objects and environs: “Visitors to New York City or Delphi testify happily to the energy that comes out of the pavement in the one and the ancient peace of the other.”15 This is a popular notion of affect that conceptualizes the phenomenon as a wild yet ultimately understandable and employable cultural energy that can reside in objects and places outside of human bodies. However, it is ultimately culture at large and the people that are players in that culture that give these objects agency. New York City pavement exudes energy by way of cultural contextualization—namely through reputation, history, and collective cultural identification. New York City’s pavement may not exude anything to someone who walks the streets without any knowledge of Broadway musicals, New Years Eve in Times Square, or the countless movies that take place or are filmed there. This is rare though, and as it stands, New York City (its streets, buildings, and symbols) work collectively as an object that can and does transmit affect. All of these concepts (which will be presented in the following pages) will work toward framing popular action-adventure films in the
1980s as objects capable of containing and exuding affective spectacle, a spectacle that changes depending on the type of body being highlighted.

**The Intentional Arrangement of Stimulation in an Attempt to Initiate the Affect Process**

In addition to transmission, affect can be intentionally mobilized with the specific purpose of emotional manipulation. Whether that intent is altruistic or malevolent is inconsequential, as mobilizing affect works the same way regardless. Often cited in discourses on political power, the mobilization of affect is the intentional attempt to align certain cultural elements in the hopes of eliciting an intense emotional response as way to sway, control, or deter. Who is intentionally aligning certain cultural elements? Ben Anderson, Massumi, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, and Bertelsen and Murphie, all point to those with power—namely political entities. In his article, “Modulating the Excess of Affect,” Anderson indicates that in moments of “total war,” the manipulation and mobilization of affect becomes as important to the tides of that conflict as guns, soldiers, and supplies. When Anderson refers to total war, he means a state of conflict that expands the concept of the battlefield beyond terrestrial military theaters and into civilian manufacturing, airspace, information, misinformation, and emotion or morale: “an expansion of the ‘front line’ of war through the advent of new extended technologies of destruction and damage that reduces the distance between home front and frontline, folding the two into one another.” In other words, total war is fought on an all-encompassing battlefield. Anderson argues that within this state of conflict, “governments invented ways of targeting and destroying morale and ways of protecting and harnessing it,” namely through the mobilization of affect. The emotional, affective psychology of both ally and enemy, and the means to control it, becomes another theater of war. This concept can be applied to the film industry and the idea of audience immersion; it is not enough for a film to simply be a set of moving pictures, it needs to
envelope the audience and connect to them on an emotional and physiological level. And, a film often has an agenda—a financial one, a political one, or both.

Directly referencing the United States’ entrance into WWII, Anderson highlights several affective techniques that addressed morale, such as the conducting and publishing of popular polls and targeted radio broadcasts. Anderson argues that radio was particularly effective as it was valorized for the “immediacy with which it enables certain collective affects—including the warmth of voice—to be communicated at a distance.” However, it was hoped that both polling and broadcasting could “enable a diffuse, heterogeneous population to coalesce into a defined public that sparks into being around issues.” Contrastingly, the dissemination of misinformation behind enemy lines was used to affectively disrupt morale. To subtly sow fear, mistrust, and anxiety through the triggering of emotional responses was a specified goal of the United States’ Office of Strategic Services. These were direct attempts to subtly manipulate (either negatively or positively) the public’s sense of being and the level of connection they felt to the war effort. An emotionally invested (or discouraged) wartime populace was a productive and supportive (or apathetic) populace. Either way, a positive allied populace and a negative enemy populace were instrumental in the war effort. Again, this isn’t unlike movies. Well written dialogue, seamless editing, believable acting, and other immersive qualities envelope the viewer, connecting them to the film in an affective way.

Yet, as Anderson points out, neither rumor nor radio was guaranteed to “produce a direct effect since both act by becoming part of the complex, living conditions that form and deform morale.” As it is with both the definition of affect itself and the concept that affect can be transmitted, the idea that affect can be mobilized must take into account the seemingly ephemeral nature of affect as a process of society, culture, and physiological response. While it
may seem to be ephemeral in nature, affect is, in reality, a product of a highly intricate, almost endlessly complex, matrix of socialization, circumstance, psychology, and biology; its complexity makes it seem ephemeral. Anderson suggests as much when he alludes to morale as an amorphous, highly contextual state of being. Again, this is easily comparable to Hollywood’s efforts to create spectacle, mobilize affect, and entrance audiences. When it works it is a financially successful blockbuster. When it doesn’t work it is a flop.

In a more contemporary, media-saturated setting, mobilizing affect can push, persuade, and otherwise manipulate in very powerful—and profitable—ways. In the always-on media environment of contemporary American life, the repetitive mobilization of affective spectacle is exploited, particularly in audiovisual mediums; this is an attempt to emotionally ensnare viewers and ensure profitability of product. When such a consumer model is employed in an online setting, it is often derided as clickbait (intentionally evocative but ultimately misleading headlines or topics that are meant to increase site traffic). Similarly, televised manifestations of this consumer model—commonly seen on cable news networks—are widely criticized for being sensational and a type of fearmongering. Ultimately, these tactics are in, the purest affective and technical terms, spectacle. The corporate broadcast media’s turn toward affect (instead of information) has even entered the American zeitgeist via, among other vehicles, Anchorman 2: The Legend Continues (2013), a pointed, satirically scathing critique of the 24-hour news model, media conglomerates, and emotionally manipulative media practices that mobilize affect as a way to drive spectacle in order to turn a profit. Regardless of the political or ethical implications of mobilizing affect in different audiovisual mediums, the practice is increasingly recognizable. However, the modern media does not create affective spectacle out of thin air. Instead, it arranges culturally significant visual, auditory, emotional, and social components to initiate an
affective process and shape affective responses—Anna Gibbs writes in *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* that “the media function as amplifiers and modulators of affect, which is transmitted by the human face and voice, and also by music and other forms of sound, and also by the image.” It is through the broadcast orchestration of component parts that media is able to mobilize affect. Carefully crafted sequences of spectacular audiovisual stimulation can unwittingly initiate an affective process that culminates in physiological events—chills, sweating, rapid heartbeat, anxiety, tension, and other symptoms. These reactions are shaped by carefully scripted displays of love, lust, patriotism, hunger, pride, or nostalgia. The twenty-four-hour news cycle retains viewers through emotional connection, even if that connection is manufactured. This is exactly the same way that the mobilization of affect works (or is intended to work) in film.

The twenty-four-hour news cycle mobilizes affect through a combination of audio, video, color, and symbolism to convince viewers that the affect they experience is a by-product of real news, not just manufactured feeling with no significant news attached. And if *Anchorman 2: The Legend Continues* is meant to be a satirical critique of the state of cable news networks in general, Stephen Colbert’s *The Colbert Report* is a satirical jab at the Fox News Channel’s manipulation of affect, in particular. *The Colbert Report* overtly mobilizes affect to satirize Fox News Channel’s mobilization of affect. One only has to look to *First Blood*, *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, *Rambo III*, and *Rambo* (2008) to understand the significance that patriotic symbolism can have on affect.

Ultimately, the mobilization of affect is the intentional arrangement of images, colors, sounds, and symbols with the express purpose of invoking a physiological reaction or state of being. And while cable news networks are perhaps the most recognizable entities in regards to
mobilizing affective spectacle, film is as—if not more—invested in mobilizing affect for financial gain.

**Audiovisual Patterns Intended to Initiate the Affective Process**

*Raiders of the Lost Ark, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom, and Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* contain certain audiovisual markers, arrangements, and patterns meant to take advantage of the audience’s socialization and cultural knowledge to initiate the affect process. When watching any of the three original Indiana Jones films, viewers may experience a number of different affective responses, including tension, exhilaration, elevated levels of adrenaline, and a quickened pulse—all of which are initiated by the films’ depictions of exploration, adventure, violence, and discovery. A close examination of the trilogy reveals a palette of earth tones, a soundtrack that incorporates both Western and non-Western musical scales, seemingly exotic settings, a host of indigenous (or at least indigenous-looking) extras, and a mise-en-scène that borrows heavily from pulp fiction and early Western films. In short, choices in casting, setting, sound, and color all can, and do, inform and contribute to the affective process and any emotions that follow.

These audiovisual patterns do not have meaning by themselves; instead, the color, music, and setting of the three films in question are sensory cues that tap into preconscious, cultural understandings of adventure, exploration, violence, and discovery. The brown earthy tones and pale sandy palette that dominate all three films, for example, tap into common perceptions of excavations and archaeology, adventure, the Middle East, Egypt, tombs, and ruins. Earth and earth tones are symbolically connected to the ground and to dirt, both of which are directly connected to the unearthing of the past, buried treasure, camping, and general cultural conceptions of adventure. At one point in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, there are people actually
digging by hand for buried treasure (see figure 28). Dirt, itself, is central to a number of popular American idioms that suggest adventuring and exploration, such as *hitting pay dirt*, *getting your hands dirty*, and *breaking new ground*. In short, dirt or earth or soil—generally thought of as having various shades of brown—is directly and culturally associated with exploration, discovery, adventure, determination, and generally speaking, also relates to hard, physical work. All of these associations inform a viewer’s response to what they see and hear on the screen. These associations inform the affective process. The color brown carries its own cultural associations and thus it has the ability to shape preconscious, affective responses.

Figure 28. Indiana Jones and other workers dig in the earth with their hands, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981).

*Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, for example, establishes and connects the color brown to adventure immediately at the onset of the film. *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* opens with a partial dissolve of Paramount Pictures’s production logo. An actual brown rock formation takes the place of the familiar production logo’s painted mountain scene—the words “a Paramount Picture” is superimposed over the formation before it too dissolves (see figure 29). After the dissolve, the camera pans down and to the right, passing over the entire formation
before scanning the reddish-brown scrub land at the base of the rock. The camera (close to the ground) continues to pan right before moving forward, up, and over a ridge, creating what is the first of five wide establishing shots that are reminiscent of similar establishing shots in a number of spaghetti Westerns from the late 1950s and early 1960s (see figure 30). Barely perceptible in these establishing shots is a line of riders on brown horses. The riders and their horses blend into the shots, not only because they are small, but because the shots themselves are awash in various shades of brown, reddish-brown, and tan. This establishing sequence is almost unbroken in its succession—between the first and second establishing shots is a medium-tight shot of the riders on their horses (see figure 31). As the scene progresses, it becomes apparent that these riders are a Boy Scout troop, as they are bedecked with brown camping packs, yellow kerchiefs, and drab green-and-tan uniforms complete with tan campaign hats. A young Indiana Jones is scouting a cave at the base of one of the rock formations when he discovers grave robbers deep in the formation. The young Jones steals a golden crucifix from the grave robbers, who give him chase over open land and onto a passing circus train. The chase from cave to train is a series of tight and medium-tight shots that come in quick succession, a technical strategy that creates spectacle and initiates an affective process, which renders tension, suspense, and excitement onto the body.

The quick establishment of the location (Moab, Utah) and the earthy palette it provides communicates to the audience that the film they are about to see is an adventure. It’s not only reminiscent of spaghetti Westerns awash in the earthy scrublands of the American West; the formations (and their corresponding palette) are synonymous with exploration, adventure, the frontier, and rock climbing. *Mission: Impossible II* (2000) and *Vertical Limit* (2000) both begin with establishing shots and rock climbing scenes featuring the mesas of Utah. In fact, sixteen films featured scenes filmed in the Moab area before *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*
premiered. Ultimately, the initial location of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* and the various shades of brown (from the mesas to the horses to the scouts) tap into the collective understanding of adventure, which in turn initiates and informs the affective response. And the color brown is constantly present; from Jones’s iconic fedora to the cities, libraries, and museums that Jones frequents, the color brown appears consistently throughout *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. Additionally, Jones himself is always covered in sand or dirt, is digging in the sand or dirt, or is surrounded by sand and dirt. Jones’s body is quite literally engulfed in browns and tans. This not only associates him with a palette that is collectively understood as an adventure palette, it imbues his body with the ability to initiate an affective process (informed by one’s understanding of adventure and exploration) all on its own.

![Paramount Pictures logo](image)

Figure 29. A partial dissolve of Paramount Pictures’s production logo that eventually dissolves and marks the beginning of the film *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989).
Additionally, Egypt (where the bulk of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* takes place) is home to the great pyramids in addition to a number of ancient, often romanticized, dynasties, while the Middle East (where a majority of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* takes place) is religiously, historically, and archeologically significant. As such, both locales are the source of many popular tales of discovery and adventure, both fiction and nonfiction alike. American culture is inundated with tales of queens and pharaohs, Antony and Cleopatra, the Great Pyramids, the Sphinx, the
Crusades, Christianity, Alexander the Great, ancient and biblical artifacts, and Islamic culture. American moviegoers have also been exposed to a consistent stream of popular films that use Egypt and the Middle East as sources of inspiration since the inception of the medium. Such tales include *The Mummy* (1932), *The Barbarian* (1933), *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), *Cleopatra* (1963), *Caravans* (1978), *Aladdin* (1992), *The Mummy* (1999), *The Scorpion King* (2002), and *Syriana* (2005), among countless others. As such, the concepts of adventure, discovery, and exoticism have become associated with Egypt and the Middle East, and those locations have, in American popular culture, become associated with various shades of tan. As a result, the earthy palette not only initiates the affective process it ultimately informs it, infusing the films with a sense of adventure, discovery, and exploration.

A large portion of *Raiders of the Last Ark* takes place in Cairo, and multitudes of shots showcasing endless sand dunes, pale ruins, hieroglyphs, and dust storms establish the city and the surrounding area as a location awash in tan. The first shot upon Jones’s arrival in Cairo is a left-to-right sweeping long-shot of the city and its uniformly tan palette; the sky in the background and the plants in the foreground are also various shades of tan (see figure 32). Similarly, a more intimate look at the city reveals more shades of tan. The city streets, the attire of its inhabitants, and Jones himself are all tan (see figure 33). Once the film leaves the city proper and begins to explore the surround area, the tan colors are featured even more prominently. A strong connection to sand is also established in the scenes that feature dig sites outside of Cairo, the place where Jones ultimately discovers the Ark of the Covenant (see figure 34). This connection between Cairo, the various shades of tan, and sand is used to inform the affective process and make one ultimately think about adventure, exploration, discovery, archeology, exoticism, and mythic places like Egypt, the Pyramids, and the Sphinx. The earthy
palette only reinforces the digging, treasure-hunting, and adventure that takes place in Cairo and the surrounding dig sites. And while the color by itself may not necessarily initiate the affective process, in combination with the American cultural understanding of Egyptian dynasties, pyramids, grave-robbing, deserts, archeology, and a whole host of films stretching back to the early days of Cecil B. DeMille, the tan palette helps invoke affective reactions that are grounded in adventure and exploration. This phenomenon is not relegated to the Indiana Jones trilogy alone; the Star Wars trilogy begins on the desert planet of Tatooine, Romancing the Stone opens with an imagined spaghetti Western, and even Batman and The Karate Kid are peppered with tan hues.

Figure 32. Even the plants in the foreground are tan, Raiders of the Lost Ark (1981).
In addition to color, exoticism—or what I consider here the utilization of non-Western art, design, and culture to convey an otherness—involves popular notions of adventure, exploration, and discovery. American films have used an approximation of non-Western culture to signal the exotic for decades. And while it can be irretrievably problematic, exoticism, nonetheless, contributes to cinematic shorthand that is used to shape affective response. The blending of the Western musical scales with non-Western scales and the casting of extras that
phenotypically resemble native populations, along with exotic filming locations, all go toward initiating and informing the affective process thanks to our collective cultural knowledge of things like adventure, exploration, discovery, and danger. In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, in particular, the extras and the musical score work together toward a common end; any time the film’s focus turns to indigenous cultures or people—the market chase scene and the dig site scenes, for example—the score generally switches to melodies that utilize a non-Western scale.

In contrast, the scenes that feature the film’s costar/heroine Marion Ravenwood (Karen Allen) include recognizable, Western instruments playing in a recognizably Western scale. Additionally, there are a number of scenes that feature exotic, diegetic melodies that are meant to be at least an approximation of non-Western musical traditions. Americans are historically familiar, at least tangentially, with non-Western musical scales and other, traditionally exoticized, cultures and societies outside of their own. Films that utilize this exoticism are tapping into a large cache of preconceived notions and established tropes. As a result, this knowledge is embedded in one’s mind. It is a part of who we are as a result of our participation in culture as a whole. Upon seeing and hearing the exotic melodies and far-flung locales of the Indiana Jones trilogy, one may preconsciously access and process an interplay of color, sound, conceptions of adventure and discovery, and a cursory (socialized) understanding of other places and other people, which in turn could initiate an affective process that would culminate in exhilaration, tension, a quickened pace, or a sudden sweat.

An excellent example of this exoticism can be seen in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*. About a third of the way through the film, Jones and company find their way to the fictional Indian province of Pankot, where they are welcomed as guests by the prime minister and the young maharajah. Jones and his travelling companions dine with the maharajah, and the
entire scene is built around the concept of exoticism, both audiovisually and narratively. The dinner scene begins with Short Round (Ke Huy Quan) being startled by a group of belly dancers and subsequently shouting in Mandarin. The phenotypically Indian dancers, dressed in bright vibrant colors that are in stark contrast to Willie Scott’s (Kate Capshaw) cream-colored costume, run around in circles—holding hands above their heads—to a diegetic score that is heavy with finger cymbals and sitar (see figure 35). The score (both diegetic and nondiegetic) goes silent as the prime minister introduces the maharajah. However, shortly into the prime minister’s long introduction, the score fades in with low, ominous brass before mixing with high brass sounds, as if it is approximating a traditional Indian raga.

As the guests sit down after the maharajah, the score switches back to sitars and finger cymbals. And like the dancers, the Indian guests, the décor, and the maharajah himself are all adorned in bright, vibrant colors (see figure 36). Jones, Short Round, the prime minister, and Scott stand out amongst the vibrant colors of the guests and decorations. Even the facial hair on many of the Indian guests is framed as unusual. And as Jones talks, the camera pans to Scott and tightens in on her and the Indian guest to her right. Scott produces a bottle of scent and proceeds to sprinkle it on the Indian man while she sniffs at him in disgust. This all takes place while a large snake is served as the first course. One of the waiters cuts into the snake only to reveal live eels wriggling inside. Scott and Short Round both look on the snake with surprise and disgust—a comical “boing” sound effect is played as Short Round’s gum falls out of his mouth. While one of the Indian guests downs the live eels two at a time, Scott and Short Round are stunned to silence. Shortly after the snake is served, scarabs are brought to the table—again, while the Indian guests eat them (one man even belches obscenely), Scott and Short Round look on in horror. Scott asks Short Round for his hat. “Why?” Short Round asks. “So I can throw up in it,”
Scott replies. A soft mixture of finger cymbals and sitar continue to play in the background. Finally, a “dessert” of chilled money brains is served, and Scott faints with another comedic sound effect.

The entire scene—the score, the costuming, the dialogue, the sound effects, the action of the characters, the colors, the food, and the set—creates a West/East dichotomy that makes the suggestion that the East is a bizarre, uncultured (the unapologetic belching), and exotic, if not downright disgusting, place. Even the interjection of a recognizably Western score only servers to highlight the dark, ominous otherness of the Indian culture. Scott (and even Short Round, who is decidedly more cosmopolitan than Scott) is openly disgusted by the experience and the people around her. All of this (despite its problematic nature) helps initiate an affective process that is informed by a collective understanding of exoticism, adventure, and otherness—one may feel nauseous or tense.

Figure 35. Belly dancers dancing to “Indian” music, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984).
One could argue that the earthy palette, phenotypically indigenous extras, and exotic (both diegetic and nondiegetic) melodies present in the trilogy are specific to those particular films; that is, in part, a valid argument. A film about an adventuring archaeologist, made by an American production company for American audiences, is going to inevitably be bathed in browns and tans and have an exotic (at least to American ears) score, setting, and cast—it is simply a by-product of the visual language that has been established in American cinema. This is true for most popular films that are borne out of the American movie industry; a number of texts on film genre explain this in depth. However, applying affect theory to a specific film or an entire genre of film takes the process of analysis one step further, allowing the scholar to understand, on a granular level, how tropes and genre convention function as an interplay between culture, socialization, and the self. We as the moviegoing society, and Hollywood as the producer of filmic content, understand that conventions of genres, familiar narratives, and repeated tropes consistently fill seats, but none of us have more than a cursory knowledge of why they fill seats. By looking at movies through the lens of affect, it becomes clearer that sight and
sound—and the ways in which they are arranged, organized, and constructed—can be (and are) specifically manipulated to elicit preconscious, culturally informed, physiological responses that eventually terminate in recognizable, if not fully understood, emotional states of being. The affective process (the *seemingly* spontaneous eruption of physiological reaction) is what keeps moviegoers coming back to their seats, over and over—audiences are physiologically and emotionally ensnared. And, by understanding the affective process, one can begin to discern the patterns that initiate and inform the affective process.

Action-adventure films in the 1980s that feature kinesthetically spectacular bodies share common themes, tropes, and narratives that initiate and inform the affect process. In addition to the themes exploration and discovery, themes of wisdom, introspection, personal growth, and searching permeate the Star Wars trilogy, *Superman, The Karate Kid, Batman, Romancing the Stone*, the Indiana Jones trilogy, *Beverly Hills Cop*, and the Lethal Weapon franchise. And the affect that results—tension throughout the body, excitement, the holding of one’s breath, a sudden softening of body tension—are shared between films. *Romancing the Stone, The Karate Kid,* and the Star Wars trilogy, in addition to the Indiana Jones trilogy, utilize browns and tans for example—a number of costuming and setting choices in the Star Wars trilogy, *The Karate Kid,* and *Romancing the Stone* all feature earth tones in their respective palettes. Additionally, a number of the most popular action-adventure films in the 1980s that feature kinesthetically spectacular bodies rely on casting, scoring, and costuming to convey a sense of cultural otherness that helps create the adventure, exploration, and discovery in the films, which in turn inform the affective process. Subsequently, the Mos Eisley cantina scene in *Star Wars*, the costuming and makeup choices in *Batman*, and the casting of the antagonists in *Romancing the Stone* all convey a sense of exoticism that help inform and amplify the sense of adventure and exploration, which
in turn initiates and informs the affect one experiences when watching these action-adventure films.

One of the most famous scenes in the original Star Wars trilogy evokes a sense of adventure, exploration, and discovery (which in turn initiates and informs the affective response) through the use of browns, tans, and exoticism. Skywalker and Kenobi’s trip into the Mos Eisley cantina starts with an establishing shot of the Mos Eisley spaceport, a city nestled in a desert valley surrounded by low, rolling mountains (see figure 37). The image is awash in browns and tans. Skywalker, Kenobi, R2-D2, and C-3PO enter the desert city where the buildings appear to be made out of sandstone and mud and make their way into the cantina. The cantina scene starts with a triangular-headed alien with bright luminescent eyes popping up from the bottom of the frame and a score (now widely famous) that is an exotic arrangement that seems to blend jazz and swing. As the score plays, the scene cuts from one exotic-looking alien to another as they squawk, trill, squeak, or purr in their native languages. A close shot of Skywalker looking bewildered follows the montage. Another montage of the patrons takes place, followed by a slow right-to-left pan of the band playing the exotic melody. The band is equally exotic as the instruments they play (see figure 38). The inside of the cantina (like the outside of the cantina) is tan and brown and seemingly made out of sandstone or mud or some combination of the two. Kenobi is dressed in a brown tunic, Chewbacca sports a brown leather bandolier, and even Solo’s off-white shirt takes on a decidedly tan hue in the cantina (see figure 39).
Figure 37. Mos Eisley spaceport, *Star Wars* (1977).

Figure 38. The cantina band, *Star Wars* (1977).
Browns, tans, exotic scores, phenotypically exotic characters, and a depiction of otherness all work toward creating a sense of adventure, exploration, discovery, and danger. These exotic sounds and images not only initiate the affective experience, they inform it—our cultural, preconscious understanding of and connection to an earthy color palette and exotic (at least what we as Americans think of as exotic) shorthand permeate the process. As evidenced by Romancing the Stone and the original Star Wars trilogy, this phenomenon is not limited to just the Indiana Jones trilogy and, in fact, appears more frequently in the most popular action-adventure films in the 1980s that feature kinesthetically spectacular bodies, as opposed to aesthetically spectacular bodies.

Movies that feature aesthetically spectacular bodies mobilize affects that are similar to those mobilized in films that feature kinesthetically spectacular bodies, namely a state of tension, a quickened pulse, or other such physiological excitements. However, the way in which this process is initiated and informed are, upon examination, radically different. Films from the 1980s that feature aesthetically spectacular bodies like Rocky II, Rocky III, First Blood, Rambo: First Blood Part II, Predator, The Terminator, Terminator 2: Judgment Day, Total Recall, and
Commando all share common themes, tropes, and narratives that intimate strength and brutality, a desire for vengeance, a sense of doggedness, and stoic masculinity. And, like the tans and browns that dominate the Indiana Jones trilogy, greens, grays, oranges, and reds also shape the affective process one may experience watching action films from the 1980s featuring aesthetically spectacular bodies. For example, in *Rambo: First Blood Part II* and *Predator*, both central protagonists show up to their respective missions in solid red shirts; but why red? Red is the color of blood, and blood factors heavily in both films—at one point or another both Schwarzenegger (as Dutch) and Stallone (as Rambo) are covered in their own blood, someone else’s blood, or a combination of both. And blood is not only associated with violence, vitality, and strength—all of which are conveyed early and often in both films—it is associated perseverance. Stallone’s Rambo and Schwarzenegger’s Dutch may get bloodied, but they move forward toward more blood, someone else’s blood. Additionally, one might also associate red shirts with the oft-guaranteed demise of crewmembers on *Star Trek*’s U.S.S. Enterprise (a well known, popular trope) as they appear in both the movies and the television show from the 1960s on. This is not unlike white hats and black hats in Westerns. Simply put, the color red is strongly imbued with culturally contingent meaning, meaning that is processed precociously, which, in turn, informs our affective, physiological reactions; our clenched jaw or sudden fist pump. As such, the red shirts are processed as both a foreshadowing of the copious amounts of bloodshed to come and a signal of strength and perseverance (Rambo and Dutch can wear red shirts and still survive). Ultimately, the red shirts, in addition to the predator’s heat vision, Rambo’s headband, and other various splashes and sprays of red in both films, help initiate and inform the affective process, as we as a culture associate red with violence, yes, but maybe more importantly, of vitality and strength.
Comparatively, the color green, like the color red, communicates a sense of vitality. However, green also connotes (especially during the 1980s) war. The color green has not only come to symbolize the US Army (Green Berets, little green army men toys), but it also has a symbolic connection to the armed conflicts taking place in the 1970s and 1980s, as a number of US military operations took place in jungle environments. All throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the US military was involved in a number of combat actions in Southeast Asia, Central America, and South America.

In *Commando*, for example, Schwarzenegger’s character John Matrix is introduced approximately five minutes into the film in a lush, green mountain setting. The introduction begins with a number of extreme close-up shots of his boots and the blade of his chainsaw; a long, lingering pan from his glistening right forearm to his relaxed right shoulder; another shot of his boots; a lingering shot of his flexed, left bicep; and finally, his face. The first time we see a majority of Schwarzenegger’s body in the frame, he’s carrying an entire tree and surrounded by lush, green mountains, heading toward a log house with smoke rising from several chimneys (see figure 40). While not directly related to war, the misty, smoky, lush scenery that introduces Schwarzenegger’s Matrix is reminiscent of the theaters of conflict in the 1980s. Additionally, this particular scene—the mountains, the cabin, the entire tree on Matrix’s shoulder, and the green hues—communicate a rugged individuality and wildness that is often associated with popular representations of highly trained special forces, like Rambo or Dutch. In other words, the color green helps inform this scene’s sense of toughness, a toughness that has the ability to initiate and inform the affective process.
And while green is primarily seen in the 1980s action-adventure films that are related to war—*Predator, Rambo: First Blood Part II, Commando, First Blood*—the color gray is a dominant shade in almost all of the top action-adventure films in the 1980s that feature aesthetically spectacular bodies. *Rocky II, The Terminator, Terminator 2: Judgment Day, Total Recall, Cobra, Predator, and Rambo: First Blood Part II*—are all heavily draped in various shades of gray. Gray not only communicates, culturally, another branch of the US military (the Navy), it also enters into the zeitgeist as a color set aside for metal, machines, and smoke. In *The Terminator and Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, this relationship is quite literal as machines, metal, and smoke abounds. In *Rocky II*, however, Stallone’s Rambo is often clothed in or surrounded by the color gray, which helps to communicate an urban setting in addition to exuding a sense of toughness, imperviousness, and rigidity. Rocky is, metaphorically speaking, tough as steel and carved from granite; granite and steel are both gray. Additionally, gray is associated with the
unremarkable and the nondescript. This connection is similar to the function of identical, drab uniforms in a number of military units both in the United States and abroad, as the color gray is also associated with the idea of de-emphasizing individuality while instead emphasizing coordinated actions and precise, crisp forms.

Rocky always seems to train in gray (either a gray sweat suit or a gray tank top), which adds to the allure of the character as an everyman, the people’s fighter. This is because gray is often connoted with the idea serving the whole while simultaneously downplaying the self, as is the case in military service. However, in Rocky IV, while this gray uniform is present, it also comingles with gray as a symbol of rugged toughness, which was also seen in the early minutes of Commando. After Rocky makes his way to Russia, a training montage that contrasts Rocky’s efforts with those of his Russian opponent Drago (Dolph Lundgren). Shots of Drago training with a team of Soviet scientists and using the latest Soviet technology (including drugs) are juxtaposed with shots of Rocky training in the gray, frigid environ of the Russian frontier (see figure 41). In this example, the color gray helps connote toughness, ruggedness, danger, extreme environment, and survivability, all of which initiate and inform the affective process. While not directly related to war, it nonetheless invokes a similar response. This gray pall is used with similar effect in Predator, Commando, Conan the Barbarian, and the Terminator franchise.
It should be noted that while tans and browns are more predominantly featured in the most popular films in the 1980s that feature kinesthetically spectacular bodies, there are notable exceptions, such as the beginning of *Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back* or the end of *Star Wars: Episode VI – Return of the Jedi*. However, these exceptions do fall in line with the connotation to war, as both films are narratively associated with traditional conflict and warfare. Similarly, the greens and grays mentioned here are predominantly associated with the most popular action-adventure films in the 1980s that feature aesthetically spectacular bodies, but there are exceptions. The most notable exception is *Rambo III*—again, *Rambo III*’s brown and tan palette are directly related the conflict in Afghanistan in the 1980s. And while color by itself could potentially carry affect (if the cultural connection is strong enough), it is more often the case that color is but a part of a configuration of audiovisual stimuli that initiates and informs the affective responses. In the case of aesthetically spectacular bodies and color, grays and greens comingle with the very real war footing of the era, the diegetic war footing on-screen,
explosions, gunfire, blood, violence, and, of course, aesthetically spectacular bodies. All of this, as a package, is processed preconsciously and culminates in a number of possible affective responses.

The musical scores in action-adventure films that feature aesthetically spectacular bodies, like *Rambo: First Blood Part II* and *Predator*, also share common traits that initiate and shape the affective process. Similar to the score used in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, some of the musical accompaniment in *Predator* and *Rambo: First Blood Part II* is easily attributed to the needs of each individual film. For example, synthesizers are heavily featured in the *Predator* score, while the *Rambo: First Blood Part II* score makes use of snare drums and bright trumpets; the alien presence in *Predator* and heavy-handed patriotic themes in *Rambo: First Blood Part II* clearly explain each choice. However, action-adventure films from the 1980s that feature aesthetically spectacular bodies are almost universally paired with a score that weighs heavy with deep bass and low brass, or the synthetic equivalent; these sounds are often accompanied by drums with a low, resonating timbre. These scores are primal, serious, and masculine. In contrast to the exotic otherness of the music in the Indiana Jones trilogy, music in films like *Predator* and *Rambo: First Blood Part II* initiate and the affective process via themes of war that are long informed by an association with Hollywood’s traditional presentation of war; namely war drums, phenotypically tribal or nomadic cultures, and masculinized musical genres like marches and heavy metal. Along with color and casting, these low, throaty scores help convey strength, toughness, and masculinity, all of which are common to action-adventure films from the 1980s that feature aesthetically spectacular bodies, and all of which initiate and inform the affective process.
It is important to note that action-adventure films in the 1980s can share mutual affects regardless of the body type driving the movie. However, more often than not, such affects are merely deceptively similar. Upon close inspection, these seemingly common affects are usually conveyed in drastically different ways. For example, action-adventure films in the 1980s that feature kinesthetic bodies generally may initiate and inform the affective process via the theme of triumph (a sense of achievement, success, and victory). And while an affective process—and the physiological response and feelings that culminate—initiated by triumph is seemingly identical across all of the top action-adventure in the 1980s, they are divergent. These common themes are what help build the spectacle associated with action-adventure films in general. However, the sense of triumph conveyed in the Indiana Jones franchise is achieved in a way that differs from the way it is achieved in the Rambo franchise. For example, action-adventure films featuring aesthetically spectacular bodies communicate triumph by stacking bodies and spilling blood—it is often the case that the bodies are stacked and the blood is spilled by a single titan of violence. Rambo single handedly wipes out an entire Vietnamese regiment and a squadron of Russian commandos in *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, while Dutch helps eliminate an entire rebel encampment before going toe to toe with an extra terrestrial hunter-killer in *Predator*. And in contrast, triumph, as communicated by films that feature kinesthetically spectacular bodies, is often about the rescuing of others and the completion of the originally intended goal—Indiana Jones finds the Ark, Batman saves Vicki Vale (Kim Basinger), and Superman saves Metropolis. This is an important concept to understand, as spectacular bodies, and the top action-adventure films in the 1980s that they populate, share seemingly similar affective processes (after all, the resulting affective responses are seemingly identical) that are, upon close examination, significantly different.
Cinematic elements like mise-en-scène, art direction, color and tone balancing, sound engineering, framing, editing, casting, staging, and other production and post-production processes produce filmic signifiers that guide our preconscious process, which, in turn, dictate our physiological reactions, which, in turn, inform our emotional responses. This, in a nutshell, is affect as it pertains to cinema. Affect is an event in which stimuli, socialization, and culture inform a physiological response before that response can be consciously interpreted as emotion; the color green in the right context—in this case, 1980s action movies with gun-toting American good guys—is associated with the US Army, which, in turn, is culturally associated with honor, duty, violence, danger, strength, and masculinity which, given what we are collectively socialized to believe about violence and danger, may trigger a physiological fight-or-flight response. In this particular example, the matrix of culture and biology (both processed before the conscious mind is able to engage) initiate and inform the affective experience from start to finish. Watching Schwarzenegger in a sea of green foliage and gray smoke, biceps bare and flexed, turn enemy combatants into red mist as the war-drum score thumps loudly can render a preconscious, physiological event onto the body that is sudden, but ultimately describable, after the conscious mind catches up.

Only upon close introspection can one pick apart the circumstances and cultural viscera that resulted in the response—affective responses take place before conscious recognition. However, once the conscious mind is aware that a physiological event took place, one can instantly associate the way the physiological event felt with an emotion or another event in their repertoire of experience that resulted in a similar physiological event. As such, an affective response (that moment between visual consumption of stimuli and conscious recognition of an emotional state) as a result of audiovisual configurations that communicate patriotism is different
from an affective response as a result of audiovisual configurations that communicate strength, which is different from an affective response as a result of audiovisual configurations that communicate masculinity, even if the physiological reactions (tension, excitement, adrenaline) are often the same. They come from a culturally different place. The way in which these affective responses are initiated and the way in which one interprets them consciously are significantly different.

The Spectacular Male Body and Its Ability to Initiate and Inform the Affective Process

Similar to the aforementioned example of Ferrell’s Brennan watching *Cops*, audiences are capable of picking up on the emotional, affective states of actors and characters in any given film. The human body is a vessel that not only experiences its own culturally constructed affective process, but is also highly capable of initiate and informing the affective process in other. A number of contemporary actors—including Christian Bale, Natalie Portman, Brad Pitt, Mark Wahlberg, and Antonia Campbell-Hughes—have famously undergone physical transformations (most commonly losing or gaining weight) for particular roles. This indicates that actors, directors, and producers—filmmakers, in general—are aware, at least tangentially, of the affective impact of the physical, human form. And remember, the human body on film is capable of initiating and informing the affective process on its own and supporting or complementing the affective processes that are already being mobilized in a given film.

The aesthetic body and the kinesthetic body on display in action-adventure films in the 1980s initiate and inform the affective process, on their own, via four unique characteristics: sexuality, physical specialization, physical capability, and physical excess. These characteristics are further divided by contrasting body types: excess splits into classic Hollywood aestheticism and vaudevillian exhibitionism, sexuality splits into sensuality and eroticism, physical
specialization splits into athleticism and strength, and physical capability splits into kinetic actualization and kinetic potential. Using these distinctions, one can begin to identify how and why each kind of body elicits affective responses in the audiences that watch them.

Each body type has analogues in the history of popular culture and mass entertainment that help inform the viewers’ affective reaction to each. The analogue for the kinesthetically spectacular body and the leading men in the 1980s that possess such a physique is relatively easy to pinpoint; the kinesthetically spectacular body is but one link in a long chain of classic, male physiques that have traditionally appeared in Hollywood productions. When one thinks of the classic leading man in Hollywood’s golden age of cinema, one is most likely to think of a tall, lean, fit, muscular (but not too muscular) white male. Michael Douglas, a kinesthetically spectacular leading man of the 1980s, is the progeny of Kirk Douglas, a prototypical leading man from the 1950s and 1960s known for (among other things) his work in Spartacus (1960). Other examples of the classic Hollywood aesthetic include Spencer Tracy, John Wayne, Richard Burton, Humphrey Bogart, Jimmy Stewart, Gregory Peck, Gary Cooper, Yul Brynner, Errol Flynn, Burt Lancaster, Cary Grant, Clark Gable, Rock Hudson, and a young Marlon Brando. As such, the kinesthetically spectacular body in the 1980s is associated with a body of work—and a host of cultural signposts—that includes genres like epics, Westerns, war movies, and adventure movies, and signposts like culturally defined concepts like heterosexual romance, machismo, sensuality, the cultural standard of masculine beauty, and a popular, cultural definition of masculinity. Simply put, the kinesthetically spectacular body, thanks to its similarity to the classic Hollywood aesthetic, taps into a host of deeply imbedded, easily recognizable, cultural signs and signifiers. This relationship, in turn, initiates the affective process and informs the affective response, all of which is grounded in and shaped by physical exceptionalism. This is
reinforced and acknowledged in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. In the film, there is a scene of Jones teaching an archeology course; the women in his class (the class appears to be mostly women) seem to be enamored by their professor as they stare at him with heads cocked and resting on their hands (see figure 42). One student in the front row slowly blinks and reveals that she has written “LOVE” on one eyelid and “YOU” on the other (see figure 43). She blinks twice, making sure that Jones catches the message. Audiences derive a sense of delight and pleasure from watching these exceptional, kinesthetically spectacular bodies; a delight and pleasure that is informed by a long history of Hollywood’s definition of handsomeness and masculinity.

Figure 42. They are all in love with Dr. Jones, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981).
Contrastingly, there is the aesthetically spectacular body that charges onto the silver screen in the 1980s; where does its popular origin lie? In order to answer that, one has to go back to traveling circuses, vaudeville, and the late nineteenth century. In particular, one has to turn to Eugen Sandow, a Prussian strongman who is often considered the “father of modern bodybuilding.”\(^{23}\) Although Sandow could bend bars and break chains, it quickly became apparent that audiences were clamoring simply for a good look at his aesthetically spectacular physique—his musculature was both large and defined.\(^ {24}\) As a result, Sandow—with the help of promoter Florenz Ziegfeld—started to incorporate “muscle display performances,” into Sandow’s act. These performances were nothing more than various poses the likes of which can be seen in contemporary bodybuilding competitions around the world. Sandow even encouraged patrons to approach him and inspect his musculature by touch: “Ostensibly an invitation to verify his muscular development, it carried obvious if unspoken erotic elements.”\(^ {25}\) And in 1894, the strongman was featured in both a short film series and a Kinetoscope; he can be seen flexing and posing, not performing any feats of strength: “And Sandow quickly emerged as the most brilliant performer of manhood of the 1890s. In his live appearances at vaudeville theaters, in widely
circulated photographs, newspaper and magazine illustrations, and in some of the very first moving pictures, Sandow’s unclad body became the most famous in the world and his name a synonym for muscular development.” After ending his American tour, Sandow permanently returned to England in the mid-1890s. There, he opened a number of public gymnasiums (what he called “Institutes of Physical Culture”), founded a monthly periodical named *Sandow’s Magazine of Physical Culture*, and wrote a series of books on fitness between 1897 and 1904. Sandow even “coined the term ‘bodybuilding’ in a book of the same name.” Sandow also organized and judged the first bodybuilding—not strength—competition, which took place at England’s Royal Albert Hall in 1901. Ultimately, Sandow not only proved the profitability and popularity of the somatic spectacle, he set the tone for such spectacle for decades to come with the introduction of muscle-display performances. In addition, he is also likely responsible for the eroticism of such somatic displays, as he often wore nothing more than a fig leaf covering his genitals, a pair of white briefs, or a leopard print loincloth. In fact, the success of Sandow’s American tour partly relied on not only the eroticism of his performances, during which he encouraged both men and women alike to touch his body, but also the eroticism played up and promised by reviews of his performances. For example, “the *National Police Gazette* portrayed one such event with all its erotic titillation, more powerful because never overtly declared, in an article the following year. The writer emphasized Sandow’s dominance and his female admirers’ timidity as the strongman bade each to touch his body.” Sandow’s performances and his body itself were sexually charged, a charge that was carried far beyond his own mortality.

The erotic displays of aesthetic spectacle that Stallone and Schwarzenegger perform are continuations of Sandow’s own erotic displays. Both Stallone and Schwarzenegger—in their respective roles—are immodestly costumed, strike deliberate poses to emphasize their physiques,
and while feats of strength are incorporated, a substantial amount of their performances are, in fact, muscle-display performances. And although the name Eugen Sandow may not be a staple in the American zeitgeist, his routine, his poses, and his erotic displays transcended his name and set the stage for the next century of aesthetically spectacular exhibitions, both on-screen and off—even the Mr. Olympia statue was modeled after him. As a result, the American zeitgeist in the first half of the twentieth century included places like Muscle Beach; people like Charles Atlas and Steve Reeves; contests like Mr. America and Mr. Universe; comic book heroes like Superman, Captain Marvel, and Captain America; and movies like *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue* (1957), *Goliath and the Barbarians* (1959), and *The Three Stooges Meet Hercules* (1961). Starting with Sandow, a long history of bodybuilding culture was ultimately forged long before Schwarzenegger and Stallone graced the silver screen in the 1980s, and as a result, affective response to the aesthetically spectacular body is culturally informed by the erotic history of the sport. And even Sandow’s early appearances on film set the tone for how aesthetically spectacular, muscular bodies should be captured. What audiences wanted (or, at the very least, what promoters thought audiences wanted) was to gaze at and linger on the aesthetically spectacular form; they were far less interested in what the body was able to do. This holds true up through the 1980s as films like *Predator, Conan the Barbarian, Rocky II, Rocky III, Rocky IV, Rambo: First Blood Part II,* and *Rambo III* all linger on the physiques of their aesthetically spectacular protagonists; their actions and feats of strength—like Sandow’s own act—are secondary.

While a number of these muscle-display performances are peppered throughout any of the top action-adventure films in the 1980s that feature aesthetically spectacular bodies, *Rambo: First Blood Part II* incorporates them in particularly interesting ways. After Rambo is captured
by the Russians, he is chained upright to a metal bed frame and electrocuted. A number of tight and medium-close shots are used in conjunction with the electrocution to accentuate Stallone’s aesthetically spectacular body by forcing him into a pose reminiscent of familiar bodybuilding poses (see figure 44). Another notable example of muscle-display performance in *Rambo: First Blood Part II* occurs when Rambo fights off the combined Vietnamese and Russian combat unit with explosive arrows. In quick succession are four tight, waist-up shots that accentuate Stallone’s abs, shoulders, chest, and arms while he pulls back a recurve bow. The third shot, perfectly framed to capture his bare upper body, lingers for some time on Rambo’s frame and particularly highlights the taught muscles of his drawing arm and his bow arm (see figure 45).

Figure 44. Rambo strikes a pose despite being tortured, *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985).
Figure 45. One of Stallone’s many muscle-display performances, *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985).

While the aesthetically spectacular body and the kinesthetically spectacular body are both objects of the gaze, the aesthetically spectacular body populating the action-adventure films in the 1980s is a more scopophilic object thanks to the long, erotic history of American bodybuilding culture (both on-screen and off), the distinct lack of clothing, the carefully crafted muscle-display performances, and the lingering eye of the camera. This translates into a more libidinously sexual base from which the affective process is initiated and informed. While not quite analogous to circus freaks, the aesthetically spectacular body is rooted in vaudeville; it is, in a sense, a sideshow oddity. This is miles away from the classic Hollywood roots of the kinesthetically spectacular body and its veiled, but sensually coded, sexuality.

Intimately intertwined with the classic Hollywood aesthetic and vaudevillian exhibitionism, the second subdivision—sensuality in contrast to eroticism—concerns the sexual appeal of each body type in question and how it initiates and informs the affective process. Actors in the 1980s with kinesthetically spectacular bodies, like Ford, Michael Keaton, Michael Douglas, and Mel Gibson, initiate and inform the affective process by being fit, handsome
leading men. Additionally, they each engage in romantic scenes that, while heteronormative and problematically aggressive, are coded as sensual. Although they constitute a minute portion of each film, scenes of romance are most notably present in *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back*, *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, *Lethal Weapon 3*, *Batman Returns* (1992), and *Romancing the Stone*. Each of these scenes features soft lighting, a romantic score with silky strings and a subdued piano, and a warm color palette of orange and tan. All of these elements translate into a sense of traditional, sensual romance as we may identify it in the United States. And while the male bodies that populate these scenes are part of a configuration of stimuli that connote sensuality, they, themselves, are able to initiate and inform the affective process; these bodies are toned, fit, athletic, and symmetrical. Additionally, these bodies are modestly displayed—they are often costumed to show off their physique through clothing, or they are costumed in a way that reveals their arms and upper chest. Rarely are they entirely nude or even shirtless. For example, when Ford’s character in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is not bedecked in slightly tight, fashionable, three-piece suits, he is in a loose fitting linen shirt that reveals more of his chest as the movie progresses; his buttons come undone and the v his shirt forms is ever-deepening. In *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, Ford’s Jones not only experiences the deepening v, at one point near the end of the film he loses his entire right sleeve while his shirtwaist is fastened with a single button. It should be noted that Ford does appear shirtless in both *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, although only for a single scene in each film, one of which is a love scene between him and Marion Ravenwood (Karen Allen)—in the other, he is under the thrall of the film’s antagonist. Along with the other kinesthetic bodies that are featured in action-adventure films in the 1980s, Ford is not only costumed to accentuate the sensuality of
his body, he often moves his body in ways that stretch or elongate his form, making him appear sleek and toned; this is common amongst the other kinesthetic bodies that appear in the most popular action-adventure films of the 1980s.

In addition to his whip-swinging, Ford’s Jones is often parallel to the ground as a result of diving or reaching or rolling, or he has his hands above his head as he jumps or hangs. In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, Jones dives across a chasm before rolling under a stone portal (see figure 46). In *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, the climactic battle takes place on a broken bridge that hangs down a cliff face. Jones holds on with one hand and gravity naturally elongates his form. As Jones and Mola Ram (Amrish Puri) grapple on the bridge against the wall, several tight shots of Ford’s right triceps muscle, pectorals, and lat are used (see figure 47). These tight shots show an elongated group of muscles, not muscles under load like the shots in *Rambo: First Blood Part II*. And in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, Jones jumps from a horse to a tank, elongating his form in an effort to bridge the gap (see figure 48). These leaps make Jones look as if he is flying and are visually similar—elongated body, hands above the head—to the scenes of flight in the *Superman* films. Ford’s body in these elongated motions are not aesthetically excessive like the bulging, straining bodies of Schwarzenegger or Stallone, but sleek and defined. Jones is not erotic, but sensual; the elongation of the form (as opposed to bulking or flexing) helps convey that idea.
Figure 46. Jones stretching across a gap, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981).

Figure 47. An elongated muscle group, *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984).
Ultimately, kinesthetic bodies manipulate their form in a way that communicates capability of action and a physicality that lies somewhere between strength and elegance; they communicate a somatic sensuality not unlike that of a dancer or gymnast, which in turn initiates and ultimately informs the affective process in viewers.

And while the aesthetically spectacular body associated with bodybuilding does initiate and inform an affective process through sexuality, it is not the same kind of sexuality that the kinesthetic body communicates, which is, as was mentioned, closely associated with dancing or gymnastics. Instead, the aesthetically spectacular bodies in action-adventure films in the 1980s initiate and inform the affective response via eroticism, not sensuality. And while sensuality and eroticism do overlap (that is to say, they are not mutually exclusive) there is a distinction to be made. The eroticism in the most popular action-adventure films of the 1980s that feature aesthetically spectacular bodies is aggressively masculine and grounded in power and physical dominance. Stallone and Schwarzenegger participate in erotic displays of physical power that link overt violence and sexuality, while Ford and Gibson are coded as traditionally seductive and sensual outside of their acts of violence. Across the board, aesthetically spectacular bodies in the
target genre are coded as more sexually explicit than their kinesthetic counterparts. Aesthetic bodies by themselves are more physically extreme; they are swollen and shaped in ways that defy convention, and they represent the physical boundary of the masculine form. As such, the mass of muscles alone position the aesthetic body as one that is visually more explicit, more erotic. And this eroticism is informed not only by the roles aesthetically spectacular actor’s play—titans, barbarians, gods, warriors—but also by the cultural history (and ultimately a cultural understanding) of weightlifting and bodybuilding as a sport.

Schwarzenegger and Stallone, as bodybuilders with traditionally defined bodybuilder physiques, are heirs to a long lineage of strongmen and weightlifters that have been coded as erotically charged and borderline bawdy. In short, bodybuilding was (and still is) tinged with an erotic sexual energy. The aesthetically spectacular body and the bodybuilding culture it is associated with are strongly salacious, while the kinesthetically spectacular body and its association with dancers and athletes is, for the most part, traditionally coded as sensual.

Additionally, the costuming of the aesthetically spectacular body in the action-adventure films of the 1980s is vastly different from what is subtly practiced on the kinesthetically spectacular bodies in the same decade, a trend that can be seen in a slew of popular action-adventure films in the 1980s that feature aesthetically spectacular bodies, including *Predator, Rambo: First Blood Part II, Rambo III, Commando, Conan the Barbarian, Rocky II, and Rocky III*. In all of these films, the aesthetically spectacular body is immodestly costumed from the waist up and is often topless for a large majority of its screen time. In *Predator*, for example, Schwarzenegger’s Dutch starts to shed clothing after the battle with the rebels in the jungle. He angrily throws his jacket to the ground leaving him with only a sleeveless shirt and a tactical vest (see figure 49). As Schwarzenegger and company set a trap for the predator, he mysteriously loses his shirt and is
left with only his tactical vest, revealing more of his flanks, his shoulders, his chest, and his back. And finally, as Schwarzenegger’s character prepares for his final showdown with the predator, he rids himself of his vest and appears completely topless (see figure 50). Similarly, in both the Rocky franchise and the Rambo franchise, Stallone is more often than not topless; even during his training montages, Stallone’s Rocky is nearly always topless.

Figure 49. Schwarzenegger’s Dutch starts to get undressed, *Predator* (1987).
Figure 50. Schwarzenegger’s Dutch is topless for his final battle, *Predator* (1987).

It isn’t only the costuming that helps the aesthetically spectacular body communicate eroticism. The way in which the aesthetically spectacular body moves (or doesn’t move) also helps in the process of transmission. In opposition to the stretching, gliding, and elongation practiced by the kinesthetically spectacular body, the aesthetically spectacular body strains, flexes, and strikes a pose. In *Predator*, there are two scenes in particular that exemplify the straining, flexing, and posing of the aesthetically spectacular body. The first is when Dutch and Dillon (Carl Weathers) are reunited and they shake hands—the two men walk toward one another, meet in the middle, and lock hands in a midair arm-wrestling grip, thumbs intertwined and fingers wrapped around the back of each others’ hand. In this particular scene, the camera captures a close-up of the mid-air arm-wrestling posture and lingers. Then the two men strain to have the stronger grip as their forearms ripple and bulge and their massive biceps push back the sleeves of their two-sizes-too-small shirts (see figure 51). This brief, but revealing, greeting encapsulates all three of the predominant physical gestures made by the aesthetically spectacular
body in the action-adventure genre throughout the 1980s: it is a scene where the flexing, straining, posing gesture transmits an erotic and preponderant sexuality. The affective process that is initiated in this scene is ultimately informed by something erotic, not sensual.

Figure 51. An excessive display, *Predator* (1987).

In addition to the mid-air arm-wrestling scene, the first battle scene in *Predator* features Dutch lifting the back end of a truck off the ground; his bare chest and arms strain and flex under the weight in another pose meant to show off the actor’s form. These gestures also show up in a number of Stallone films from the 1980s. A particularly famous image comes from *Rambo: First Blood Part II*. After hijacking an attack helicopter and strafing the camp that is holding American prisoners of war, Rambo lands the chopper, removes the mounted belt-fed machine gun, and charges the last of the enemy soldiers. In this particular scene—while a flurry of cuts ramps up the tension—Rambo is captured in a tight shot at a low angle, topless and sweaty, firing the enormous weapon with one hand and holding the belt of ammunition in the other. The butt of the gun is wedged under Stallone’s right arm, and his chest, arm, and neck muscles strain
and flex from the weight and action of the weapon (see figure 52). Everything in this image—from the strained muscles to the phallic weapon to the intense grimace on Rambo’s face—is erotic. Stallone’s shirtless visage, captured only from the waist up, is positioned and framed in a way that could easily be mistaken for a sexual position if not for the weapon. Even Rambo’s grimace can be mistaken for sexual effort or an expression of orgasm. Rambo is figuratively, suggestively fucking the enemy with his giant gun and erotic body.

Figure 52. Stallone’s body strains in an erotic display of power, *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985).

In contrast to the top action-adventure films of the 1980s that feature kinesthetically spectacular bodies, those that feature aesthetically spectacular bodies rarely feature scenes of romance. The exceptions to this pattern are a few scenes scattered throughout *Rocky II, Rocky III, Rocky IV,* and *Rocky V* (1990)—and even these scenes are nothing more than a brief lip-lock between Rocky and Adrian (Talia Shire). And although they are coded as romantic and sensual, they are brief, largely ignorable, and largely inconsequential to the plot of the film. Sex (at the very least, intimated) and romance, however, are prominent themes in films like *Raiders of the Lost Ark, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom, The Living Daylights, For Your Eyes Only,*
and *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back*. It should again be noted that these scenes of romance are often irretrievably problematic—most of the romance scenes in these films are aggressive and forceful, if not outright criminal. However, these scenes are *coded* as sensual. In contrast, sex as a physical act is mostly moot in the action-adventure films of the 1980s that star aesthetically spectacular actors—sex of any kind is absent in *Predator, First Blood, Rambo: First Blood Part II, and Rambo III*. And, if sex is mentioned in one of these films, it is with an erotic overtone that connotes violence, belittlement, aggression, and domination. In *Predator*, for example, the word “pussy” is used as either a pejorative or as part of a sexually explicit joke. At one point, the character Blain (Jesse Ventura) exclaims that chewing tobacco “will make you a goddamn sexual tyrannosaurus.”

The one example of an actual sex scene in any of the action-adventure films in the 1980s that feature aesthetically spectacular bodies, courtesy of *Conan the Barbarian*, is equally aggressive, dominating, and erotically pornographic. In it, Schwarzenegger’s character Conan has sex with a woman (Cassandra Gaviola) who turns into a witch during intercourse; Conan, positioned on top, prevents her from biting him, appears to give her one more thrust, and then throws her into a fire where she dies. In this scene, even before the woman turns into a witch, there is no music, the scene is dark and draped in shades of brown, and Conan’s body engulfs the woman’s body as he lies on top of her. The scene starts with the witch crawling toward Conan on all fours until they are face to face and drifting closer. However, before they kiss, the scene cuts to a tight shot of Conan on top of the witch, thrusting. The camera angle is low and aimed (with a slight cant toward his left side) at Conan’s shoulder. The shot lasts for almost thirty seconds. Conan’s massive arm and shoulder, and his head, take up most of the frame, visually engulfing the woman. About halfway through this long single take, the camera pans up slightly as Conan
lifts his head and his chest; the pan and the bend completely remove the woman from the frame, and the focus is solely on Conan’s body (see figure 53). The next cut switches to a high angle that focuses on Conan’s back from the waist up. Again, the woman is entirely engulfed (see figure 54). The focus of the sex scene in Conan the Barbarian is Schwarzenegger’s body, not the actress’s or a combination of the two. The sex in Conan the Barbarian may initiate an affective process, but that process is informed by male eroticism, the aesthetically spectacular male figure, and dominance and power.

Figure 53. It’s all about Conan, Conan the Barbarian (1982).

Figure 54. It’s still all about Conan, Conan the Barbarian (1982).
The aesthetically spectacular body and the kinesthetically spectacular body both initiate and inform the affective process as a result of their sexuality—each body titillates its viewers. However, while the kinesthetic body is clothed, directed, and written into scenarios that are supposed to accentuate the sensuality of its physique, the aesthetic body is contrastingly unclothed, directed, and put into scenarios that accentuate its eroticism. The aesthetically spectacular body is lasciviously posed and subsequently gazed upon, while the kinesthetically spectacular body is modestly revealed and made to perform in ways akin to sport. Intrinsically, each body communicates a unique form of sexuality and are subsequently put into scenarios that are appropriate for that physique—it is hard to imagine Ford, Mark Hamill, or Keaton throwing a witch into a fire after one final thrust of the pelvis. Likewise, it is hard to imagine Schwarzenegger’s aesthetically spectacular body in the 1980s expressing sensuality, romance, or tenderness.

The last two subdivisions—physical specialization, which splits into athleticism and strength, and physical capability, which splits into kinetic actualization and kinetic potential—are, like the previous characteristics, interrelated. Ultimately, the aesthetically spectacular body and the kinesthetically spectacular body both initiate and inform the affective process via veneration, and respect for the physical specialization and physical capability of the spectacular form, either kinesthetic or aesthetic. This awe that may be experience as a result of the spectacular body, is one of the reasons that action-adventure films in the 1980s are spectacular; in fact, it’s what makes spectacle itself spectacular. The human body as it is portrayed in the action-adventure films of the 1980s—whether aesthetic or kinesthetic—is spectacular; it pushes the boundaries of what the human body is capable of, either aesthetically or kinetically. As a result, audiences respond affectively to both types of body. The kinesthetic and aesthetic bodies
on-screen in the 1980s are spectacle in and of themselves. And while these bodies both initiate and inform affective process, the affective response is informed in unique ways; the kinesthetically spectacular body is admired for its athleticism and its ability to move through space, while the aesthetically spectacular body is admired for its potential for strength. Likewise, the kinesthetically spectacular body is admired (often held in reverence) for what it does kinetically—leaping, jumping, sliding, swinging, running, riding—while the aesthetically spectacular body is admired for its physical potential, which is guessed at by audiences based on its excessive size. Aesthetically spectacular bodies are full of potential; these bodies, based on their physical appearance alone, seem capable of performing all sorts of somatic feats, but often don’t.

The kinesthetic body, in films like *Raiders of the Lost Ark, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, is a mobile, active, athletic body. Jones communicates somatic spectacle through athleticism; his running, sprinting, jumping, reaching, swinging, climbing, and general spelunking is the direct result of a lithe, flexible, capable, fit, but modestly sized body. In all three films, Ford, as Jones performs feats that would be untenable for an aesthetically spectacular body like Schwarzenegger’s or Stallone’s. For example, in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, viewers are shown several medium shots of Jones running from the now iconic boulder, whip in one hand, golden idol in the other. The camera is placed primarily in front of Jones (there is one shot from behind the boulder) and is witness to his running, sidestepping, and backpedaling until he dives headfirst out of a narrow opening (see figure 55). Jones evades the iconic rolling boulder by running, diving, and grappling through tight spaces that couldn’t have accommodated an aesthetically spectacular body. Even Jones’s famous whip is an active, athletic weapon or tool that requires a fair amount of kinetic energy—Jones not only has to be
athletically capable to whip it, the actions he performs after the whip action are often kinesthetically spectacular as well, like swinging or climbing. So, not only does Jones look athletically capable, he is actually athletically capable; he is active and actual, not theoretical and potential. In contrast, the aesthetically spectacular body on-screen in the 1980s appears to be somatically gifted—with large, well-defined muscles and tremendous bulk—yet it is not nearly as active (kinetically) as its kinesthetic counterparts.

Figure 55. Jones dives away from the boulder at the top of the screen a third of the way from the left, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981).

In contrast to the lithe and sprightly kinesthetic body, the aesthetic body of the 1980s communicates strength and excessive amounts of unrealized somatic potential. Stallone’s character in the Rocky films is a seeming exception to this pattern, although boxing by its very nature—especially heavyweight boxing—is predominantly an upper-body sport. However, Rambo, Dutch, the Terminator, and Conan are all specifically coded for strength and venerated for their impressive physiques; impressive physiques that were carefully shaped not to perform certain tasks, but instead to look a certain way. As such, films like *Predator*, *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, *Conan the Barbarian*, and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* are littered with muscle-display
performances and a significant amount of feats of strength that require very little running or jumping, which initiate and inform the affective process as a result of the image the aesthetically spectacular body creates, not the actions it performs, as most actions performed are meant to accentuate the physique. For example, in *Predator*, Ventura’s character Blain carries a modified General Electric (GE) M134 minigun; this in itself is a feat of strength due to the gun’s size and weight, since it was originally designed as a mounted weapon (either on a helicopter or a terrestrial vehicle), not a handheld weapon. Realism aside, the minigun provides opportunities for feats of strength that accentuate Ventura’s arms, neck, and chest.

There is a difference between active forms of strength that require kinetic movement and feats of strength that require little to no movement; while the fighting we see in films like *Conan the Barbarian* and *Rocky II* is active, simply holding a heavy gun, doing chin-ups, or mimicking deadlifts with a truck are mostly inert. The less-than-active feats allow for muscle-display performances that the camera can linger on. Schwarzenegger as the Terminator repeats the minigun feat in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* as he, at one point in the film, carries and fires another modified version of the M134. But, where Ventura’s model had a body harness to displace the weight of the weapon, Schwarzenegger’s does not. Similarly, Rambo uses a large compound bow in both *Rambo: First Blood Part II* and *Rambo III*—not only does the bow require a significant amount of strength to draw, it accentuates Stallone’s arms and chest much in the same way the minigun does for Ventura and Schwarzenegger. *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, *Rambo III*, *Predator*, and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* do feature running, jumping, and kinetic movement, but this is secondary to the muscle-display performances that are stationary. In terms of kinetic movement by the aesthetically spectacular bodies in such films, the actors’ actions are much slower and much more calculated—one might be tempted to make a comparison to an
animal stalking prey. Schwarzenegger in *Predator* and *Commando* especially and Stallone in *First Blood, Rambo: First Blood Part II*, and *Rambo III*, often move slowly with their heads forward and knees bent in a crouch. In *Commando*, Schwarzenegger as Matrix—bedecked in forest fatigues and dark green camouflage face paint—begins to infiltrate the enemy compound in a low, careful trot. The camera, placed at eye level and pulled back to a medium-wide shot, captures Matrix hunched over, muscles taught, crossing a small river (see figure 56). When Matrix makes it to the compound, he dispatches half a dozen guards by sneaking up on them from behind, carefully emerging from a slow, crouched stalk. Not only does the slow, steady stalking movement make the actors’ upper bodies appear larger, it forces their bodies to hold tension, which, again, accentuates their musculature. The slow kinetic movements also allow the camera to linger on the body, a body that is encouraging viewers to connote it with wild, predatory animals. This is in direct contrast to the often blurry movement of Ford or Hamill in *Indiana Jones* or Star Wars.

Figure 56. Schwarzenegger’s Matrix stalks his prey, *Commando* (1985).
Initiating the Affective Process: The Spectacular Male Body as Part of a Film’s Audiovisual and Thematic Configuration

Spectacular male bodies are able to communicate the characteristics mentioned above without the help (for the most part) of any given film. In their prime, Schwarzenegger and Stallone cultivated coiled, hulking bodies that communicated predatory, animal ferocity both on and off the screen. Likewise, Ford, Eddie Murphy, and Hamill (among others) maintained physiques that communicated to the outside world a graceful, but athletically capable, masculinity—a physicality that has been the desired physical quality among leading men in Hollywood for over a century. As such, the body itself, regardless of its framing, is capable of initiating and informing the affective process by way of sexuality and physicality. The films that actors with spectacular bodies star in, and the situations in which their characters are placed, maximize that affective impact, but the bodies themselves are the origin point for the affective reaction. However, this process also happens in reverse, especially in action films from the 1980s that feature actors with particularly spectacular bodies; affect is mobilized outside an actor’s spectacular body, yet the body is used to maximize the potential impact. For example, the costuming, dialogue, plot, and settings (the audiovisual configuration of stimuli present in a film) in Raiders of the Lost Ark intimate that when he isn’t Indiana Jones, Ford’s character must be Professor Jones, a bookish, bespectacled scholar interested in antiquities. Ford, himself, does not necessarily convey bookish, but his body (particularly his range of facial expressions) does not stand in the way of such an image. Just imagine Schwarzenegger or Stallone in their physical primes donning three-piece suits and browsing the library. Their bodies would simply get in the way of the desired effect, and the end result would be incongruous.
Incongruous body and film pairings—namely putting aesthetically spectacular bodies in situations and settings that clash with their physiques and the affective reactions such a physique helps shape—is used to great success in creating comedy. Films like *Kindergarten Cop* (1990), *Twins* (1988), and *Mr. Nanny* (1993) are all excellent examples of comedy as result of an actor’s aesthetically spectacular body clashing with the themes and dominant audiovisual configurations within the film. *Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot* (1992) is another example, but instead of an aesthetically spectacular actor clashing with the themes and audiovisual configurations of the film, a physically unspectacular actor—in this case, the then 70-year-old Estelle Getty of *Golden Girls* fame—is paired with a spectacular plot, theme, and audiovisual configuration. And each time an incongruent pairing occurs, the result is comedic. In affective terms, the body is initiating and informing the affective process in ways the rest of the film (setting, costars, themes) is not. The body does not fit into the film’s dominant audiovisual configuration. As such, filmmakers have to be aware of the way an actor’s body might initiate and inform the affective process and the overall compatibility of the pairing. Thus, Schwarzenegger wouldn’t, couldn’t, and shouldn’t play Indiana Jones, and Ford wouldn’t, couldn’t, and shouldn’t play the Terminator, since each film aims for a more serious (read: not comedic) tone.

The action films in the 1980s that form the corpus of texts of this study have themes, settings, plots, and audiovisual configurations that initiate and inform the affective process in ways that are maximized and intensified by the body or bodies on-screen. Because they are all from a particular genre, these films share a number of tropes that are reflected and intensified by the actors’ physiques—adventure, heroism, capability, masculinity, aggression, and bravery are but a few of a given action-adventure films’ themes and tropes that initiate and inform affect and are intensified by both aesthetically and kinesthetically spectacular bodies. As a result, both
Schwarzenegger’s bulky physique and Ford’s more classic Hollywood musculature are capable of intensifying the sense of adventure that is already present in their respective films. They are congruous with their films’ dominant audiovisual configurations. Things around the actors’ body, things that already shape the affective response like props, settings, dialogue, supporting cast, editing, colors, music, themes, and tropes are intensified—or, at the very least, not muted—by the presence of the body. As a result, the overall affective response to the entire audiovisual configuration (body, objects, cinematography, and editing) are ultimately intensified. For example, a theme of courage is not something that a body by itself (either aesthetically spectacular or kinesthetically spectacular) can communicate or mobilize. However, courage is something that can be supported and intensified by a spectacular body, which in turn can more effectively initiate and inform an affective process.

Schwarzenegger’s slow, careful strut—assault rifle in hand—and Ford’s limber frame hanging off the side of a speeding truck both communicate, by way of complement or support, their films’ theme of courage. In Predator, for example, after Blaine is killed and Dutch decides that his team should make a stand against whatever is hunting them, Schwarzenegger’s physique complements the film’s themes of courage, capability, and resiliency. These themes, which initiate and inform the affective process, are only bolstered by Schwarzenegger’s aesthetically spectacular body. After interrogating the captured rebel Anna (Elpidia Carrillo) about the predator, Dutch decides that they should lay traps and wait to ambush the creature. What follows the conversation is a montage of placing trip wires, planting claymores, and pulling down trees in process of creating snares (see figure 57). The majority of the shots of Dutch are from a low angle, making him appear even bigger than he is. In shots that feature Dutch, Schwarzenegger’s bulk takes up a majority of the frame. And although the traps don’t work (almost the entire team
is killed), audiences got the sense that the traps would work because Schwarzenegger’s excessive, stalwart, imposing frame reinforces a general theme of capability and a sense of standing one’s ground. This is also the first point in the film that Carl Weathers is shirtless, and his bulk also helps support the themes of courage and capability; a theme that is able to initiate and inform the affective process (see figure 58). As the commandos set traps, place explosives, pull down trees, and wait to ambush the predator, the montage and music initiate and inform an affective process that culminates in a quickened pulse or shallow breath; Schwarzenegger’s physique (his indomitable appearance) helps inform that process.

Likewise, Ford’s kinesthetically spectacular body supports themes of courage and is congruous with his films’ audiovisual configurations, but in a different way. In Raiders of the Lost Ark, after Jones reunites with Ravenwood, the pair find themselves outnumbered by a bevy of henchmen. The henchmen attack, and despite the odds, Jones and Ravenwood fight back. Not unlike Schwarzenegger’s hulking frame, Ford’s kinesthetically spectacular body supports the idea—and thus helps inform the affective process—that the good guys can prevail. In a number of medium shots that capture a significant portion of Ford’s body, we can see him extend his arm as he fires (see figure 59). This is in opposition to the way in which Schwarzenegger and Stallone hold their weapons—close to the body, elbow bent (see figure 60). In this display of precision, Ford’s kinesthetically spectacular body helps to connote a sense of capability and competency. Additionally, Ford’s kinesthetically spectacular body, by way of its ability to condense and fit into tight spots, helps to communicate courage in the face of being outnumbered and helps to communicate a sense of capability in combat. In the same scene, Ford avoids gunfire by quickly condensing his body and hiding behind a doorframe (see figure 61).
Figure 57. Dutch singlehandedly pulls down a tree, *Predator* (1987).

Figure 58. Feeling safe with Carl Weathers’s massive physique, *Predator* (1987).
Figure 59. A straight shot, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981).

Figure 60. Rambo holds his weapon close on the box art for *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985).
And while both Ford and Schwarzenegger support and bolter their films’ themes of courage, heroism, and capability, and are congruent with the dominant audiovisual configurations, these themes cannot be communicated by the body alone. However, the right body in the right situation is capable of maximizing the theme and informing the affective process. Had Estelle Getty been the one hanging from a Nazi troop transport or walking through a thick jungle setting with camouflage on her face and a rifle hanging from her shoulder, it would be funny—not so with Ford, Schwarzenegger, and their spectacular bodies. However, like the way each aesthetically spectacular and kinesthetically spectacular body alone initiates and informs affect in divergent ways, the two kinds of spectacular bodies on-screen in the 1980s support the audiovisual configurations and themes—that initiate and inform the affective process—present in their films in different ways.

Generally, the kinesthetically spectacular body that appears on-screen in action films in the 1980s seems to support and intensify themes and tropes like exploration, discovery, aggressive defense, introspection, and knowledge, whereas the aesthetically spectacular body generally supports and intensifies brutality, steadfastness, vengeance, and duty. And like the
characteristics that can be communicated by the body alone—sexuality, physical confidence, and others—the dominant audiovisual configurations and themes present in the top action-adventure films in the 1980s that are supported by spectacular bodies are also bifurcated into discrete subcategories. For example, both the aesthetically spectacular body and the kinesthetically spectacular body are capable of and congruent with the violence present in the top action-adventure films from the 1980s. Yet, the kinesthetically spectacular body channels that physical violence into aggressive defense, while the aesthetically spectacular body channels the violence into savagery, brutality, and acts of vengeance. In *Conan the Barbarian*, Schwarzenegger’s Conan seeks revenge for the slaying of his family and the destruction of his village. Throughout the film, Conan savagely dispatches the perpetrators, slashing them, stabbing them, running them through, crushing them, and hacking at them. As an extension of Conan’s strength, the violence in *Conan the Barbarian* is savage and graphic. And when Conan finally faces Thulsa Doom (James Earl Jones), a medium-tight shot captures the moment Conan gruesomely beheads Doom (see figure 62). Interestingly, Schwarzenegger’s massive forearm is captured in the sequence. Again, Schwarzenegger’s bulk helps reinforce the savagery of the violence in *Conan the Barbarian*, a savagery that initiates and informs the affective process.
Conversely, the violence done by the kinesthetically spectacular body in the most popular action-adventure films of the 1980s is tame in comparison. Ford’s Solo and Ford’s Jones do not kill as a result of vengeance, but preservation. For example, in *Star Wars*, Solo shoots Greedo (Paul Blake) at the conclusion of the cantina scene—an infamous exchange. In a medium-wide shot, Solo is seen with his feet up on the table, his right arm resting on the headrest of the booth. Greedo is there to bring Solo—dead or alive—to Jabba the Hutt. Knowing that he is in imminent, mortal danger, Solo fires his gun under the table killing Greedo. The violence is done in self-defense. It should be noted that in later releases of the film, George Lucas, through CGI, has Greedo shoot first—missing Solo—before he himself is shot and killed. And while this set off a subsequent firestorm among fans, it reinforces the idea that Solo’s violence was in self-defense. This kind of scene happens again in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* when Jones goes up against a masked swordsman in the middle of a busy market. After a medium shot of the swordsman’s flourish, Jones pulls out a pistol, shoots him, and turns away. Again, this violence is in self-
defense, and again, Ford’s body compliments the notion—he is not extremely brutal, but capably violent out of necessity.

To be clear, each film includes a number of objects, colors, sounds, settings, and dialogue exterior to the actor’s body that connotes the desired theme. *Rambo: First Blood Part II* communicates savagery, brutality, and vengeance—all of which initiate and inform an affective response—with or without Stallone’s aesthetically spectacular body. However, Stallone’s tightly coiled, chiseled physique and well-struck muscle-display performances complement the existing themes in a way that is either unattainable or less effective with another kind of physique. Similarly, Ford’s kinesthetically spectacular body complements the playfully violent, aggressive defense that is communicated throughout the original Star Wars trilogy and the Indiana Jones franchise. Ford’s svelte and limber frame accentuates the heroic, playful (although at times, graphic) violence that is a staple of the entire franchise. Like the violence in the film, Ford’s frame does not come off as uncontrollably excessive. In contrast, the violence in *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, not unlike like Stallone’s frame in the 1980s is brutally excessive, thus it complements the preexisting themes and audiovisual configurations, which in turn go a long way toward initiating and informing the affective process. One can also compare the violence in *Commando* with Schwarzenegger’s frame to a similar effect.

A number of other overarching themes and dominant audiovisual configurations present in the most popular action-adventure films from the 1980s—like adventure—are also split into subdivisions depending on the type of spectacular body present in the film. While the kinesthetically spectacular body is congruent with the themes and audiovisual configurations that communicate exploration and discovery, the aesthetically spectacular body is congruent with themes that communicates a sense of duty. In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, for example, exotic
locations, the presence of golden treasures, the ever-present danger of ancient mantraps, the inclusion of exotic weapons, and foreign dialogue—all of which occur in the first ten minutes of the film—do, indeed, initiate and inform affect via themes of adventure. Yet, this is not adventure in a generic sense, but a specific kind of adventure that emerges from the more specific themes of exploration and discovery. The explorative nature of the adventure present in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*—and in the Indiana Jones franchise as a whole—is communicated by several motifs, including the animated montage of an aircraft, a map, and a solid red line. This animation (which is a symbolic representation of Jones’s travel) is not only deeply associated with the franchise, it connotes a theme of exploration, specifically (see figure 63). Ford’s body is congruent with exploration and discovery, as it is lithe and capable of crawling, swinging, diving, shimmying, and otherwise spelunking; something an aesthetically spectacular body is not nearly as good at.

Themes of exploration present in the Indiana Jones franchise is a thematic subset of adventure that initiates and informs the affective process. The vintage map, the red marks (appearing as if plotting a course), and the decidedly nonmilitary style of the aircraft all initiate and inform the affective process through the theme of exploration. The scope of the travel (as evidenced by the graphic, but also the film’s locales) also communicates far off, foreign exploration. And even Jones’s chosen profession, archeology, initiates and informs the affective process via exploration and discovery. Archeology, not unlike the main character’s persona, is deeply associated with rooting around in and unearthing of things past, the piecing together of small bits of evidence in the hopes of understanding the whole; in short, archeology is securely rooted in both exploration and discovery, which in turn initiates and informs affect. And again, Ford’s nimble, sprightly physique is congruent with this theme.
The kind of adventure that Jones finds himself on is drastically different from the kind of adventure that characters like Rambo or Dutch find themselves on. Rambo and Dutch are not on their adventures (which, like Raiders of the Lost Ark, are rife with exotic locales, foreign languages, lethal weapons, and mantraps) to discover or explore. Rather, Rambo and Dutch adventure as a matter of duty; their reasons for adventure are specific, unalterable, and (in their minds) righteous. In both of their respective films, Rambo and Dutch are framed as morally righteous, duty-oriented characters that are steeped in danger as a by-product of their given missions. They are on tours of duty; they are answering a call. In First Blood, Rambo: First Blood Part II, The Terminator, Terminator 2: Judgment Day, and Predator, there are a number of shots and scenes that depict either some sort of command center or mission readout (see figure 64 and figure 65). It should be noted that Rambo destroys the command center in Rambo: First Blood Part II in a symbolic gesture of redefining the mission into his vision of what it should be. More on that later.
A duty-oriented mission informs the adventure of films like *Predator* and *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, and it is clearly communicated, in both films, by the overarching thematic motifs of patriotism, militarism, and unarguable moral positions. A sense of patriotism and militarism are clearly present in both films as both Rambo and Dutch are functionaries of the US military—in *Predator*, Schwarzenegger plays a Vietnam veteran who goes on to take charge of a private military team hired by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) at the onset of the film, while in
*Rambo: First Blood Part II*, Stallone plays another Vietnam veteran who is released from prison by the US military on the condition that he attempts to rescue American prisoners of war still held captive in the jungles of Vietnam.

As for the motif of unarguable moral positions, it is important to note that both characters repudiate their respective missions. However, this is not in opposition to the motifs of patriotism and militarism. Instead, both characters adopt new missions of their own design that better accommodate their own sense of patriotism and *justifiable* military intervention. In Dutch’s case, he is duped into eliminating Central American rebels only to redefine his mission as the elimination of a much greater foreign threat (the alien predator) and the evacuation of his team and the one surviving guerrilla, Anna (Elpidia Carrillo). The following interaction between Dutch and Dillon is especially telling:

Dutch: I think this is what you’re looking for. You set us up. It’s all bullshit. All of it. The cabinet minister, the whole business. Got us in here to do your dirty work.

Dillon: We stopped a major invasion. In three days they’d have crossed the border.

Dutch: Why us?

Dillon: Because nobody else could’ve pulled it off. You’re pissed about the cover story. You would have never come without it.

Dutch: So, what story did you hand to Hopper?

Dillon: We’ve been looking for this place for months. My men were in that chopper when it got hit. Hopper went in and he disappeared.

Dutch: He didn’t disappear. He was skinned alive.

Dillon: I had to get somebody who could crack these bastards.
Dutch: So you cooked up a story and dropped the six of us in a meat grinder.

What happened to you, Dillon? You used to be somebody I could trust.

Dillon: I woke up. Why don’t you? You’re an asset, an expendable asset, and I used you to get the job done. Got it?

Dutch: My men are not expendable. And I don’t do this kind of work.

As for Rambo, he too is duped by the US military. He was led to believe that he would be emancipating prisoners of war, but instead he is instructed at the last moment to simply scout the camp—so he reorients his mission and interprets the chain of command so that it accommodates his own sense of patriotism and military intervention, which results in an armed assault on the enemy encampment and the release of American soldiers:

    Murdock: Rambo, I don’t make the orders. I take ’em, just like you. I swear to God I didn’t know it was supposed to happen like this. It was just supposed to be another assignment.

    Rambo: (lunging at Murdock with his knife drawn) You know there’s more men out there. You know where they are. Find ’em . . .

As both redefined missions are adopted near the end of the first act or at the onset of the second (and each original mission is morally suspect from the onset of the film), the adventure each protagonist occupies is singular, morally righteous, and unalterable. And each film initiates the affective process through a clear communication of moral righteousness, patriotism, and militarism as defined by each character, not by the governmental apparatus that commands said military—both Dutch and Rambo are firm believers in patriotism, military intervention, and the military apparatus. However, they also believe that the bureaucrats (a word that is said with
distinct disdain in each film) in charge of the apparatus are not acting in patriotic ways. They believe that the bureaucracy is morally bankrupt and has failed the military.

These specific, thematic subdivisions of adventure are reflected in and enhanced by the spectacular body or bodies on-screen. Ford’s kinesthetically spectacular body complements themes of exploration and discovery as it is a body that connotes mobility and situational, somatic capability. Throughout all three films, Ford’s body runs, jumps, dives, rolls, fits in tight spaces, and travels with ease both on land and through the air; Ford’s physicality is appropriate for, and complements, the themes and audiovisual configurations of exploration and discovery, which in turn initiates and informs the affective response. From the iconic boulder scene in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* to the final fight in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* where Jones jumps from his galloping horse onto the Nazi tank, Ford’s agility and kinesthetically spectacular body complements and enhances the dominant audiovisual configurations and themes present in the films. In contrast, the aesthetically spectacular frames of both Stallone and Schwarzenegger do not communicate agility or somatic versatility and therefore are less capable of complementing and enhancing a sense of adventure that is firmly rooted in the kinds of exploration and discovery communicated by *Raiders of the Lost Ark, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, and *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*. Instead, their bodies are congruent with the monolithic, resolute, incontrovertible themes of patriotism, moral righteousness, and militarism present in *Predator* and *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, as their aesthetically spectacular frames are monolithic, resolute, uncompromising, and extreme. In the same way that Schwarzenegger and Stallone in the 1980s wouldn’t be good fits for the part of a world-traveling, sprightly, adventuring archeologist, Ford’s body in the 1980s simply wouldn’t complement a
film where the themes that shape the affective process are uncompromising and rigid, as his body is neither of those things.

The rigidity of the aesthetically spectacular body—in contrast to the lithe kinesthetically spectacular body—also corresponds to the limited range of emotional expressions present in films like *Predator, Rambo: First Blood Part II, Commando, Conan the Barbarian,* and *Rocky II.* Simply put, films that feature aesthetically spectacular bodies mobilize a limited emotional spectrum, a narrow continuum that the aesthetically spectacular body complements. Related to the aforementioned concept of affective transmission, the emotions that films like *Predator* and *Rambo: First Blood Part II* aim to convey (via dialogue, direction, and characters) are routed through the aesthetically spectacular body, which are then embodied, intensified, and passed along to the audience. Rambo, Dutch, and Conan, in particular, are emotionally consistent characters that are, more often than not, in a state of grim determination. This is reflected in, among other things, the actors’ limited range of facial expressions throughout their respective films. Dutch, Rocky, Conan, and Rambo do smile, even laugh, and, at times, their expressions communicate fear or trepidation, but their facial expressions consistently trend toward anger or determination. This is expressed through clenched jaws, neutral mouths, and constantly alert, piercing gazes—even Rambo’s thousand-yard stare (a critical comment on trauma as a result of warfare) is determined, not unfocused or blank. Additionally, actions the characters take also communicate anger and determination. Furthermore, expressions and actions are not the only signposts for anger and determination—the dialogue in films like *Predator, Commando, Rocky II,* and any of the films in the Rambo trilogy (especially *First Blood,* as evidenced by the dialogue below) communicate anger and determination:
Rambo: Nothing is over! Nothing! You can’t just switch it off! It wasn’t my war. You asked me, I didn’t ask you! I did everything to win, but someone didn’t let us win. And at home, at the airport, those maggots were protesting. They spat at me, called me a baby murderer and shit like that! Why protest against me, when they weren’t there, didn’t experience it?

Trautman (Richard Crenna): It was hard, but it’s in the past.

Rambo: For you! Civilian life means nothing to me. There we had a code of honor. You watch my back, I watch yours. Here there’s nothing! You’re the last of an elite troop—don’t end it like this. There I flew helicopters, drove tanks, had equipment worth millions. Here I can’t even work parking!

What’s interesting is that the emotions expressed by characters with aesthetically spectacular bodies (especially their facial expressions) while limited in their variety are almost always extreme, excessive, and uncompromising in their intensity; when Conan or Rambo gets angry, it’s not simply anger, but rage, wrath, or fury. Similarly, the occasional happiness expressed by aesthetically spectacular characters (the initial greeting between Dutch and Dillon at the onset of Predator is a good example) is intense and extreme. This narrow, but intense, spectrum of emotion present in films like Predator and Rambo: First Blood Part II is complemented (indeed, elevated) by aesthetically spectacular bodies, as such bodies are themselves—as has been discussed in great detail—somatically intense and physically and consistently firm, fixed, unalterable, and rigid. The aesthetically spectacular body also complements and enhances the ever-present sense of excess present in the films that feature them. This sense of excess is not simply an emotional component (although, it often manifests in extreme emotions), it is integral to each film’s overarching narrative: extreme anger and
vengeance drives films like *Predator* (anger at being duped and revenge against the alien invader), *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (anger toward and revenge against the Vietnamese, the Russians, and the US bureaucracy), *Conan the Barbarian* (anger toward and revenge against Thulsa Doom), and *Rocky II* (revenge against Apollo Creed). The extremity of vengeance is only complemented and enhanced by the aesthetically spectacular body that in itself is somatically extreme and physically severe.

All in all, the narrow spectrum of emotions present in a film like *Predator* or *Rambo: First Blood Part II* are ultimately due to the way in which the films’ characters, direction, and narratives are shaped. And as it is routed, complemented, and enhanced through the body of the actor or actors, the embodied emotions (predominantly anger and determination) easily initiate and inform their own affective processes. As such, the tension, exhilaration, sweaty palms, and quickened pulse experienced as a result of action-adventure films in the 1980s that feature aesthetically spectacular bodies are, more often than not, cued and shaped by anger and determination.

In contrast, Ford, as Indiana Jones or Han Solo, communicates a broad array of facial expressions throughout *Raiders of the Lost Ark, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom, Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, Star Wars, Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back*, and *Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi*. Ford’s range of facial expressions indicates a range of emotions present in the aforementioned films. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* includes myriad emotions like fear, happiness, excitement, sadness, anger, frustration, trepidation, love, lust, levity, distress, anxiety, resolve, introspection, and determination. As this short list of emotional options indicates, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (among other action-adventure films in the 1980s that feature kinesthetically spectacular bodies) is emotionally diverse and emotionally specific.
contrast to characters like Rambo and Dutch, as Indiana Jones, Ford doesn’t simply express the extremity of anger or fear throughout the films, but instead expresses a number of different, specific manifestations of fear or anger throughout the film.

In the final scenes of Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, there are a number of medium-close shots that center on Ford’s face. These shots are used to showcase a number of nuanced expressions. When Jones selects a grail and fills it with water, Ford looks almost directly at the camera, at the viewers, and pauses long enough for audiences to absorb his expression (see figure 66). This particular expression is a mixture of trepidation (“Will this be the right grail?”) and determination. After choosing the right grail, Jones runs back to his father and treats his wounds with the water from the chalice. When the water miraculously erases his father’s wounds, Ford’s face is once again centered in a medium-close shot. This time, Ford’s expression is a mix of relief and wonder (see figure 67). And when the chamber begins to collapse, Ford’s expression—head back, eyes wide, brow wrinkled, and chin tucked—is one of concern and concentration; it’s apparent that Jones is already assessing the situation (see figure 68). Once the chamber begins splitting apart, the grail falls onto a ledge below one of the fissures. The edge of the fissure breaks apart and Jones starts to fall. He is caught by his father. Just out of his reach, Jones strains to get the grail. Ford’s face is first twisted in effort, but once his father convinces him to let it go, his face immediately relaxes into an expression of resignation as he comes to terms with losing the grail (see figure 69). There are no less than a dozen of these shots throughout the sequence, and within a matter of only a few minutes, Ford’s facial expressions run a gamut of nuanced meaning.
Figure 66. Jones is nervous, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989).

Figure 67. Jones cures his father, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989).
Ford’s command of his facial performance in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (indeed, in any of his films) allows viewers to make a distinction between trepidation, bewilderment, horror, anxiety, and concern. And Ford’s kinesthetically spectacular body complements this vast array of affect as it is, and is asked to be, physically complex; the kinesthetically spectacular body is capable of a wide range of somatic expressions.

As it is with the aesthetically spectacular bodies, films that feature kinesthetically spectacular bodies communicate and mobilize emotion not only through the facial expressions of
the actors, but also through direction and narrative. The original Indiana Jones trilogy and the original Star Wars trilogy have moments of levity, humor, tenderness, and romance alongside of anger and determination. And as a result, the affective process in the films (a process that culminates in a physiological reaction) are initiated and informed by a multitude of emotions channeled through the kinesthetically spectacular body, not just anger.

**Conclusion**

Each kind of body (aesthetic or kinesthetic) featured in action-adventure films in the 1980s reflects and intensifies the emotional range already established and expressed by the given film. These projected emotions are all filtered through the protagonist’s body and, in turn, the bodies are able to initiate and inform affect through transmission, as has been discussed previously. While the kinesthetically spectacular body supports and enhances a varied array of emotions put forth by the film itself, the aesthetically spectacular body is physically suited for a much narrower, but more intense, cross section of emotions. In either case, the emotions communicated via narrative, facial expressions, direction, and the bodies on-screen absorb, intensify, and ultimately initiate and inform an affective process via the said emotions.

Similar to cinematography and editing, the themes and audiovisual configurations that initiate and inform the affective process present in the most popular action-adventure films of the 1980s are largely bifurcated, with films that feature aesthetically spectacular bodies on one side and films that feature kinesthetically spectacular bodies on the other. And while each body type is capable of initiating and uniquely informing the affective process on their own—think about how our own bodies respond certain ways to certain bodies—they more generally support the affective process of the films in which they appear. For example, the original Star Wars trilogy, rife with dog fights, lightsaber duels, and gunplay, needs compatible, aesthetically spectacular
bodies to maximize its ability to initiate and inform the affective process—Hamill’s body flips through the air with ease, while Ford’s body tucks, dives, and rolls without hesitation. One could also make the argument that the film insists (through dialogue and cinematography) that the Millennium Falcon is an extension of Ford, and as a result, its agility, speed, and caginess are Ford’s. It is simply hard to imagine an aesthetically spectacular body taking on the role of Luke Skywalker or Han Solo; it simply wouldn’t be able to support the specific themes and audiovisual configurations present in the Star Wars franchise.

Conversely, films that feature aesthetically spectacular bodies (*Rambo: First Blood Part II, Predator, The Terminator, Rocky II, and Commando*) rely on different themes and audiovisual configurations to initiate and inform a physiological response. Explosions, bloody gun battles, gritty hand-to-hand combat, and hypermasculine displays of strength are but some of the audiovisual cues that can push audiences to the edge of their seats, set their jaws, or encourage a rush of adrenaline. And for their part, Schwarzenegger and Stallone often participate in muscle-display performances—bodybuilding parlance for striking a pose. These performances, in addition to the actors’ often-shirtless chests, complement and support the aforementioned themes, which in turn initiate and inform the affective process. Again, it is hard to imagine a kinesthetically spectacular body in the role of Rambo.

In either case, these bodies and the characters they play are not average and they are not normal—they are spectacular. And these bodies weren’t simply adding to the spectacle of the films that they were in; the films themselves shifted to highlight the spectacular nature of the given body, both technically and affectively. It’s hard to tell if a film’s technical and affective dimensions were adjusted to accommodate the body, or if the body was cast to accommodate the film’s envisioned spectacle. Whatever the case may be, each popular action-adventure film from
the 1980s that I examined is technically and affectively compatible with—and spectacularly enhanced by—either the kinesthetically spectacular body or the aesthetically spectacular body, but not both.

Notes


4. Men and women in the United States are expected to behave according to patriarchal gender subdivisions, and men are actively conditioned to suppress strong emotions outside of anger.


http://public.eblib.com/EBLWeb/patron/?target=patron&extendedid=E_438722_0.

9. Ibid., 3.

10. Ibid., 5.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 1.


17. Ibid., 179.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., 180.


22. “Moab Movie Locations - Take a Tour of Some of Moab’s Famous Movie Locations,” Moab Area Travel Council, accessed April 1, 2016,


25. Ibid., 54.

26. Ibid., 23.


CHAPTER 4: OUTLINING A NEW, BODY-ORIENTED ANALYTICAL LENS THROUGH WHICH THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FILM AND CULTURE CAN BE EXAMINED

This study has reoriented our understanding of the male action star’s body in the 1980s, the influence these bodies had on the movies they appeared in, and the influence these bodies had on spectacle. And, while the primary thrust of this study was an understanding of the way in which the action-adventure films in the 1980s were influenced by the type of body that was featured (writing, filming, editing, affect, emotion and more), a secondary consequence arose. This study has created a new kind of body analysis that has the potential to shed light on, and challenge our conceptions of, the culture and the politics of any given era, the 1980s notwithstanding. Simply put, the methods of analyzing the cinematic male form as I have outlined in this study could potentially be applied to a number of films, eras, and bodies.

And while body analysis outside of this study’s scope this is an exciting prospect, thanks to Schwarzenegger, Stallone, and a number of others like Lundgren, Ferrigno, and Van Damme, the 1980s represents a unique era to which these new methods could be applied. Once it is all put together—spectacle, affect, cinematography, editing, set design, kinesthetically spectacular bodies, aesthetically spectacular bodies, affect, and emotion—the findings in this study have the potential to not only recontextualize our academic understanding of the era’s cinematic oeuvre, but also reveal new things about American culture in the 1980s. And while the identification of spectacular bodies in the most popular action-adventure films of the 1980s (and the filmic evidence it provides) has the potential to nuance the Reagan era’s impact on culture in particular, a body analysis of this kind has the potential to provide a more nuanced, cultural understanding of the decade in general. When applied to the 1980s, this study’s unique body analysis reveals an era that may not have been as divisive as we originally thought. Spectacular male bodies, like the
films they appear in, reflect (and support our understanding of) the time and place in which they are situated, and the \textit{kinesthetically spectacular} bodies that appear in the top action-adventure films of the 1980s challenge our popularly accepted understanding of the era as it appears in the scholarship. There is simply no disputing the fact that Reagan had his share of supporters. And one cannot wish away Reagan’s profound impact on the cultural and political fabric of the American landscape—the 1980s gave rise to Rambo, Rocky, the Terminator, and Conan the Barbarian. Yet, the evidence in this study reveals an American cinematic landscape that was more nuanced.

The unrivaled popularity of the top action-adventure films in the 1980s that featured kinesthetically spectacular bodies (Schwarzenegger and Stallone’s movies couldn’t come close to Ford, Hamill, and Murphy’s films in terms of box-office success), in conjunction with what the kinesthetically spectacular and aesthetically spectacular body each represented affectively, reveals an American populace that was maybe a little less in crisis than we have been led to believe by the scholarship. This isn’t to say that the 1980s were free from the well-documented antifeminist backlash and anti-black and anti-poverty legislation—it simply means that the average American bought more tickets to see Foley in \textit{Beverly Hills Cop} than they did to see Rambo in \textit{Rambo: First Blood Part II}, and that \textit{means} something.

In an effort to more fully understand the relationship between male action stars, their physiques, affect, filmmaking, and the 1980s, I have created a new lens through which movies can be viewed that further elucidates the relationship between American culture, movies, and the male body. This study has not only refined the definition of spectacle as it pertains to film, it has put affect theory to use in new, unique ways. Ways that highlight the intimate relationship between culture, film, and physiology—culture informs our base reactions to movies while
movies simultaneously inform the culture in which they exist. In short, this study is an exciting new lens through which movies in the 1980s (and movies before and after the 1980s) can be examined.

So, what is it that can be discovered by examining the most popular action-adventure film in the 1980s through this lens? These concluding pages will ask two questions. One, does the evidence gathered from this study’s body analysis align with what is already known about the politics and culture in the 1980s. Two, what new conclusions can be drawn from a comparative analysis of what is already known about politics and culture in the 1980s and what the top action-adventure films in the 1980s are communicating? However, since these questions are immensely broad I am narrowing the extent of the inquiry to three specific cultural/political subjects in the 1980s—foreign policy, American gender politics, and American racial politics. And, while a number of movies included in this study will be used in this analysis, Beverly Hills Cop will be the central example. These questions and these topics will be examined through the new lens that this study has created, with the delineation between the kinesthetically spectacular body and the aesthetically spectacular body being of the utmost importance. Again, bear in mind that this is not an exhaustive case study of these particular topics, nor is it definitive proof of the cultural and political configurations in the 1980s. This is simply a demonstration of a new lens through which the 1980s (and the movies of the 1980s) can be viewed and examined—this is evidence, not proof. As a result, the following analysis will be incomplete, leaving ample room for further study.

And, again, it should be noted that while I am using this new lens as a way to reexamine the politics and culture of the 1980s, it could be used for genres and time periods outside the Reagan era. With significant amounts of new qualitative and quantitative data (gleaned from this
study) supporting the idea that on-screen male bodies are integral to the cinematic experience, the lens that this study has created could be turned toward a number of movies through a number of decades. An examination of Leni Riefenstahl’s *Olympia* (1938) might benefit from this new lens, for example. Simply put, this lens is not unique to the 1980s and has far-reaching benefits for a number of studies throughout scholarship—if anything, I want this project to be a springboard from which others will explore popular movies in new, exciting, thorough ways.

While some (both inside and outside academia) may think that popular film is socially irrelevant or culturally bankrupt, I do not. In my view, popular movies are one of our most revelatory artistic mediums—popular, spectacular movies can tell us things about ourselves in a way no other artistic form can. This lens is a tool that has the potential to help reveal such a connection.

**The Kinesthetically Spectacular Body, the Aesthetically Spectacular Body, and Their Divergent Representations of American Foreign Policy in the 1980s**

The state of war and foreign policy in the 1980s was unprecedented in American history; American military involvement, while widespread, was uniquely passive-aggressive and unapologetically underhanded. During Reagan’s two terms in office (starting in 1981), American military intervention in the Middle East, South America, and Central America was commonplace. Afghanistan, the Persian Gulf, Panama, Nicaragua, and Grenada were of particular import to the Reagan Doctrine—a foreign policy agenda that was dedicated to the containment and resistance of communist (particularly Soviet) influence around the globe. Following Richard Nixon’s resignation in 1974, the aftermath of the fall of Saigon in 1975, and widespread civil unrest throughout the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, Reagan inherited from Jimmy Carter a country in the middle of a cultural identity crisis, an identity crisis that threatened to (and in some cases did) destabilize traditional white masculinity in profound ways:
In 1979, film icon and conservative activist John Wayne died, symbolically representing the passing of a more traditional, triumphant vision of white masculinity. What America lost and desperately needed again, [Robert] Bly and others declared, were *real men*—men who reclaimed a “deep masculinity,” a warrior mentality that had gone missing in post-civil rights culture. For many, Ronald Reagan—voted the “most admired man in America” for eight consecutive years (1980–1988) in Gallup polls—answered the call. Reagan’s slogans called for a return to simpler times and ideals: traditional values, unambiguous strength, order, and power. “No pale pastels,” as he put it in a 1975 CPAC speech. At home and abroad, clear distinctions were made between us and them, good and evil, tough and weak.¹

Reagan, for all intents and purposes, was packaged and sold as a white knight who was going to not only reassert American political, economic, and military dominance around the world, but also safeguard masculinity against the *soft*, albeit steadfast, onslaught of a surging feminist movement emboldened by a reinvigorated black civil rights movement. In what was, for the time, a unique amalgamation of celebrity culture and politics, Reagan was presented and received as an extension of the parts he played on the silver screen: a cowboy, a football player, and an all-American. This was a reciprocal, synergistic relationship; Reagan’s macho conservatism, which was partly gleaned from his time playing macho characters, irrevocably influenced popular culture and the action-adventure films of the 1980s.²

In the 1980s, “traditional manhood was on the defensive, responding actively and violently to the democratization and bureaucratization that threatened it.”³ Action-adventure films during this time became forums in which men could safely opine for a return to a position of dominance they thought lost. Akin to the popular conception of Reagan as hero, and running
parallel to the political policies of the Reagan administration, scholars have often considered such films to be “defending the manhood which, according to Susan Jeffords, was lost in the humiliating and emasculating defeat in Vietnam. First Blood and Rambo: First Blood Part II dealt directly with the Vietnam question, and Predator, Commando, and others carried it by implication.” For indeed, it is widely accepted that Reagan’s military dictums, domestic policies, and the Reagan Doctrine itself were responses to, and extensions of, a deeper, masculine, more cultural agenda—Reagan was going to reclaim and reeducate the lost, soft, American man; he was going to reestablish a traditional hierarchy, one based on race and gender. Indeed, the bodies on-screen in the most popular action-adventure films of the 1980s are all, in some way, products of, or reacting to, the Reagan Doctrine and its implementation around the globe. And while a number of scholars lump all of the action-adventure films of the 1980s into the same ideological category (conservative reaffirmation of the masculine), my analysis of the bodies on-screen, and the differences—both affective and technical—between the kinesthetically spectacular body and the aesthetically spectacular body tell a slightly different story.

While watching a film, one may experience physiological sensations in response to the audiovisual configurations on-screen—dialogue, editing, action, music, special effects. This is true for any film, but it is particularly true for action-adventure films. Action-adventure films are often steeped in spectacle, and spectacle (with its particularly stimulating audiovisual configurations) drives the physiological reaction defined as affect. Action-adventure films in the 1980s can initiate and inform affect without a spectacular male body, but both the aesthetically spectacular body and the kinesthetically spectacular body perform two unique affective functions: they are capable of initiating and informing affect by themselves and they can enhance and maintain the themes and audiovisual configurations of the films in which they are featured.
In short, the bodies that appear on-screen in the most popular action-adventure films of the 1980s are either initiating and informing affect by themselves or bolstering their films’ themes and audiovisual configurations, which in turn initiate and inform affect.

The events and cultural strata of the 1980s help the bodies and the films inform the affective process. Indeed, it can be said that the politics and culture of the 1980s help inform the affective process. An affective moment that arises as a result of athleticism, kinetic actualization, strength, kinetic potential, adventure, exploration, discovery, justified violence, brutality, vengeance, perseverance, duty, and stoicism can all be linked to the specific culture of war and foreign policy in the 1980s. And these specific themes (which are either communicated or supported by the spectacular male bodies on-screen) are reflections—critical or otherwise—of the state of foreign policy and war in the time period in which they were produced and consumed. For example, both *First Blood* and *Rambo: First Blood Part II* deal directly with the aftermath of the Vietnam War, an American conflict that for many is seen as an emasculating and embarrassing defeat—both films espouse the idea that defeat came not because of an individual’s failure, but because bureaucratic red tape bound the soldiers. In essence, *First Blood* and *Rambo: First Blood Part II* are both thinly veiled defenses of traditional, white masculinity and a strong indictment of a democratic and bureaucratic process that both films depict as trying to stifle or soften that masculinity.

In *First Blood*, Rambo tells his colonel at the end of the film, “I did what I had to do to win, but somebody wouldn’t let us win!” Similarly, in *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, Rambo asks the same colonel, “Sir, do we get to win this time?” Both pieces of dialogue represent, in large part, the plot of the second film: Rambo finds out that the US government is actively trying to sweep the existence of prisoners of war still in Vietnam under the rug for political and monetary
reasons, so he wages a one-man war—the diplomatic consequences be damned—in order to liberate them. The ultimate message is clear; soldiers like Rambo were entirely capable of defeating the enemy in Vietnam (as demonstrated in each film), but weren’t allowed to as a result of political red tape. And Sylvester Stallone’s body—including the themes that it communicates—reflects this very idea; Stallone’s aesthetically spectacular body is, as was discussed in the previous chapter, full of kinesthetic potential that is never fully realized. It is a body that is visually intimidating, but never fully unleashed. Instead, it is coiled and ultimately restrained. Stallone’s body communicates uncompromising brutality, but moves methodically and in rigid, restricted ways. Stallone’s body is every bit an analogy for the underlying concepts in both *First Blood* and *Rambo: First Blood Part II*—a concept that the masculinity of the American soldier in Vietnam was intact but ultimately constrained. The films seem to say, *Just, for a moment, imagine what Stallone’s body (or subsequently the American military) could do if it was simply unrestrained!* The Vietnam war, and both films, would have been over in a matter of minutes. And this coincides with Reagan’s aggressive stance on foreign policy and even his specific feelings on the conflict in Vietnam: “An enthusiastic ‘hawk,’ Reagan felt that Johnson was not willing to go all-out to win the war, and that asking soldiers to die in combat with their hands tied was, at the least, immoral.”5 Reagan, in a letter to a serviceman in the fall of 1968—when he was still governor of California—aligns himself with the soldier on the ground in a way that is mirrored by the Rambo franchise in a frighteningly accurate way: “In my opinion we must have a change of leadership in Wash. & a change of policy in the conduct of the war.”6 Even before he was the president of the United States, Reagan was bemoaning the bureaucracy that he was intimately tethered to, a bureaucracy that he accused of hamstringing the American soldier. Additionally, it was during Reagan’s two terms in office that ultimately led to a buildup of
American Special Forces units (clandestine military divisions) and the frequent deployment of those units. After the invasion of Grenada—and in light of the proxy nature of the Cold War with the Soviet Union—Reagan relied heavily on the Special Forces and deployed them in various training and combat capacities around the globe, including South and Central America, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. This buildup and subsequent deployment of such teams circumvented a number of bureaucratic barriers on the road to military action. Rambo, as such, was the ideal, mythical, Reagan-era American Special Forces soldier and Reagan knew it:

“While the nation’s political climate informed the 1980s action film, the genre’s popularity also fueled the Reagan administration’s rhetoric, as when Reagan would invoke Harry Callahan’s famous ‘Go ahead, make my day’ (from Sudden Impact) or joke about Rambo as a blueprint for hostage recovery.”

Rambo was, despite the red tape, getting the job done. And Rambo’s aesthetically spectacular body was a manifestation of the time and situation—a constrained but resilient body at odds with an environment bent on softening it.

In contrast, the kinesthetically spectacular body featured in the most popular action-adventure films in the 1980s is significantly less in tune with the state of war and foreign policy in the Reagan era. The kinesthetically spectacular body, as has been seen, initiates and informs the affective process through acts of justified violence, kinetic actualization, and moments of discovery and exploration. Whether directly communicated by the body or supported by the body, a number of these themes that initiate and inform the affective process run against the grain of the Reagan-era war footing. The kinesthetically spectacular body’s affective justified violence is particularly interesting in this regard. Star Wars, Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back, Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi, Raiders of the Lost Ark, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom, and Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade not only pit kinesthetically
spectacular protagonists against aesthetically spectacular antagonists, they are thematically aligned against unquestionably immoral political entities that are either of the actual past or are based on entities of the actual past. For example, in the original Star Wars franchise, Skywalker is aligned against the nefarious Galactic Empire, while in the original Indiana Jones trilogy, Jones is aligned against the Nazis. Nazi Germany and the Galactic Empire (which has undeniable similarities to Nazi Germany) are morally reprehensible bad guys—they are wearing the blackest of black hats. And in Darth Vader’s case, this is literal. What’s interesting, however, is that neither the Galactic Empire nor Nazi Germany as depicted in original Indiana Jones trilogy bear any resemblance to the United States’ adversaries in the 1980s in the way the enemies in Rambo: First Blood Part II or Predator do. Skywalker and Jones each do battle with a far less ambiguous enemy. And while the Reagan administration would have its constituents believe that the Cold War wasn’t ambiguous, a number of disarmament and anti–Cold War protests throughout the decade suggest otherwise. Regardless, the kinesthetically spectacular body on-screen in the most popular action-adventure films in the 1980s complements the lack of ambiguous enemies in films like Star Wars: Episode VI - Return of the Jedi and Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom—the affective process that is initiated and informed by the kinesthetic body is often rooted in clearly, unequivocally justified violence.

Similarly, in Beverly Hills Cop—a film that has not been analyzed up to this point—the violence is morally unambiguous and is, more often than not, done by Eddie Murphy’s Axel Foley in complete self-defense. And Murphy, as Foley, fits the cinematic and affective parameters of a kinesthetically spectacular body. Indeed, as the only black kinesthetically spectacular body within this study, and a rare exception in popular Hollywood cinema in the 1980s and beyond, the similarities between his character and those characters played by Harrison
Ford, Mark Hamill, Keaton, Douglas, and Gibson are remarkable. For example, at the beginning of *Beverly Hills Cop*, Murphy not only hangs from the back of a truck—swinging from the back of the trailer to the side and back in, much like Jones does in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*—he does it in clothing not dissimilar to Skywalker’s in *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back*: both Foley and Skywalker wear sleeveless shirts that show off their toned arms and form-fitting pants. All of this action at the beginning of *Beverly Hills Cop* is filmed in medium, medium-wide, or wide shots that frame Foley’s entire body. Once again, this is not dissimilar to other popular action-adventure films in the 1980s that feature kinesthetically spectacular bodies.

Additionally, Murphy’s kinesthetically spectacular body is frequently juxtaposed with Billy and Taggart, played by Judge Reinhold and John Ashton, respectively. Billy and Taggart are the two cops that Foley teams up with in Beverly Hills. In one particularly revealing scene near the end of the film—when Foley, Billy, and Taggart try to sneak onto the property of the film’s antagonist (Victor Maitland played by Steven Berkoff)—shots of Billy awkwardly and humorously trying to get Taggart over a wall are set against shots of Foley effortlessly sprinting across the lawn in a crouch and gracefully bounding up several sets of stair. Only moments later, in a hail of gunfire, the trio take cover behind a low wall—Billy and Taggart stumble over the wall and wind up sprawled on the ground, while Foley gracefully vaults the low wall and lands on his feet. These are but a few examples of this kind of juxtaposition, all of which help highlight and convey Foley’s kinesthetically spectacular body.

In addition to the technical similarities, *Beverly Hills Cop* generally, and Murphy as Foley specifically, communicate justified violence. While the violence in *Beverly Hills Cop* is not being done to Stormtroopers or Nazis (although one might consider Foley’s rivalry with Maitland a pointed critique of trickle-down Reaganomics), it is, more often than not, a defensive
action. Throughout the film, the violence—especially hand-to-hand combat—is seldom initiated by Foley. Instead, Foley is often defending himself from violence—a lightning fast punch, an arm bar that turns into a flip, or a maneuver that disarms his opponent. While capable of violence, Foley is not the aggressor throughout Beverly Hills Cop. And the affective process initiated and informed by the film in general, and by Foley specifically, seems to stem from a place of great underestimation; Foley’s physical ability (quick, agile, flexible) come as a surprise to those who mean to do him harm and maybe to those in the audience. The affective process is initiated and informed by his quickness, yes, but also from the surprise of unexpectedness. One has to remember that Murphy, at this time, is thoroughly entrenched in comedy. Although Murphy was in Best Defense (1984) and 48 Hrs (1982) before taking on the lead role in Beverly Hills Cop, most Americans were familiar with his work on Saturday Night Live (1975)—Murphy was a cast member between 1980 and 1984. In a way, Murphy’s kinesthetically spectacular body works in tandem with the sense of unexpectedness seen in Beverly Hills Cop; as has been discussed before, the kinesthetically spectacular body, while physically capable, is subtler than the aesthetically spectacular body. The affect that one might experience in response to Foley and Beverly Hills Cop is undoubtedly shaped by all of these constructs—a measure of unexpectedness, Murphy’s turn on Saturday Night Live, Murphy’s kinesthetically spectacular body, the filming and editing, the juxtaposition of characters, and level of ability.

Another interesting component to Beverly Hills Cop is its American setting—whereas the Star Wars franchise or the Indiana Jones trilogy dealt with a more unambiguous enemy, Foley’s battleground is domestic. This is a phenomenon rarely seen in the top action-adventure films from the 1980s—Predator, Rambo: First Blood Part II, Commando, Conan the Barbarian, the original Indiana Jones, the Star Wars franchise, Romancing the Stone, Rambo III, Rocky IV, and
*Batman* are either set in fictional universes or take place outside of the United States. What’s interesting, though, is that the filming and editing in *Beverly Hills Cop* (especially the opening sequence in Detroit and the establishing shots of Beverly Hills) connotes a sort of exoticism very much in line with the other popular action-adventure films in the 1980s. *Beverly Hills Cop* opens with an establishing shots of what audiences will eventually discover is Detroit—these shots are not of government buildings, stadiums, or local landmarks, but of rundown buildings, abandoned properties, rusting cars, and working class (mostly black) citizens. This locale is quickly put in contrast with the sun-soaked decadence of Beverly Hills, complete with a montage of Rodeo Drive, expensive cars, and fashionable (mostly white) upper-class citizens. The Detroit police station and Beverly Hills police station are also radically different; the station in Detroit is industrial, dirty, and out of date, while the station in Beverly Hills is modern, pristine, and bordering on sterile. All of these shots and locations are viewed in a place and time that gave rise to a Reagan administration that actively sought to defund programs aimed at helping the impoverished. According to the National Housing Institute, Reagan actively sought to reduce funding for social programs: “Let us recall that the two-term president was no friend to America’s cities or its poor. Reagan came to office in 1981 with a mandate to reduce federal spending. In reality, he increased it through the escalating military budget, all the while slashing funds for domestic programs that assisted working class Americans, particularly the poor.”

While *Beverly Hills Cop* does not criticize Reagan’s war on drugs directly—Foley is a narcotics cop and his best friend is killed as a result of the drug trade—there is a sense of division between white and black, rich and poor, that permeates the film. And, while this is not a direct condemnation of the policies and priorities of the Reagan administration, it is certainly not a promotion of them. Murphy’s kinesthetically spectacular body is unique in this case, as it is a
black body; a black body that crosses into a predominantly white environment. Foley is a stranger in a strange land, not unlike his spectacular counterparts in the other action-adventure films in the 1980s. The only difference is that his strange land is not the jungles of Panama or the dunes of Tatooine, it’s Beverly Hills. And while the affect one may experience as a result of watching Foley and Beverly Hills Cop may feel the same, it is initiated and informed in a radically different way. This is important because it illustrates, on some level, that audiences were aware of and receptive to these kinds of racial and class politics—Beverly Hills Cop, as evidenced by its economic success, resonated with audiences.

Most of the top action-adventure films in the 1980s are set in exotic, international places. The kinesthetically spectacular body, which is able to support themes of exploration and discovery, thrives in exotic locations—Jones, Solo, and Skywalker all complement the environs they populate as they skip, jump, run, shimmy, and squeeze their way through them. In Beverly Hills Cop, even though the settings are strictly domestic, they are filmed, edited, and narratively treated as exotic. Detroit, for example, is established through the lens of black, working class poverty, broken buildings, and rusting, rotting cars; it’s as if the city is a third-world country one might see in Commando. During Foley’s first meeting with Maitland, Maitland asks Foley, “Detroit is a very violent city, isn’t it?” to which Foley replies, “Yes, yes it is.” However, Beverly Hills is also exoticized, and in more ways than one—not only is Beverly Hills framed as a capitalist, fashion-driven, white, upper-class Mecca, it is transformed into a veritable war zone. In fact, both Detroit and Beverly Hills are framed as war zones—Detroit is made to look like a post-apocalyptic border town, while Foley’s visit to Beverly Hills results in not one, but two lethal firefights fought with automatic weapons. In fact, Maitland’s estate, his bodyguards, and the weapons used by the bodyguards wouldn’t be out of place in Schwarzenegger’s Commando.
Interestingly, Foley (as a result of his kinesthetically spectacular frame) never really seems out of place—either in Detroit or Beverly Hills. Foley seems comfortable in both locations, because like any of the other kinesthetically spectacular bodies in the most popular action-adventure films of the 1980s, the settings created for him are framed as places of exploration and discovery. When viewed through the lens of the kinesthetically spectacular body, Foley is at ease in these exotic locations because the kinesthetically spectacular body is meant to traverse exotic, far-flung locations. However, when viewed as not only a kinesthetically spectacular body, but a black kinesthetically spectacular body in the United States starring in a film that draws comedy from the juxtaposition of white and black and rich and poor, the cultural significance is vast. Audience members are in awe of Jones’s body as it rolls and shimmies its way through ancient ruins in a far-flung corner of the globe. Audiences are in awe of Foley’s body as it rolls and shimmies its way across Maitland’s neatly manicured lawn—even if, instead of a far-flung corner of the globe, it’s Beverly Hills. The affective reaction is the same, but the source of that reaction is radically different. And while this may not be a particularly pointed critique on the state of war and foreign policy established by the Reagan administration in the 1980s, it is a critique of the Reagan administration’s domestic policies, policies that were dramatically altered as a result of the Reagan Doctrine, as evidenced by a priority shift in not only money but philosophy. I hope that audiences watching Beverly Hills Cop, no matter when or where, never miss the irony that is Foley—a poor, black cop from Detroit, exchanging gunfire with a rich, white, drug-dealing, money-maker in Reagan’s own backyard, Hollywood.
The Kinesthetically Spectacular Body, the Aesthetically Spectacular Body, and American Feminism in the 1980s

Gender politics in the 1980s, like war and foreign policy, was driven, in part, by a moment of crisis for American masculinity. Regardless of its validity, this crisis was a response to an aggressive campaign for women’s rights that peaked in the early 1980s; by the beginning of the 1980s, “second wave feminism was a tidal wave at its crest, evident locally and nationally in the thousands of activities and projects initiated by feminists. Every aspect of American life was shaken and transformed.”10 As it is, second-wave feminism is a well-documented sociocultural movement, and the general consensus is that American society and American culture were both irrevocably altered as a result of this campaign for equality. What is also generally accepted is that, as a result of this push for equality, a severe backlash took place; a backlash that was more or less culturally, socially, and even politically encouraged at the highest levels. Reagan himself was a strong opponent to the Equal Rights Amendment, a major item on the feminist agenda throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. Susan Faludi explains in her appropriately titled (and widely lauded) work Backlash that, “in the Reagan administration, US Census Bureau demographers found themselves under increasing pressure to generate data for the government’s war against women’s independence, to produce statistics ‘proving’ the rising threat of infertility, the physical and psychic risks lurking in abortion, the dark side of single parenthood, the ill effects of daycare.”11 Faludi’s rigorous investigation (endorsed by a number of reputable outlets of the time, including The New York Times and Newsweek) argues that pseudo-scientific studies and more or less cooked statistics are but a foundation for a comprehensive cultural campaign in the 1980s to discredit the women’s rights movement—and feminism in general—as physically and psychically detrimental to not only those involved, but to society as a whole. At one point,
an ally to the cause, news media in the 1980s, according to Faludi, turned its back on women’s rights and began reporting on, and seriously considering, the politically sanctioned studies and statistics; studies and statistics that would turn out to be less than rigorous at best, and fraudulent at worst. However, some of the most noticeable backlash occurred on-screen.

Faludi explains that although a little late to the proverbial party, Hollywood embraced the national antifeminist trend present in American culture during the 1980s as a way to bring in more moviegoers through a wider appeal: “The backlash shaped much of Hollywood’s portrayal of women in the ’80s. In typical themes, women were set against women; women’s anger at their social circumstances was depoliticized and displayed as personal depression instead; and women’s lives were framed as morality tales in which the ‘good mother’ wins and the independent woman gets punished.” Of particular note for Faludi was Fatal Attraction (1987)—a film that so perfectly crafts the single, independent working woman as nothing more than a villainous psychopath that is dangerous to both herself and the honest people she is surrounded by. And while the portrayal of women on-screen was a notable problem rooted in an antifeminist backlash, the effect that the backlash had on the portrayal of men and how they appeared on-screen was arguably more pronounced: “Action stars such as Schwarzenegger, Stallone, and Van Damme dominated the box office with film performances which reveled in their muscular masculinity and the feats which their bodies could perform. In many ways, these texts can be read as an attempt to soothe masculine anxieties in a period of masculinity in crisis.” The evidence for this kind of a response is generally apparent when examining the most popular action-adventure films in the 1980s and particularly apparent when examining the affect that manifested as a result of the aesthetically spectacular male bodies that appeared in theme.
The themes of sensuality, athleticism, classic aestheticism, eroticism, and vaudevillian excess—all of which initiated and informed the affective process—are of particular import to the relationship between male bodies, action-adventure films in the 1980s, and the apex of second-wave feminism. Both the aesthetically spectacular body and the kinesthetically spectacular body seem to respond to and are shaped by second-wave feminism in the 1980s, but each does so in subtly different, but critically important, ways. While the bodies themselves initiate and inform the affective process—namely through themes of strength, athleticism, rigidity, and flexibility—the historical genealogy of the male body as entertainment and the themes present in the films that each body supports are even more revelatory. For example, the aesthetically spectacular bodies on-screen in the most popular action-adventure films of the 1980s (chiefly Schwarzenegger and Stallone) share a physical lineage with vaudevillian strongmen, circus sideshows, and, of course, bodybuilding. From Schwarzenegger’s slow, shirtless jaunts through the jungle in *Predator* or *Commando* to Stallone’s (also shirtless) muscle-display performances in both the Rocky franchise and the Rambo franchise, the aesthetically spectacular body on-screen in the 1980s was a sexual, hyperbolized manifestation of traditional white masculinity under siege.

The aesthetically spectacular body was meant to be dominant, both physically and sexually; it was meant to reassure the male audience that men were still the kings of the cultural jungle. The aesthetically spectacular body did this by using strength, or the appearance of strength, to initiate and inform the affective process. Maybe more importantly, the aesthetically spectacular body in the most popular action-adventure films in the 1980s assuaged the fears of white males by supporting traditionally conservative themes of gender in the films in which they appeared. Aesthetically spectacular bodies, through the act of simply being filmed and popularly
circulated, were a reinforcement of the perceived masculine ideal of strength and vitality that was tightly entwined with a history of white strength and virility as the status quo; Schwarzenegger’s physique (a physique that earned him one Mr. Universe title and seven Mr. Olympia titles), for example, filled the screen as a representation of the masculine, physical ideal. Schwarzenegger’s and Stallone’s bulging muscles communicated strength that, at the time, was a uniquely male achievement. So while strongmen and body builders weren’t a new phenomenon in entertainment, their massive popularity in the 1980s signaled a wider cultural fear that traditional masculinity was in decline.

In addition to strength, the aesthetically spectacular body initiated and informed the affect process via erotic sexuality. The aesthetically spectacular body’s vaudevillian lineage carried with it a history of eroticism that supported the sexuality present in films like *Conan the Barbarian*. Simply put, the aesthetically spectacular body was not only meant to be ogled (as evidenced by its lack of clothing), it was meant to be sexually unapologetic and sexually virile. These ideas of sexual potency and sexual aggression, and the films that carried them, are, at the very least, at odds with feminism in the 1980s. As a result, these films did not offer any kind of support for the antifeminist agenda present in the 1980s. Women were hardly present in any of the action-adventure films in the 1980s that featured aesthetically spectacular bodies, and if they were, they were punished for being too progressive and too independent, were in need of rescue, or were used as narrative chattel. For example, Schwarzenegger violently beds and eventually kills the witch in *Conan the Barbarian*, while Stallone’s love interest in *Rambo: First Blood Part II* is unceremoniously killed, rendering her as nothing more than added motivation for his revenge. Likewise, in *Predator*, the only female character is kidnapped by Dutch, punished by Dutch, and eventually rescued from the predator by Dutch. In these particular examples—and in
these films in general—the gender hierarchy is identical to (or at the very least mirrors) a traditional gender hierarchy established by popular culture, workplace culture, and domestic roles in the 1950s; a hierarchy that Reagan’s wife Nancy vociferously celebrated and promoted during the 1980s. These aesthetically spectacular bodies on-screen in the most popular action-adventure films of the 1980s either reinforce or reflect a wider antifeminist campaign present in the United States throughout the decade.

In subtle contrast, kinesthetically spectacular bodies featured in the most popular action-adventure films of the 1980s seem to, in part, eschew the regressive, antifeminist tendencies of their aesthetically spectacular counterparts. While still problematically gender-normative, the kinesthetically spectacular body appears to somewhat counterbalance the hypermasculinity of the aesthetically spectacular body and allow some space for resistance. As for the characteristics of the kinesthetically spectacular body itself—specifically characteristics that intersected with gender politics—there are the concepts of flexibility, athleticism, sensuality, and classic aestheticism. Of the themes that the kinesthetically spectacular body supported within the films it’s featured in, there are the familiar concepts of exploration and discovery. With that said, the kinesthetically spectacular bodies featured in the most popular action-adventure films in the 1980s are not (in the strictest sense) gender-progressive. There’s no secret that Jones, Solo, Riggs, Colton, and Bond are sexually aggressive, traditionally masculine, and routinely dismissive when it comes to women; this is easily gleaned from numerous problematic romantic subplots throughout a number of films that feature these characters. However, they aren’t—for the most part—kidnapping, punishing, killing, or otherwise dominating the women that appear alongside them in their films. In the original Indiana Jones trilogy and the Star Wars franchise, there are heroic female characters that arguably achieve a modicum of agency—Leia saves Solo
and Skywalker when they attempt to rescue her, while Marion Ravenwood fights alongside Jones. These characters aren’t on the same feminist level as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997), *Jessica Jones* (2015) or *Star Wars: Episode VII - The Force Awakens* (2015), but films in the Star Wars, Lethal Weapon, or Indiana Jones franchises from the 1980s aren’t entirely out of sync with the feminist movement in either affect or narrative.16

Similar to the aesthetically spectacular body, the kinesthetically spectacular body is, in part, the result of a specific lineage—classic, Hollywood masculinity. The kinesthetically spectacular body was shaped by a bevy of leading men from the golden age of Hollywood cinema—Michael Douglas, who plays Jack Colton, is the son of Kirk Douglas, a prototypical example of the classic leading man. As a result of this lineage, the kinesthetically spectacular body in the 1980s carries with it a certain affect, such as a strong, traditional masculinity; an athletic aesthetic; and a sensual—less erotic—sexuality. And while some of these characteristics are tied to traditional, lamentable gender-normative behaviors and themes, they aren’t nearly as regressive or dismissive as the affect communicated and supported by the aesthetically spectacular body in the most popular action-adventure films of the 1980s.

Ultimately, the kinesthetically spectacular body on-screen in the most popular action-adventure films of 1980s is neither a reflection of the wider, antifeminist politics of the decade nor a scathing critique of it. Instead, the kinesthetically spectacular body is simply an extension of an on-screen status quo with the potential for minute progression; a number of the themes communicated and supported by the kinesthetically spectacular body in the 1980s (particularly sensuality, flexibility and discovery) are potential sites of resistance or evidence of a cultural shift in gender politics—despite the popular politics of the decade. In other words, the kinesthetically spectacular body, unlike the aesthetically spectacular body, is not completely cut
off from the possibility of sociocultural progress in regards to gender. In fact, there are moments on-screen in the 1980s where the kinesthetically spectacular body and the affect it communicates and supports do resist the status quo in interesting ways. For example, in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, after escaping the Nazis in Egypt—by boat—Jones and Ravenwood engage in a love scene that unambiguously pokes fun at the classic Hollywood lineage to which Ford belongs. The scene, which opens on Jones and Ravenwood recovering from their recent escape in the cramped captain’s quarters of a liner headed to Greece, is at first glance a typical intimate encounter—he is tending to his wounds while she, dressed in a silky nightgown, gazes at her reflection in a stand mirror. However, as soon as Ravenwood spins the mirror on its horizontal axis and it hits Jones under the chin, it becomes apparent that this is anything but traditionally intimate. The jokes continue as Ravenwood helps the wincing Jones apply a salve to his injuries. Then, when it appears that that the scene will finally turn steamy—Ravenwood, at Jones’s behest, starts kissing his bumps and bruises—Jones falls soundly asleep. For comparison, one only has to look at the love scene in *Romancing the Stone* for a much more traditional classic Hollywood romantic encounter. In any case, Ford’s kinesthetically spectacular body is the catalyst for this satirical poke at classic tropes; not only is Ravenwood kissing the injuries Jones sustains in the process of exercising his kinesthetically spectacular body, the scene in general frames his physique as vulnerable, something not normally seen done with an aesthetically spectacular body. The sensuality in this scene not only satirizes the eroticized sexuality traditionally expressed by the aesthetically spectacular body, it in part runs parallel to, or at the very least doesn’t wholly disrupt, the second-wave feminist agenda seen in the 1980s.

Another example of the kinesthetically spectacular body’s reinforcement of the status quo can be found in an intimate scene in *Lethal Weapon 3*. Alone, Riggs and Lorna Cole (Rene
Russo) begin revealing their bodies to one another in order to show off the scars and injuries they have each sustained in the line of duty. Cole abruptly calls it off when Riggs takes off his pants in order to show her a wound. Riggs tells Cole, “You started this,” to which Cole responds, “And I can end it.” While this provides Russo’s character with a lot of agency in the moment, it is quickly diminished when Riggs roughly pulls her in close by the collar and kisses her aggressively. Again, while not gender-progressively (in this scene, Riggs is sexually aggressive and advances on Cole despite her protests), this particular scene doesn’t disrupt the feminist agenda in the 1980s the same way a film like Predator does. After all, Cole is on equal footing, professionally, with Riggs (as evidenced by both her position in law enforcement and her scars) and she makes a declaration of agency, although that declaration is ultimately reduced.

Maybe the most interesting example of all is Beverly Hills Cop. While most of the popular action-adventure films in the 1980s that feature kinesthetically spectacular bodies have a female love interest, Beverly Hills Cop does not. The lack of a female love interest is not akin to films like Predator, the Rambo series or Terminator 2: Judgment Day where females are simply absent or little more than narrative flotsam. No, Foley is sexually interested in women—he flirts with a number of women upon his arrival in Beverly Hills and he has a penchant for strip clubs. Yet, the one significant female character in the film (Jenny Summers, played by Lisa Eilbacher) is a platonic childhood friend and remains that way throughout the film. In fact, Foley drives across the country to avenge his male best friend Mikey Tandino (James Russo), yet Jenny, in need of rescue by the end of the film, makes her own escape possible by elbowing Maitland (her patriarch, both in profession and social standing) as she’s being held at gunpoint. This elbow to the ribs gives Foley the room he needs to make the shot and kill the bad guy. Murphy’s kinesthetically spectacular body, simply by being kinesthetically spectacular (physically and
culturally flexible) and his body’s distance from any erotic context (no kissing, no disrobing, no contact with the strippers at the clubs) place it and the film itself into a distinctly neutral, maybe slightly, progressive category in regards to gender politics in the 1980s. It should be noted that although Foley is the one that brings Taggart and Billy to a strip club, it is Billy who interacts with the strippers, not Foley. This not only disrupts the hypermasculine escalation seen in films like *Rambo: First Blood Part II* or *Commando*, it also disrupts the stereotype of the black male as sexually aggressive or sexually uncontrollable. Again, the inherent sensuality (not eroticism) of the kinesthetically spectacular body in the 1980s—and the affective process that it informs—while not running entirely concurrent to the feminist agenda of the time is not wholly disruptive. Ultimately, the sensuality of the kinesthetically spectacular bodies as they appear on-screen in the most popular action-adventure films of the 1980s, while not progressive, are also not regressive in the way their aesthetically spectacular counterparts are.

The kinesthetically spectacular body’s sensuality is not the only site of possible resistance; the affective process that it initiates and informs via its flexibility and participation in exploration and discovery are potential sites of political disruption as well. These themes are inherent components of the kinesthetically spectacular body and, as such, stand in opposition to the rigidity of the aesthetically spectacular body. In the case of gender politics in the 1980s, this is telling—if the flexibility of the kinesthetically spectacular body stands in opposition to the rigidity of the aesthetically spectacular body, and the aesthetically spectacular body is a reflection of the constraint placed upon masculinity in the 1980s, it stands to reason that the kinesthetically spectacular body is less culturally constrained, or at the very least less paranoid in regard to masculinity in crisis. In the most popular action-adventure films in the 1980s, the kinesthetically spectacular body communicates flexibility that, though physically grounded, also
represents a sociocultural flexibility. This lies in opposition to the aesthetically spectacular body that communicates via stoicism and an exaggerated pretense of strength. Tellingly, the aesthetically spectacular body seems to enter the American zeitgeist in earnest during the peak of second-wave feminism. So, while the kinesthetically spectacular body and the affective process it initiates and supports may not be in direct dialogue with second-wave feminism in the 1980s it doesn’t support regressive ideologies that the aesthetically spectacular body supports.

Alternatively, the kinesthetically spectacular body communicates agility and flexibility that, when exposed to the same sociocultural lens, appears significantly more adaptable and less concerned with second-wave feminism’s apparent affront to traditional American masculinity.

Let it be noted that this is not the same as being pro-feminist; instead, this simply means that the kinesthetically spectacular body is not entirely disruptive to the feminist agenda in the 1980s in the same ways the aesthetically spectacular body is—thus, filmgoers in the 1980s are equally receptive, if not more receptive (the Indiana Jones franchise and Star Wars franchise were significantly more successful in terms of box office receipts than the Rambo franchise or Schwarzenegger’s films) to flexible, less aggressive, albeit predominantly traditional, gender politics. Like the aesthetically spectacular bodies that communicate it, the antifeminist backlash in the 1980s is big and bold. However, the kinesthetically spectacular body offered an alternative masculinity that was less combative. And while this alternative masculinity (in the form of the kinesthetically spectacular body) was not a wholly progressive—in a feminist sense—identity, it did open up a masculine possibility outside of the choices seen in Rambo: First Blood Part II, Rocky, Predator, Commando, and Conan the Barbarian.
Race, Politics, and Beverly Hills Cop

The last case study in this dissertation will consider the intersection of racial politics and spectacular bodies in the United States in the 1980s, specifically Reagan-era policies aimed at the black community in the 1980s and spectacular bodies as they appear in the most popular action-adventure films of the same decade. This case study is particularly difficult to execute, as there is a near-complete lack of black bodies—male or otherwise—in the films featured throughout this project. The most prominent black bodies to appear in the most popular action-adventure films in the 1980s are Danny Glover as Roger Murtaugh (the Lethal Weapon franchise), Billy Dee Williams as Lando Calrissian (the original Star Wars trilogy), Carl Weathers as Dillon (Predator), and Murphy as Foley (Beverly Hills Cop). There are people of color in the original Indiana Jones trilogy, the original Rambo trilogy, and throughout the Rocky franchise (Mr. T.’s Clubber Lang and Weathers’s Apollo Creed, most notably), but they are often cannon fodder, white actors in makeup, children, or antagonists. And it should be noted that Calrissian is a rather insignificant character—considering the entire narrative arch of the original Star Wars trilogy—while Murtaugh in Lethal Weapon is not a spectacular character, either kinesthetically or aesthetically. As a result, this case study will be a comparative analysis of the character Dillon as he appears in Predator and Foley from Beverly Hills Cop. Fortuitously, these characters (and their respective physiques) are perfect foils—Murphy’s Foley is a prime example of the kinesthetically spectacular body on-screen in the most popular films of the 1980s, while Weathers’s Dillon is a prime example of an aesthetically spectacular body.

While the general tenor of gender politics in the 1980s—and the Reagan administration’s diametrical opposition to second-wave feminism—is a known quantity among scholars, racial politics in the 1980s, especially the Reagan administration’s opposition to a resurgent Civil
Rights Movement, is a known quantity among scholars and non-scholars alike. The racial inequality in the United States in the 1980s, and a political system meant to propagate it, is widely recognized, acknowledged, and examined, both academically and popularly. Only fifteen years after the assassination of Malcolm X and less than fifteen years after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., and massive civil unrest throughout the United States, the 1980s were a time of great regression for black Americans. Similar to the political, social, and cultural attacks on second-wave feminism and gender equality in the 1980s, “regressive policies that cut federal aid to education and refused to challenge segregated education, housing, and hiring, as well as the cynical cultivation of an anti-black consensus through attacks on affirmative action and voting rights legislation clearly reinforced possessive investments in whiteness.” Additionally, civil rights as an institution of equality was vehemently opposed by the Reagan administration and the rising neoconservative movement in the United States. Generally speaking, neoconservatives in the United States were traditionally aligned American conservatives who promoted interventionist foreign policy and, eventually, a return to wholesome family values. Beginning to form in the mid- to late-1970s, the neoconservatives are most notably represented by Reagan, George H.W. Bush, George W. Bush, and their respective administrations and administrative policies. Either by design or simply by result, neoconservative policies were also opposed to any return to strength for the Civil Rights Movement: “Attacking the Civil Rights tradition serves many functions for neoconservatives. By mobilizing existing racisms and generating new ones, neoconservatives seek to discredit the egalitarian and democratic social movements of the post–World War II era and to connect the attacks by those movements on wealth, special privilege, and elite control over education and opportunity to despised and unworthy racial others.” While the depth and breadth of this neoconservative agenda is more
apparent (thanks to George W. Bush and the second Iraq War), it was at the time, quietly systemic and only truly observable by those nonwhites on the receiving end: as one researcher puts it, “the worst symptoms of the crisis were hidden from the view of middle- and upper-class whites.”19 As such, the complex, often culturally and politically entwined, antifeminist sentiment in the United States in the 1980s extended to the state of anti-equality also present in the United States at the same time. Additionally, the anti-equality, anti-civil-rights sentiment in the United States in the 1980s was not only politically sanctioned but also popularly, culturally sanction by news outlets and mass entertainment media:

The media, treating drugs and crime as causes rather than symptoms of urban blight, combined with Reagan-Bush rhetoric to recast black (and Hispanic) urban America as a land of pushers and killers; white television viewers saw only a parade of such characters (often in arrests every bit as staged as a Broadway musical—as when L.A.P.D. Chief Gates invited Nancy Reagan and a cadre of local and national TV cameras over for some fruit salad and a tour of a “coke house” bust). This spectacle—the Willie-Hortonizing of black America—brought calls for longer prison terms, more cops, and a mysterious silence on the part of many white political activists as to the increasing violations of civil rights. The older generation of black leaders looked impotent; even as the rights they fought for were eroded by the Reagan court, the economic ills of their communities were worsened still more by the sixty percent cutback in urban aid under Reagan.20

This is the backdrop for black Americans in the 1980s and black American actors as they appear on-screen in the most popular action-adventure films in the 1980s. As such, this is the backdrop for *Predator* and *Beverly Hills Cop*.
In regards to racial politics, the themes that inform the affective process in *Predator* and *Beverly Hills Cop* are many—sensuality, athleticism, classic aestheticism, eroticism, strength, vaudevillian excess, brutality, duty, and stoicism are all relevant because the politics of race extend to and enmesh with the politics of war, foreign policy, and gender. The intersection of race and spectacular bodies in the 1980s is, by far, the most complex of all of the case studies attempted here, and as a result, will not be as thorough as it could possibly be—as has been noted, this is an exhibition of new techniques and is not intended to be an exhaustive or conclusive study.

Although Dillon and Foley are both in positions of power and privilege (one is a detective, the other, a CIA operative), Foley is the alpha male amongst a predominantly white, cinematic world, despite his initial outsider position. Dillon, on the other hand, is initially in charge but quickly becomes subordinate to Schwarzenegger’s white character. Despite Foley’s position as an outsider upon his arrival in Beverly Hills, he is immediately more knowledgeable, more capable, and a flat-out better cop than the white officers he encounters upon arrival. Furthermore, by the end of the film, this de facto superiority is ultimately recognized by the bureaucracy of both the Beverly Hills Police Department and the Detroit Police Department. In contract, Dillon, while initially in a position of knowledge and power, fails to survive. It can be argued that Dillon’s demise is, at least in part, a result of his position in the United States bureaucracy—after their gratuitous mid-air arm wrestle, Dutch mocks Dillon’s tie, is critical of his physical strength (Dillon loses the arm-wrestling contest), and suggest that going to work for the CIA has made him soft. This is a critique that runs parallel to the one seen in the Rambo franchise—in *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, Rambo almost kills his CIA handler. Interestingly, while Dillon’s aesthetically spectacular body inherently communicates strength and resilience, it
cannot overcome his status within the bureaucracy that Rambo and Dutch both detest. And, as
the only black character in all of Predator, his status as CIA cog can be intimately tied to his
blackness—in fact, Dillon’s position in the US government, as it is characterized in Predator, is
not dissimilar to the state of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States during the 1980s—
that is to say, under attack as detrimental to the whole. Dillon’s government-entwined blackness
is ultimately destroyed, while Dutch’s independent, government-suspicious whiteness prevails;
this is apropos given the Reagan administration’s desire to gut social welfare programs. The
black American in the 1980s, like Dillon in Predator, is characterized as detrimental to the well-
being of those who know best, namely, Reagan and Dutch.

Meanwhile, Foley’s blackness in Beverly Hills Cop is not an impediment to his
kinesthetically spectacular body. In fact, it appears to be a boon. Arguably, it is Murphy’s
blackness that prepares him for his work in Beverly Hills. Foley is a “veteran of war” (as
evidenced by Detroit’s framing in the film), and his body and his blackness are essential keys to
his success. Foley’s blackness and kinesthetically spectacular frame are essentially two sides of
the same coin, as both enhance—at least in Beverly Hills Cop—adaptability, flexibility, and
agility. While Murphy’s frame enhances his physical flexibility and adaptability, his blackness in
the world of the film enhance his cultural flexibility and adaptability. Foley, because of his
blackness, is wise to the world in a way that his eventual partners in Beverly Hills simply aren’t.
Foley can pick a lock, stop up a car, slickly interview persons of interest, and communicate with
those in the working class; this is all evidenced throughout the film. And while this special set of
skills and unique access to knowledge aren’t necessarily a matter of blackness (more likely it
would be a matter of class or environment), the film frames it as such. As the only person in the
film with these particular gifts—street-smarts and confidence—his blackness is intimately tied to
them. Simply put, Foley’s ability to police (either in Detroit or Beverly Hills) is a result of his body, both in terms of physique and ethnicity.

When it intersects with race, sexuality is a precarious paradigm. The vaudevillian nature of the aesthetically spectacular body is regressive in terms of gender politics, and when combined with blackness, it has the potential to become racially problematic, especially when one considers the lineage. The disrobed black body, and the black body and its movement for purposes of entertainment, has an incredibly problematic history that can be traced back to the first American popular culture export—minstrelsy. And if one looks back even further, the commoditization and sexualization of the naked black male body undoubtedly begins with slavery and slave auctions. Weathers perfectly meets the criteria for an aesthetically spectacular body—throughout *Predator*, he is participating in eroticized, vaudevillian muscle-display performances. Dillon is, essentially, a lone black body stripped naked from the waist up, framed for visual consumption, used, and then discarded. Given the history of the black male body as a vehicle for white consumption (sexual or otherwise), Weather’s turn as Dillon is concerning. Foley, on the other hand, reveals enough of his body in *Beverly Hills Cop* to show off a toned physique (sleeveless shirts and form fitting pants), but never disrobes, never participates in muscle-display performances, and is never overtly sexualized. Simply put, Foley is not a hyper-eroticized object; he is admired for his physical feats, but he is not framed and consumed in the way Dillon is framed and consumed. In fact, there are costuming associations in *Beverly Hills Cop* that not only distance Murphy from overtly erotic associations, but also seem to frame him as an equal amongst his white peers in Beverly Hills. In the opening scenes, Foley—clothed in a sleeveless shirt—is confronted by a superior officer (his boss) wearing a three-piece suit without the jacket and with the sleeves rolled up. Foley’s boss is not only black, but also bears a striking
resemblance—both in build and costuming—to Foley himself. This aesthetic association, both in terms of physique and clothing, intimately ties Foley to a position of power already occupied by another black man. This costuming choice might appear to be a one-off, but the aesthetic association resumes upon Foley’s arrival in Beverly Hills—when Foley first meets the lieutenant of the Beverly Hills police department, the lieutenant is wearing an almost identical vest and pants combination (both in cut and color) to Foley’s boss in Detroit. This not only re-associated Foley with a similar position of power, it also associated him with a position of power occupied by a white man.

So what does this all mean in regards to discovering something culturally relevant about racial politics in the 1980s? Well, at the very least, both Predator and Beverly Hills Cop contain grains of truth about the 1980s in general—while Predator’s jungle combat references the state of Reagan-era international warfare, Beverly Hills Cop makes repeated references to the class warfare raging back home. And like any film, they are, in part, a reflection of the time and place in which they were created, distributed, and watched—it’s easy to align the dialogue, behaviors, action, and objects in either film with nondiegetic analogues. However, what’s interesting is the deviations from these analogues; where do these films, at first glance, diverge from the nondiegetic world around them? Or, maybe even more interestingly, where do these films line up exactly to the 1980s outside the frame—where does art exactly imitate life? In regards to Predator, the answer to this question is the Reagan Doctrine and the aggressively anti-feminist, anti-civil-rights agenda of the Reagan administration. Predator, simply put, is racially problematic—the character Dillon represents the maligned bureaucracy that betrayed good soldiers in Vietnam, and the actor Weathers represents a subsection of the US population intent on destroying themselves and those around them, so it falls to Dutch, the only surviving white
man, to right Dillon’s wrongs and stem the foreign threat. Although Dillon is outed as a liar, subordinated by a white hero, and eventually killed, his body is put on display as spectacular, erotic entertainment—Weathers’s aesthetically spectacular body is framed as a sexual body (an affective extension of the aesthetically spectacular body) and subsequently exposed to the sordid lineage of sexualized black bodies put on display for the entertainment of white viewers. In the words of Lipsitz, Predator is invested in whiteness, and Weathers’s body—and its ideological abuse—is evidence of that. Weathers’s body serves to support an ideological campaign in the 1980s that, while conservative in terms of foreign policy and staunchly anti-feminist, is also inherently racist; it serves to subtly erode gains made by the Civil Rights Movement.

In contrast, Murphy’s turn as Foley in Beverly Hills Cop, while not radically progressive for the 1980s, doesn’t seem to support Reagan’s various regressive agendas. And, for the time and place in which it was made, Beverly Hills Cop is racially progressive. Murphy’s body—particularly its modesty, flexibility, adaptability, and competence (both culturally and physically)—resists the erosion of civil rights gains and propagated stereotypes common in the 1980s. Murphy’s black body is both physically and culturally competent; Foley is a fish out of water in Beverly Hills, but his adaptability, flexibility, and acumen ultimately put him on equal footing with his white counterparts—Murphy’s character is equal to, if not superior to, the cops in Beverly Hills. In the end, it’s Murphy’s kinesthetically spectacular body that is a site of resistance, not Weathers’s aesthetically spectacular body. Instead, Weathers’s turn as Dillon in Predator communicates and supports regression.

Conclusion

The primary goal of this study was to examine and explore the range of implications inherent in incorporating the male physique into the concept of action-adventure movie
spectacle. This led to a comparative analysis of the kinesthetically spectacular body and the aesthetically spectacular body through the lens of cinematography and affect. Contrasting these two body types as they appeared in films from the same genre in the same decade (and in the same tier of popularity) revealed distinct differences where there seemed to be few. These distinctions—this fresh evidence—has created a new analytical lens, which in turn has the potential to shed new light on the culture that produced, and that continues to consume, these films. However, this analytical lens is not simply confined to top action-adventure movies in the 1980s, I am confident that it can be used to great success outside the 1980s and outside the action-adventure genre.

This dissertation began with the simple idea that male bodies should be included in the discussion on movie spectacle and should—specifically—be included in discussions concerning spectacle and popular action-adventure films from the 1980s. Working from this premise, I concluded that if male bodies are to be considered a component of spectacle they must be analyzed like any other component of spectacle, namely as physical, technical components. That conclusion was the catalyst for questions like, how are such components filmed, how do such objects contribute to a film’s sense of scale, how do such objects contribute to the exotic, opulent, grandiose nature of spectacle? A close and thorough examination of these inquiries necessitated the recognition of a more physiological relationship between male action stars and the overarching concept of spectacle—a concept that seems to be rooted in the emotional state of the audience.

I found that my application of affect theory was not only a necessary method of analysis (as a result of the complex, nuanced relationship between the physical components of film and the psychological or physiological impact on audiences), but also a discovery in and of itself.
Affect theory has been used to analyze film, but not on such a large scale or as thoroughly; applying affect theory to scholarly film analysis in this project has been a successful proof of concept. In short, including male bodies within the concept of spectacle led to looking at them from a technical or cinematographic standpoint, which in turn led to examining them from an emotional or affective standpoint. Ultimately, this initial scaffolding (as a result of a single conceptual tweak) has identified the male body as a physical, technical, *analyzable* component of film that, like other filmic components, is intimately tied to the psychosocial in both its creation and its consequence for audiences.

Recognizing that the male body could be considered—and studied—like any other filmic object inevitably leads to the conclusion that the male body is steeped in sociocultural meaning. If a black cowboy hat is not simply a black cowboy hat, but a complex matrix of signification, what, then, is a moving, talking, uniquely shaped male body appearing on-screen in the most popular films within the most popular genre of the 1980s? Culturally complex, it turns out.

Through a combination of traditional, scholarly film analysis and the application of affect theory, this dissertation reveals that the male bodies on-screen in the 1980s (specifically male bodies that appear in popular action-adventure films) are capable of both emanating sociocultural meaning in and of themselves and augmenting and supporting sociocultural matrices of significance produced by the separate components of the films in which they appear. Additionally, the sociocultural meaning embedded within the film helps to, in part, define the sociocultural meaning of the body itself and vice versa—the body and the film in which they appear are entwined in a continuum of signification. In other words, male bodies as they appear in the most popular action-adventure films of the 1980s (as discovered through a combination of affective analysis and traditional filmic analysis) create and are created by sociocultural
meaning; *they are co-constitutive*. Arnold Schwarzenegger’s body in *Predator* is not simply a vehicle for a character, it is also a manifestation of complex sociocultural currents—Schwarzenegger’s body defines and is defined by the time and place in which it is situated. It is by itself a social commentary that is, in turn, defined by the social commentary it adds to and supports. When recognizing the 1980s male action hero (and the body he inhabits) as an object deeply rooted in cultural signification—an object that, in part, helps to define itself—one must come to the conclusion that its analysis can inevitably identify important sociocultural markers within the films. These markers can be used to ascertain and isolate a number of sociocultural trends, currents, and movements that define American life during the time of a movie’s production and release—in this case, the 1980s. In short, male bodies as they appear in the most popular action-adventure films of the 1980s are culturally revelatory. They have the ability, as a result of their complex makeup and their nuanced relationship with society and culture, to pull back the veil on the culture in which they appear and gain popularity.

The sociocultural markers that are part of the popular action-adventure films in the 1980s, as ascertained and identified through an analysis of the male bodies within them, are relevant because of their popularity. This study argues that the sociocultural markers that are initiating and informing the affective process of these films and these bodies are important because of how successful the selected films were—not only did they resonate with audiences, as evidenced by their gross box-office revenue, their success ensured cultural saturation and entrance into the American zeitgeist. Additionally, spectacle (in general) has been established as a driving factor in the success of commercial film produced for the purposes of entertainment since its inception in the late nineteenth century. As such, it stands to reason that the source of spectacle—in this
case, identifiable themes and characteristics that initiate and inform the affective process—is culturally and socially relevant.

As a result of my initial assertion that the body needs to be considered a basic component of spectacle there is, essentially, new sociocultural evidence available to film scholars. By examining the male bodies as they are presented in the most popular action-adventure films in the 1980s and ultimately identifying the affective process they initiate and inform, film scholars can, in some capacity, determine the sociocultural atmosphere of the time period in which such processes appear. In short, the interconnected nature of affect and culture, affect and spectacle, and spectacle and bodies necessitates the conclusion that the male bodies appearing in the most popular action-adventure films in 1980s, and the affective process they initiate and inform, are a reflection of sociocultural ebbs and flows; these on-screen bodies are a portal to a more nuanced understanding of the culture in which they were produced.

Notes


4. Ibid.

6. Ibid.


12. Ibid., 104.

13. Ibid., 126.


15. Amanda Marcotte, “Nancy Reagan’s Anti-Feminism Might Be Her Most Lasting Legacy,” Salon, March, 7, 2016, accessed September 13, 2016,
http://www.salon.com/2016/03/07/nancy_reagans_anti_feminism_might_be_her_most_lasting_1
egacy/.

16. I realize that this is anachronistic, but it is here to illustrate that the women in the
films featuring kinesthetically spectacular male bodies are more like the feminist heroes of today
and less like the damsels in distress or set pieces found in the films in the 1980s featuring
aesthetically spectacular male bodies.

17. George Lipsitz, “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness,” in White Privilege:

18. Ibid.

(London; New York: Routledge, 1999), 128.

http://public.eblib.com/EBLWeb/patron/?target=patron&extendedid=E_438722_0.

20. Ibid.


http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/guardians_of_the_galaxy/reviews/#page=2.


http://public.eblib.com/EBLWeb/patron/?target=patron&extendedid=E_438722_0.


http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/lucy_2014/reviews/.


http://public.eblib.com/EBLWeb/patron/?target=patron&extendedid=E_438722_0.


McIntyre, Gina. “‘Guardians of the Galaxy’: Chris Pratt Talks Action Hero Transformation.”

