ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: INSECT POLITICS: PRESIDENTIAL OPTICS AND THE PROMISES OF MANLY MONSTERS IN 1980s HORROR FILM

James Nolan Santos, Master of Arts, 2023

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In their own terms, the intellectual and political spheres of the American 1980s spoke on conversations on gender through human bodies. Feminist theorist Sandy Stone wrote the foundational text for transgender studies in 1987 at the height of the Reagan Administration, which was defined by its own masculine politics. Between Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, their White House Office of Communications staffers were tasked with upholding this image of masculinity, specifically upholding the physical bodies of men, going against 1980s feminist theorists that upheld binary views on gender. Horror filmmakers in Hollywood, however, more closely aligned with feminist thought regarding the flexibility of gender, and like the White House Office of Communications, used the bodies of characters onscreen to convey their ideas. This thesis is a comparative history of Washington and Hollywood in the 1980s, using the psychoanalytic framework of Julia Kristeva's abject as a means to look beyond the gendered boundaries set by Washington and seeing how those same boundaries were manipulated by Hollywood.

“INSECT POLITICS: PRESIDENTIAL OPTICS AND THE PROMISES OF MANLY MONSTERS IN 1980s HORROR FILM”

By

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Introduction

Bodies are screens on which we see projected the momentary settlements that emerge from ongoing struggles over beliefs and practices within the academic and medical communities. These struggles play themselves out in arenas far removed from the body. Each is an attempt to gain a high ground that is profoundly moral in character, to make an authoritative and final explanation for the way things are and consequently for the way they must continue to be. In other words, each of these accounts is culture speaking with the voice of an individual.[1]

[1] Sandy Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttransexual Manifesto," *Camera Obscura* 10, no. 2, May 1, 1992, 163. (emphasis added)
The first version of this text was written by Stone in 1987, under the tutelage of feminist theorist Donna Haraway at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Chestburster

The White House Family Theater was built in 1942, designed as a space where the first family and their guests could sit back in one of the 40 upholstered seats and watch a movie, often times sent directly from Hollywood before public release.[2] To many, movies were activities of escape, allowing them to momentarily dive into an alternate universe beyond the silver screen. For those in the political sphere, escaping the responsibility of the most powerful office in the country meant escaping the critical eye of their constituents, a common desire for a brief respite. In the White House, the most watched type of film were westerns, films that prioritized law and order, good against evil – in this genre, there was a clear, binary line drawn between the politics of this genre. The least watched genre, however, was horror.

On June 13th, 1979, at 7:30 PM, President Jimmy Carter, his family, and 65 guests gathered in the theater and put on Ridley Scott's *Alien*.[3] Set far into the future, the crew aboard the commercial spaceship, the *Nostromo*, was awoken by a distress signal, following it to a nearby moon where they encountered an alien ship unlike any they'd seen before. Combining organic and industrial architectural styles, the glossy black interior was more than just a marvel of engineering – it held the offspring of the dangerous Alien. After surviving a brief attack, the crew luckily made it back to their ship in one piece, or so they thought. During dinner, crewmate Kane collapsed onto the table in a coughing fit, screaming in agony as the rest of the crew tried to hold him down. Suddenly, his chest burst, dousing the others in red blood and splitting his ribs wide open

[2] "Family Theater," The White House Museum, http://www.whitehousemuseum.org/east-wing/theater.htm.
[3] "The Daily Diary of President Jimmy Carter," Jun. 13, 1979, https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/assets/documents/diary/1979/d061379t.pdf.
Alien, directed by Ridley Scott (20th Century Fox, 1979).

to reveal a young Alien with chrome teeth, gurgling and wriggling beneath sinew and gore just before its rapid escape. At this very moment, one hour into *Alien,* First Lady Rosalynn Carter departed the Family Theater.

Like many others before the First Lady, the violence was too much to handle, with early viewers of the chestburster scene reportedly fainting or running to vomit in the theater lobby.[4] This was Scott's goal personified – "I wanted to scare the shit out of people. That's the job."[5] During the 1970s and 1980s, horror film occupied a niche sector of Hollywood, seen as B-Movies that exploited women and featured gratuitous violence – bodies were cut into pieces, stabbed, sexually assaulted, and disfigured beyond belief. If gender theorist Sandy Stone was right, and that bodies *were* screens that had been inscribed with different ideological beliefs, what did it mean for Hollywood horror cinema to destroy bodies so routinely? Why were presidents like Carter and Reagan so afraid to watch horror movies? Everyone, including those in power, had something to fear. The Presidents and their families were not immune to the ideas that were obscured by the violated, maimed, and bloody bodies onscreen.

Unlike Hollywood, Washington did not destroy bodies, but instead put presidential bodies in the spotlight, attempting to uphold a presidential image. As the country reeled from the aftermath of the Watergate Scandal, trust in the government faltered – the illustrious role of the president had been compromised. Both Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan made it a point during their terms to try to reestablish this trust, to varying degrees of success. To them and to their inner circles, leadership required a

[4] Charles de Lauzirika, *The Beast Within* (Lauzirika Motion Picture Company, 2003).
[5] "Ridley Scott: 'I wanted to scare the shit out of people. That's the job,'" *The Guardian*, last modified May 7, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/may/07/ridley-scott-i-really-wanted-to-scare-alien-covenant-interview-blade-runner-2049

man's man for success. This meant that the White House Office of Communications, formally established during Nixon's presidency in 1973, played a large role in shaping the image of the president. These Washington image-makers were not unlike Hollywood filmmakers - often times, that's where they developed their skills. These professionals would construct an image of the president through press management and communication strategies. And like the directors, screenwriters, and producers that created Hollywood films, White House scriptwriters, speakers of the house, and directors of the Office of Communications had their own agendas that they inscribed within the bodies of their subjects. Hollywood wanted to scare – Washington needed to build. This thesis looks at these two seemingly disparate institutions and investigates how the body became their chosen medium on which they could project their contradictory ideas.

The Refigured Body

This thesis draws from three different areas of study: Hollywood horror, White House communications, and importantly, gender theory. Gender built the bridge between Washington and Hollywood, especially in the 1980s. Jimmy Carter's and Ronald Reagan's presidencies centered around ideologies of masculinity, of toughness. Horror filmmakers constantly dove deeper into the politics of gender, developing tropes like the Final Girl. One upheld masculinity, the other femininity – both seen as positive in separate spheres and both seen as negative in different ones. And in academia, the 1980s were a time for feminist scholars and intellectuals to break these binary boundaries. Janice Raymond, a transphobic feminist scholar, published *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* in 1979, disparaging trans-identified people, one of whom was

transgender woman and scholar, Sandy Stone. In the text, Raymond cited a woman concerned with Stone's transgender identity, stating "I feel raped when [Olivia Records] passes off Sandy, a transsexual, as a real woman. After all his male privilege, is he going to cash in on lesbian feminist culture too?"[6] Through misgendering and binary thinking, Raymond denied Stone's identity, mocking it because it existed beyond a binary spectrum. Under the tutelage of theorist Donna Haraway at the University of California, Santa Cruz, Stone herself wrote a response to Raymond years later in 1987, calling it "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto." Within the text, Stone argued not just against Janice Raymond, but also for a more positive construction of identities found between male and female, stating,

> In the transsexual as text we may find the potential to map the refigured body onto conventional gender discourse and thereby disrupt it, to take advantage of the dissonances created by such a juxtaposition to fragment and reconstitute the elements of gender in new and unexpected geometries.[7]

Stone defined gender in a more flexible, more mutable way than Raymond – it was more than the binary Raymond had asserted. These 'unexpected geometries' of gender, between Raymond's binary imagining of gender in 1979 and Stone's elusive and disruptive concept of gender in 1987, as Stone stated, would find themselves expressed in the political stages of Washington and the silver screens of Hollywood. And within the actors and within the presidents were scripts of meaning – their bodies, like Stone asserts, were texts. From 1979 and 1987, feminist theorists like Donna Haraway, Joan W. Scott, and Judith Butler would challenge the primary narrative of binary gender in their works,

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[6] Janice Raymond, *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982), 103.
'Olivia Records' refers to the women-centered record label that Stone was a part of
[7] Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back," 14

offering a more capacious understanding of womanhood defined apart from masculinity. For this project their work serves as both primary and secondary documentation of the transformation of gender theory. During these same years, filmmakers like John Carpenter and David Cronenberg would use these feminist principles, whether they were conscious of feminist gender theory or not, and, like Ridley Scott, "scare the shit out of people" through the bodies of non-binary and gender nonconforming monsters and survivors.[8] This thesis offers a way of thinking about the body and its capacity to carry meaning, told historically through the conflicting narratives about gender in horror films during the Carter and Reagan presidencies. Each sphere, from the White House in Washington to the studios of Hollywood to the classrooms of UC Santa Cruz, thinks in their own terms. Hollywood had its own methodology of analyzing politics and Washington had its own methodology of analyzing images. And, more importantly in the 1980s, both looked at gender in their own ways.

The Promises of Manly Monsters

Psychoanalytic theory plays an immense role in thinking through the historical analysis of film, politics, and gender of the 1980s. In Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, she defines her notion of the abject, a near-physical reflex that occurs during the breakdown of boundaries where object and subject or the self and the Other begin to break down.[9] She relates this reaction most to themes of mortality, like

[8] I use the term 'non-binary' as a means to express that someone, or a film character/ monster exhibits characteristics that fall outside of a 1980s conception of traditional male/ female gender roles. The intent is not to impose a gender identity, but rather as a descriptor. It is indicated if someone does identify as non-binary.

[9] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1982).

when one sees a corpse. The reaction of dread and disgust signifies this breakdown of meaning between the self and the deceased – it is a marker that the two separate states are more connected than imagined. Kristeva stated,

> It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a killer … Abjection is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you …[10]

So not just simply relating to mortality, the abject relates to ideas and identities that fail to adhere to binary structures, things that betray commonly assumed logic. Abjection lives in the middle ground and causes dissonance to anyone who feels threatened or uncomfortable with a breakdown of their assumed identity, an identity formed in relation to a supposed binary opposite. Kristeva argues here that the identities found in between boundaries have just as much power, if not more power, than those on either side. The discussion of gender in the 1980s easily situates itself within this framework through gender theorists' assertions that the traditional gender binary is incapable of wholly encompassing identity. To them, gender identity extended way beyond and in-between notions of male and female. Stone's own work noted the malleability of gender, seeing power that non-binary identities had in undermining traditional hierarchies. The abject is a reaction to this disruption.

In relation to Hollywood, boundaries are also easily broken on the silver screen. Cultural theorist Siegfried Kracauer extended this mindset to film by describing mass

[10] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

marketed cinema's *madness*; "At times, films go mad. They have terrifying visions and spew images that expose society's true countenance. Luckily, they are healthy at root. The schizophrenic outbursts are only momentary; the curtain is lowered once again, and everything returns to normal."[11] Put simply, filmmakers manifest their ideas beyond the images present in their work. In *Alien,* the contrast between the lead heroine and the extraterrestrial monster is complicated when we know that the Alien was portrayed by a Black man. In this instance, what can we understand about Ripley Scott's ideas of race and gender? These outbursts are abjection in action. Specifically with horror film, created to scare and terrify the public, boundaries of comfort are constantly broken. Film is a reactive commodity, framed within bounds of time, place, and culture. And as Kracauer suggested, films are a means in which the film industry and the wide array of people involved within it both reflect and uncover the unconscious desires of ticket-purchasing movie-goers. The successful careers of horror directors like David Cronenberg and John Carpenter suggest that there is something in their films that people repeatedly pay to see – the fear that they generate is seductive, not repulsive. In reexamining this cultural history, looking at the histories of horror films means to look safely at momentary schizophrenic outbursts, being able to see how filmmakers themselves understand the power of identities in between boundaries.

Horror film history is a familiar friend to interdisciplinary historical research. While films theorists like Linda Williams and David Huckvale explore the horror genre by tying the ideas of Kristeva and gender to the multiple kinds of bodies depicted on the silver screen, "Insect Politics" was moreso founded from the ideas of literary theorist,

[11] Siegfried Kracauer, *Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 303. Text originally published as *Das Ornament Der Masse* in 1963

Carol Clover in her groundbreaking text, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror.*[12] As the author that defined the now colloquial Final Girl, Clover notices the flexibility inherent within gender, attaching it to the many protagonists of slasher films. Not only do Final Girls display elements of masculinity and femininity, but the monsters and murderers they fight display those same qualities as well. I align more with Clover's representation of femininity as opposed to cinema theorist Barbara Creed's, whose "Monstrous Feminine," is more of a critique on horror films, claiming that women in horror are always portrayed as victims.[13] And while there is validity in this argument, I believe that Creed's reading of Kristeva's abject does not see the benefit in the monstrous.

However, a larger goal of this project is to put these theoretical texts into historical context – over time how have these ideas impacted the world of politics and how have they changed to better act as vehicles of commentary and critique? Clover and Creed do not look at horror in a historical context. The works of Jack Halberstam, however, are able to more succinctly analyze the interdisciplinary questions that arise from political, film, and gender histories. His work, *Female Masculinity*, in a vein similar to Kimberlé Crenshaw's idea of intersectionality, suggests that more non-binary expressions of gender, like butch lesbianism should be examined independently of their polar ends.[14] Like many gender scholars before him, looking beyond binary gender is

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[12] Carol Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
[13] Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).
For more texts surrounding gender and horror film, see Barry Keith Grant, *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), and Brigid Cherry, "Refusing to refuse to look: Female viewers of the horror film," in *Horror: The Film Reader*, ed. Mark Janovich (New York City: Routledge, 2002).
[14] Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

crucial as a feminist praxis, giving more flexibility to gender expression and, in consequence challenging patriarchal norms that exist in political institutions as a means of dominance. Halberstam does place reluctance in situating gender primarily within the body. This is a completely understandable hesitation – as the feminist theorists in the 1980s have suggested, the body does not define gender or gender identity, and it would be incorrect to make this claim in our current understanding of gender. In looking at Hollywood and Washington during this time, it is crucial to note that the language used in these spheres did not reflect Halberstam's ideas on gender flexibility. But in the 1980s, I argue that the body was the most salient text to both uphold and critique binary gender norms. "Insect Politics" grounds itself in the physical body, looking to examine the changing and conflicting ideas that have been imprinted on the political and cultural bodies in Washington and Hollywood.[15]

Opposed to gender and Hollywood, however, abjection is unwelcome in Washington. While Carter was dubbed as the "first woman president,"[16] Reagan found comparisons with the rough and tough actor, John Wayne.[17] Binary notions of gender served to uphold the presidential image or serve as a critique of it with masculinity as superior to femininity. In 1987, political historian John Orman compared the Carter and

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Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6, Jul. 1991

Halberstam's early work would also take a look at the interactions of the horror genre and gender – see Jack Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

[15] Crucial to the foundations of this project is Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993). It is important to assert, like Stone, that the body itself is a text and should not be seen as determinant of identity. However, what I suggest and what Jeffords also suggests is that during the 1980s, physical presentation and gender were tightly linked.

[16] John Mihalec, "Hair on the President's Chest," *Wall Street Journal,* May 11, 1984.

[17] Adam Clymer. "Carter and Reagan Dispute Views on Arms Policy, Economy and Iran in a Broad Debate Before Nation." *New York Times,* Oct 29, 1980.

Reagan presidencies, developing what he called a macho presidential style, citing qualities like competitiveness, athleticism, strength, and more importantly, a lack of femininity, as markers of masculinity.[18] While broadly defined by today's measures, in this instance, what it meant to be a successful leader meant to be masculine in all respects, from personality to physicality – any presence of femininity tarnished power. Extant histories of the White House Office of Communications also adhered to binary gender norms, if they spoke about gender at all. There are typical histories of presidents and their images like the works of John Orman, but histories about this specific office are limited in scope. The works of presidential scholars John Anthony Maltese and Martha Joynt Kumar illuminated the intricate inner workings of the communication office, but as stated, these are more mechanical, limited to the day-to-day workings.[19] In elaborating further upon these works, Shawn Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles closely examine the image of the president, calling the ideas involved in its construction *presidentiality*.[20] They state specifically that postmodern politics in the United States is marked by hyperrealism. The rising surge of media and the images they generate, cause more boundaries to break between reality and representation, especially in such a highly public role as the Presidency. I hope to use this same terminology looking backwards, continuing to see the histories of post-modern presidencies within Carter and Reagan. For the purposes of this thesis, between 1978 and 1988, White House Communication offices

[18] John Orman, *Comparing Presidential Behavior: Carter, Reagan, and the Macho Presidential Style* (Westport: Greenwood Press, Inc.), 7-8.
[19] John Anthony Maltese, *Spin Control: The White House Office of Communications and the Management of Presidential News* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).
Martha Joynt Kumar, *Managing the President's Message: The White House Communications Operation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).
[20] Shawn J. Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles, *Constructing Clinton: Hyperreality & Presidential Image-Making in Postmodern Politics* (Bern: Peter Lang), 3.

made the explicit attempt to masculinize the president in hopes of denoting them as successful leaders, equating their presidentiality with their adherence to a masculine image. The more tough and assertive Carter or Reagan seemed to be, the more they *were* a President. In communication with gender theory, I wish to posit this ascription of gendered values to not just Carter and Reagan, but also to the bodies on Hollywood screens as performances of gender. As Judith Butler stated in *Gender Trouble,*

> Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence, or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.[21]

If for Stone, the body is the text, then for those in the White House Office of Communications and in Hollywood studios, gender is the language. Gender is constructed, reformatted, and inscribed within bodies.

Abjection finds itself in the cracks and controversies of the Carter and Reagan terms – I argue that both their administrations attempted to quash non-masculine images in hopes of retaining a strong political image. Within "Insect Politics," psychoanalytic thinking helps us understand the relationship between Washington and Hollywood. Without a border to separate ideas of gender and the 'madness' of film, we can more closely examine fault lines of anxiety and fear in non-binary thinking. An understanding of Hollywood's Horror Film Industry becomes an understanding of Washington, and vice versa. Both examine the role of the masculine body and its many interpretations as sites of leadership or sites of vulnerability. Here, we can summarize the goals of "Insect Politics" through the lens of the Monster. Feminist Donna Haraway asserted in her essay, "The Promises of Monsters," that monsters lavish in the in-between, constituting identity

[21] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York City: Routledge, 1990), 185.

in a binary-less scale.[22] Theorist Jeffrey Jerome Cohen reiterated Haraway's points, asserting that "the monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy. […] The monstrous body is pure culture."[23] Monsters in the 1980s were found in both Washington and Hollywood, but had different ideas inscribed within them. This thesis claims that the politicians and image-makers of Washington, the Manly Monsters, promised a lie. While masculinity was a marker of political success for presidents like Ronald Reagan, that adhesion to the binary led to the detriment of those who fell outside of it - Hollywood and the Monsters in horror films would challenge binary gender and undermine the power of masculinity.

"Insect Politics" is largely written chronologically. Chapter 1 illustrates the second half of the Carter Presidency, looking at how his falling reputation was nearly saved by White House Office of Communications Director, Gerald Rafshoon. His attempts to masculinize Carter go hand in hand with the role of image-making, dictating what kinds of changes to the White House were needed in order to project Carter in the right light. Concurrently, we see the emergence of the Final Girl in slasher films like *Halloween* (1978) and more crucially *Alien* (1979), showing the belief that femininity, in coordination with masculinity allows for survival. Chapter 2 examines the 1980 election between Carter and Reagan, looking at how Reagan's own masculinity was utilized to

[22] Donna Haraway, "Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others," in *Cybersexualities,* ed. Jenny Wolmark (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).
[23] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 4.
Cohen additionally mentions the importance that fear plays into horror and monsters. While not explicit, this project also seeks to add onto the emerging field of emotions history, a field that, like "Insect Politics," is highly based in psychoanalytic theory. Not just based in Hollywood fear, the emotions history of fear extends well into Washingtonian politics. For more on the history of fear and horror, see Peter Stearns, *American Fear: The Causes and Consequences of High Anxiety* (New York City: Routledge, 2006).

overtake Carter's weakness. It also covers the Reagan Assassination attempt, looking at how his body was utilized by Communications Director, David Gergen, to tie in with his economic policies. In Hollywood, similar conversations were being held about the body, with David Cronenberg's and John Carpenter's body horror films, *Scanners* (1981) and *The Thing* (1982), specifically destroying the masculine body. Chapter 3 looks further into Reagan's presidency at the Election of 1984, which saw the denigration of Democratic Vice-Presidential Candidate, Geraldine Ferraro – here, her womanhood is placed into direct comparison with Reagan. Gender was not only examined in politics, but in movies like *Christine* (1983), *Sleepaway Camp* (1984), and *Videodrome*, asserting the power of femininity in relation to masculinity. Lastly, Chapter 4 serves as a case study, critiquing the Reagan Administration's response to the AIDS epidemic, looking at how the LGBTQ+ community, as outsiders to a binary masculinity, were abandoned by a policy of inaction to uphold masculine domination - films like *The Fly* (1986) and *Hellraiser* (1987) directly illuminate the suffering and terror they experienced.

> Insects don't have politics. They're very brutal. No compassion. No compromise. We can't trust the insect. But I'd like to become the first … first insect politician. I'd like to, but I'm afraid…[24]

The title of this thesis is drawn from David Cronenberg's 1986 body horror film, *The Fly*. In it, the main character aimed to keep the masculinity he scientifically grafted onto himself, despite that very masculinity killing him. Here, the insects are the source of masculinity, but as stated, the masculinity the flies are inscribed with is brutal and binary,

[24] *The Fly*, directed by David Cronenberg (20th Century Fox, 1986).

abjecting to any identity beyond it. The monstrous fly wants nothing to do with intellect or compassion. It only wants power and control. This is what I propose the masculine politics, the proposed Insect Politics, were like in the 1980s. For Presidents like Reagan that upheld and were inscribed images of binary masculinity, their supposed strong leadership was nothing short of toxic and monstrous, abjecting to any identity that fell outside of a masculine boundary. In analyzing horror films and their creators, we can see that the promises upheld by the Insect Politics of the Carter and Reagan Administrations, the promises of stability and strength a masculine image were thought to provide, were nothing more than lies.

Chapter 1 - Carter

Dun Dun … Dun Dun – Carter in Washington Waters

Something was in the water. Something dangerous. Something invisible. What was once a safe summer beach town had now become a site of horror. And yet, despite this threat to visitors of Amity Island, Mayor Larry Vaughn decreed that, "[the] beach will be open on the Fourth of July,"[25] selfishly putting lives in danger in the pursuit of capitalistic gains. It seemed that Amity Island had two monsters – one below the water and one on the surface. Within 80 days of its release in June 1975, Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* amassed $124 million dollars in profits, becoming the highest grossing film in the United States at that time.[26] His film was especially rife with commentary on the country's political culture, with Spielberg saying, "I didn't know how critics would relate to the three elements – terror, manipulation which all good fright films have, and the human element. I just believed that what would frighten me would frighten others."[27] What *did* frighten Spielberg?

1970s America reeled from Nixon's Watergate scandal, fomenting mixed emotions about the sanctity about the American government due to the administration's culture of surveillance and resulting investigation obstruction. Distrust was inevitable – it became a part of national consciousness, and *Jaws* was its mirror, reflecting the terror Spielberg spoke of back at the viewers.[28] On Watergate's social impact, reporters stated

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[25] *Jaws*, directed by Steven Spielberg (Universal, 1975).
[26] "'Jaws' Becomes No. 1 Film," *Los Angeles Times*, Sep 11, 1975
[27] Joyce Haber, "The Man Who Bit the Bullet on 'Jaws'" *Los Angeles Times*, Jul 13, 1975
[28] Carl Gottlieb, *The Jaws Log* (Newmarket Press, 2012).
It's also interesting to note what *Jaws* writer, Carl Gottlieb, said of actor Murray Hamilton, who played Mayor Vaughn, "Competent and gifted with an uncanny ability to portray weakness posing as strength, Murray [Hamilton] was a natural for the part. […] Quite coincidentally, he bears a passing resemblance to Richard Nixon."

that "Some fear that public distrust of government – courthouse, state house, White House – has risen so high among so many that it is doubtful that any president of whatever party can govern effectively for a long time to come."[29] Washington had lost its credibility, even going as far for people to report to NBC pollsters in 1976 that the next president after Gerald Ford should be an outsider to national politics.[30] This was the political climate Carter inherited, one where those governed believed that their government did not have their best interest at heart. The country was seemingly led by Amity Island's mayor. But while the politics of *Jaws* remained visible in Washington, the shark still loomed underneath the surface.

At the start of his 1976 autobiography, *Why Not the Best?,* Democratic presidential candidate Jimmy Carter quoted philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, saying, "Every man is an exception,"[31] touting his individuality not just as a politician, but as an American man. What did it exactly mean to be an *exceptional man*? Maybe Carter believed that he was the exception to governmental secrecy and corruption, that he was the exception to conservative beliefs, and maybe, through his specific masculinity, Carter saw himself as someone who could disrupt these boundaries. As a small-town, novice politician with a peanut farm, Carter wanted to distance himself from the previous years of anxious politics, saying, "there is a simple and effective way for public officials to regain public trust - be trustworthy."[32] Initial impressions were mixed in the public eye - they were duped by their government, and, seeing promises of turning a new leaf, they

[29] Roscoe Drummond, "How to lift miasma of Watergate," *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 18, 1973.
[30] John Herbers, "Without Watergate, the Campaign Is Part Illusion," *The New York Times*, Mar 21, 1976
[31] Jimmy Carter, *Why Not the Best*? (New York City: Bantam Books, 1976), 10.
[32] Carter, *Why Not the Best?*, 82.

had their doubts, claiming Carter's goal was an "impossible task."[33] And yet, it was a task he felt he could overcome.

In the face of doubt, Carter remained optimistic. The newly elected president came prepared to change the culture of the White House with a 120-page list of alterations and changes on the way things were run.[34] The administration delivered immediately on sweeping democratic reforms and actions, granting amnesty for Vietnam draft dodgers, advocating for human rights in his foreign policy addresses, pushing for the abolition of the electoral college, and even proposing that states decriminalize marijuana usage. The Carter administration adopted an open style of presidency, one that prioritized transparency and honesty with the public. The peanut farmer had cards to play in the Washington big leagues, leading to a honeymoon approval rate in the 70% margins.[35] His status as an outsider was a breath of fresh Georgian air, but that would not last in Washington waters.

Despite this promising start, President Carter's popularity and reputation among the press and public faltered drastically halfway through his term in 1979, with the Los Angeles Times headlining, "71% Lack Confidence in Carter."[36] The honeymoon had ended, and the efficacy of his new image faded – his lack of experience in Washington was, in fact, detrimental to his popularity.[37] The president's public image for the administration was crucial to his success. And yet, despite a restructuring of the White House Office of Communications through the hiring of former Hollywood ad-man,

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[33] Nicholas von Hoffman, "Jimmy Carter's Impossible Task," *Chicago Tribune,* Jan. 15, 1977.
[34] Charles Mohr, "Carter with a long list of campaign promises," *New York Times,* Nov. 15, 1976.
[35] Orman, *Comparing Presidential Behavior*.
[36] UPI "71% Lack Confidence in Carter, Harris Poll Finds" (Jul 27, 1979)
[37] Louis Harris, "Harris Survey: Confidence issue continues to plague Carter," *Chicago Tribune,* Dec 10, 1979.

Gerald Rafshoon, his legacy was defined in the *Wall Street Journal* years later in 1984 as the "first woman president,"[38] despite believing that he was an exceptional man. For this author, femininity was a point of attack, a mark of weak leadership. And yet, Congress would fund International Women's Year (IWY) conferences in 1977, allowing for "Four Days that Changed the World," for feminists and women's rights activists campaigning for the rights of women.[39]

> Reporters continued to comment on Carter's faltering popularity in 1979, stating,
>
> President Carter is neither popular nor unpopular. There is a kind of emotional vacuum at the center of his administration. […] The public seems to think Mr. Carter is hard-working, conscientious, compassionate, but nobody gets emotionally excited about him. The test is now effectiveness.[40]

In comparison to the tenacity that came from the 1977 (IWY) Conferences, Carter's lack of connection, the seemingly unemotional disconnect that was brought forth by his leadership paled in comparison. As the "first woman president," his lack of masculinity and his apparent femininity contributed to a confusing image to the public – with his mangled identity, no one seemed to rave or critique his presidency. Effectiveness was what Carter lacked. Internationally, while the Democratic president had fumbled negotiations with Panama and the Panama Canal in 1977 and would continue tenuous relationships with the Soviet Union throughout 1980.[41] Domestically, Carter faced

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[38] John Mihalec, "Hair on the President's Chest," *Wall Street Journal*, May 11, 1984.
[39] Lindsy Can Gelder, "Four Days That Changed the World: Behind the Scenes in Houston," *Ms.* March 1978.
For more on the International Women's Year Conferences in 1977, see Marjorie J. Spurll, "Divided We Stand: The Battle Over Women's Right as Family Values That Polarized American Politics," (New York City: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017).
[40] Richard L. Strout, "Carter at miderm: now the high hurdles," *The Christian Science Monitor*, Jan 8, 1979.
[41] Robert A. Strong, "Jimmy Carter: Foreign Affairs," UVA: Miller Center, https://millercenter.org/president/carter/foreign-affairs

inflation, looming oil shortages, and consistent questions of federal budget allocation from both Democrats and Republicans.[42] And while this isn't to say he did not have his successes like the Camp David Accords, these constant threats both inside and outside of the country, and without a strong coalition of Carter-aligned Democratic Senators in Congress, questioning his leadership, and coincidentally his masculinity, was the next step for the public.[43]

Gender in the Carter years was the proverbial shark, a political tool that would be used to instill fear, to create discord. While gender norms of the late 1970s enforced a dominance of masculinity over femininity, in the lens of Kristeva's abject, the gender shark could break those boundaries. Like *Jaws,* boundaries are ill defined in horror. But what was especially noticeable of horror films released during the Carter years was their attention to the power of femininity. The Final Girl found its origins in the age of Carter.[44] These were strong women that straddled the boundaries of masculine and feminine, and unlike Carter, Final Girls were fit to be leaders, with headlines exclaiming, "'Alien's' Sigourney Weaver: The Hero Is a Woman."[45] Femininity in Hollywood could achieve different possibilities than in Washington. As we discuss Kristeva's abject and the interruption of boundaries not only in terms of subject and object, but also in the gendered notions of female and male, we can more closely examine the differences between Carter's unsuccessful gendered politics during his term and the horror films of

[42] Strout, "Carter at Midterm."
[43] Steven V. Roberts, "Carter, at Midterm, Is Still 'Outsider' to Many in Congress," *The New York Times,* Mar 7, 1979.
[44] Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws.*
[45] William K. Knoedelseder Jr., "'Alien's' Sigourney Weaver: The Hero is a Woman," *Los Angeles Times,* Jun 4, 1979

that time. Horror and Hollywood in the 1970s undermined the perceived strength of Washington masculinity.

"Rafshooning the Presidency"[46] - Gendered Image-Making

In an Op-Ed to the *New York Times* on March 24th, 1978, Gerald 'Jerry' Rafshoon, a former 1976 Carter campaign staffer and former advertising agent at 20th Century-Fox, openly criticized national news media coverage of the Carter campaign, claiming that the administration's open communication strategy with the public had left reporters, previously sated with leaks during the Nixon and Ford presidencies, hungry for any kind of controversy. To him, national news organizations were largely at fault for creating the President's poor image. He thus illustrated the antagonistic, yet crucial, relationship between politics and the media. From his perspective, despite the Carter administration's communication having done nothing inherently misleading, reporters could still shape the public perception of the government. Despite his connection with Hollywood, he largely ignored the potential influence of film on the mind of the public, and, as seen with *Jaws,* popular media had the ability to reinforce ideas not just on a conscious level, but within the subconscious as well. Less than two months later, Rafshoon became the Director of the newly established Office of Communications team on July 1st, 1978. He was now in a position to reclaim partial control over Carter's image and attempt to create what the public could see as a respectable leader.

Rafshoon immediately found himself amidst a sea of Carter's controversies, tasked with the goal of calming a rising press storm. Carter's presidentiality waned in the

[46] Julius Duscha, "Rafshooning the Presidency." *The Sun,* Sep 19, 1978.

eyes of the public. The Sun called on the president to, "[...] scrub down the aw, shucks, small-town, friendly neighbor act,"[47] commenting on his image as a, "[...] scoutmaster, Sunday school teacher, manager of the produce department at the local supermarket," and additionally criticizing the prevalence of casual dress, lack of decisive action, and absence of 'Hail to the Chief' during presidential appearances.[48] What the American public saw was not Gerald Ford's own presidentiality years prior. Instead, years after they'd wished for a non-Washingtonian as president, Americans viewed Carter as a local man who had not let the presidency change his identity. After promising to change the American government in a more open style and beginning to enact that change, the change was too little, almost Un-American. It wasn't enough to just be a man in the White House. Per John Orman, there were qualities that made a political leader masculine, and to the public, President Carter lacked decisiveness, power, and strength, leading them to eventually consider Carter to be the first woman president.[49] For newspaper readers across the country, the White House was running amok with a weak-spirited, non-masculine leader and his rowdy staff. 'The Georgia Mafia' was constantly in the newspapers, just not entirely for positive, presidential activities.

Rafshoon's hiring in itself became its own new story with the press. Headlines in the *Los Angeles Times* flared, "Adman Called in to Polish Carter's Tarnished Image,"[50] and "Carter names assistant to improve his image."[51] Hiring a new image-maker was almost an admission of guilt. If the Carter administration was doing a good job at

[47] James J. Kilpatrick, "Enough Grits and Catfish." *The Sun,* July 9, 1978.
[48] Kilpatrick. "Enough Grits and Catfish."
[49] Mihalec. "Hair on the President's Chest."
[50] Jack Nelson. "Adman called in to polish Carter's tarnished image." *Los Angeles Times,* July 10, 1978.
[51] New York Times News Service, "Carter names assistant to improve his image," *Chicago Tribune,* May 19, 1978.

managing its image, why did they need Rafshoon? To him, the current communication plan was too near-sighted under former head of the Press Office, Jody Powell.[52] Ideas and commentary coming from the White House were too open and too loose, a call-back to his own Op-Ed several months prior.[53] Despite his name in the headlines, he made sure to de-emphasize his own hiring. Rafshoon reorganized the White House immediately, first and foremost to masculinize Carter and his staff. In memos to President Carter, Rafshoon expressed that his ultimate goal was to set a cultural theme both within the White House and in the eyes of the public that Carter was 'getting control' of his image as a competent leader.[54] Shying away from the President's initial goal of maintaining an open style of leadership, Rafshoon's intervention began to restrict external media access to the White House. This began a new relationship with media organizations with the Office of Communications in control. Carter and his Communications team were to proactively engage with them, establishing networks with reporters in the Washington, D.C. metro area to report on Carter's programs, keeping in constant communication with presidential critics, and controlling presidential imagery and optics with consistent camera and video presence.[55] Controlling media output and fostering relationships with the press, however, was but the first step on Rafshoon's agenda. 'Toughness' was the trait that needed to be attached to the Carter image. In the eyes of Rafshoon, Carter needed to shift away from his open, hands-off, and actionless diplomacy and political style, and embrace instead a

[52] Maltese, *Spin Control*, 249.
[53] Curtis Wilkie. "Carter's image maker returns." *Boston Globe*, June 15, 1978.
[54] Memo, Rafshoon to the President, 19 July 1978, page 2, "Memos from Rafshoon, July 1978," Box 28, GRF, JCL. I am largely indebted to John Anthony Maltese and the scholarship he produced in *Spin Control: The White House Office of Communications and Management of Presidential News* for the sources collected at the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.
[55] "Assistant to President for Communications," undated [circa May 1978], "Office Procedures: Memos (I)," Box 29, GRF, JCL.

strategy that showed action to the public in a more direct way. A new, proactive relationship with external press organizations would streamline this communication.

"Costanza 'gag order' denied"[56] – Presidential Optics and Womanhood

In consideration of optics and masculinity, issues arose with Carter's outspoken aide, Midge Costanza. The restructuring of the White House Communications team and Rafshoon's goal of masculinizing Carter had serious ramifications for Costanza, especially when it came to press coverage. An article in the *New York Times* titled, "Midge Costanza: Enduring a New Life In a Niche in the White House Cellar,"[57] was no hyperbole. The special assistant for public liaison had been moved from her office to a small, cramped basement room to make space for Anne Wexler, Carter's newest senior assistant who was notably less in the spotlight than Costanza. The reduction of her status was as much news to her as it was to the public. Weeks later, further controversy with Costanza arose after her replacement from speaking on ABC's David Hartman show. Carter's domestic affairs advisor, Stu Eizenstat participated in her place.[58] As part of his communications strategy, Rafshoon had instructed all staff to seek approval with him before speaking on any form of media, and Costanza had failed to do this. However, what seemed to be a minor blip in engaging with new procedures turned into a news story. The *Los Angeles Times* emphasized this act as a great removal, "Midge Costanza TV Talk Canceled by White House," and, "White House Aide Bumped From TV."[59]Despite

[56] "Costanza 'gag order' denied." *Boston Globe*, July 26, 1978.
[57] James T. Wooten. "Midge Costanza: Enduring a New Life in a Niche in the White House Cellar." *New York Times*, July 4, 1978.
[58] Times Wire Service. "White House Aide Bumped from TV." *Los Angeles Times,* Jul 26, 1978.
[59] United Press International. "Midge Costanza TV Talk Canceled by White House." *Los Angeles Times,* July 25, 1978.

Rafshoon's true intent, or Costanza's true feelings about her removal, newspapers highlighted how the Carter administration was, in a way, hesitant to have women and femininity represent the White House. Additionally, not only did the White House Communication team emphasize masculinity over femininity, but the decision to have Eizenstat fill in for Costanza was made by George Merlis, the senior producer of ABC's Good Morning America.[60] Supporting Rafshoon's approach to creating a positive image of Jimmy Carter, TV news networks were also complicit with print news organizations in favoring masculinity over femininity. Costanza was not incompetent by any means, but would resign less than a week later on August 1st, with headlines recounting, "Miss Costanza Resigns as Assistant To Carter, Citing Problems of Style."[61] In this case, her womanhood was a target on her back, supported through the words in her resignation letter, saying, "[...] I have had to deal increasingly with the subject of approach rather than that of substance, spending valuable time and energy on discussions of whether I have spoken out too much, what my relations are to your other senior staff, or where my office is located."[62] Jerry Rafshoon's hiring to the Carter administration saw an increase of masculine rhetoric, leadership, and imagery among men, but only in coordination with the minimizing of femininity and women.

"They're all going to laugh at you"[63] - Horror in a Period of Gendered Politics

Times Wire Service. "White House Aide..."

[60] Ibid.
[61] Karen De Witt. "Miss Costanza Resigns as Assistant To Carter, Citing Problems of Style." *New York Times,* Aug 2, 1978.
[62] Ibid.
[63] *Carrie*, directed by Brian De Palma (United Artists, 1976).

In cinema, however, women were on full display. And in the horror genre, powerful women were the focus. Brian De Palma's *Carrie* (1976) was released two weeks after Carter won the 1976 Election.[64] An up-and-coming director, De Palma was posited by critics as someone who focused on the "tawdry and perverse,"[65] tackling the adaptation of Stephen King's novel. Carrie White was a sheltered girl devoid of interaction with her classmates and the outside due to her religious mother. At the late age of 16, she had her first period and believed she was dying. This meant different things for different people in Carrie's life - her peers ridiculed and mocked her for her lack of bodily knowledge while her mother was appalled, as it signaled her daughter's transition to becoming a woman. But as Carrie discovered, her menstruation was a source of power and self-discovery. Not only did she start becoming more confident in herself as a teenage girl, but she also attained telekinetic powers. After a prank where she had a bucket of pig's blood poured over her head during her crowning as prom queen, those powers turned Carrie into a monster in red. In a trance, she effortlessly murdered prom-goers in the gymnasium and eventually crucified her mother before sending her home to the literal depths of hell. From scrawny outcast to mass murderer, Carrie White's bloody metamorphosis ran contrary to the homely, bland election of Jimmy Carter.

Carrie was successful at the box office and with critics. The film was "a dazzling metaphor for the enduring evils of ignorance and superstition."[66] Ignorance, in this instance, was not only referring to Carrie's mother's hyper-religiousness, but also to the teen's own ignorance of her body. Femininity was weaponized but had to be uncovered

[64] "Carrie (1976)," The Numbers, https://www.the-numbers.com/movie/Carrie-(1976)#tab=summary
[65] Gary Arnold, "De Palma's Spectacular Sleeper: 'Carrie,'" *The Washington Post*, Nov 21, 1976.
[66] Kevin Thomas, "Pity Terror and Wit in Carrie," *Los Angeles Times*, Nov 17, 1976.

first. It's an argument that contradicted Rafshoon's goals to masculinize Carter to improve his image, one that claimed Midge Costanza's outspokenness was a positive attribute rather than a nail to hammer down. Femininity in this film was not only the source of change and ridicule but was also the source of strength and power for the downtrodden teen. The duality of perspectives on femininity came alive in *Carrie*, with original novelist Stephen King saying,

> *Carrie* is largely about how women find their own channels of power, and what men fear about women and women's sexuality … which is only to say that, writing the book in 1973 and only out of college three years, I was fully aware of what Women's liberation implied for me and others of my sex.[67]

For King, gender was a clear topic of conflict, both in horror and politics – men had lots to fear of female power. It would be easy to dismiss the ending of *Carrie* as an "unsubtle exercise in gore,"[68] but in looking at the abject, boundaries that have historically been separate in the political sphere of the 1970s were able to coexist within Carrie. She's monstrous yet womanly, powerful yet emotional. De Palma praised the ending of his film, saying, "when you're effective at what you're doing, you are always accused of manipulating the audience … I'm not cynical enough yet to feel that you can push buttons and know how people are going to respond."[69] He saw himself in his work, and the expression of that identity, especially a monstrous identity covered in pig's blood, was one that took seriously the power of the feminine.[70]

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[67] Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (New York City: Pocket Books, 2010), 171-172.
Original text written in 1981
[68] David Sterritt, "'Carrie': unsubtle exercise in gore," *The Christian Science Monitor*, Dec. 10, 1976.
[69] Bob Dingilian, "Biography: Brian De Palma," Domestic Promotion and Publicity, *20th Century-Fox Film Corp*.
[70] Marcelle Clements, "Scare Meister," *New York Newsday*, Aug 6, 1992

But this was a film where women were the central characters. It would make sense that Carrie drew on her newfound femininity simply because she was around other women. Would male-centric casts support the notion of masculine superiority? In *Jaws*, pure masculinity was also criticized. Captain Quint and newcomer Hooper were created as near opposites.[71] Quint is a grizzled WWII veteran, having survived the sinking of the USS *Indianapolis* while Hooper is a modern oceanographer invited to investigate the attacks. One is local, the other is not. One is tech-savvy, the other is not. In the case of the manly veteran versus the educated marine biologist, Spielberg painted a careful image of gender disparity. And yet, while these two characters were diametrically opposite, only Quint died at the jaws of the great white. Hooper and Carrie White shared similarities in that their embracing of non-masculinity allowed either survival or immense power. It's then a point where Rafshoon was influenced by status politics and, in return, that same status politics was influenced by gender norms – he wanted to uphold a masculine style of leadership within Carter. If, as Orman stated, masculine traits were the most desired in political leadership, then anything that fell outside of that restricting definition of manliness, including both Carrie's celebration of femininity and Hooper's version of masculinity, embodied an implicit critique of those in power and of the historically masculine power structure itself. What did manliness really have to fear?

Yet, despite the direction horror film headed in to prioritize the strength of the feminine, Carter's adherence to Rafshoon and the rest of the White House Communications staff's masculinizing advice resulted in a spurt of rising support for the president. "Suddenly, Mr. Carter has Grown," the *Boston Globe* stated, acknowledging

[71] *Jaws.*

not only Carter's change in demeanor, but also finally assuming some consensus with Rafshoon's image making.[72] Achieving positive coverage meant to assert masculinity, to finally take charge of the country. This resulted in a rapid flurry of legislative action. In line with the open communications strategy, on August 8th, amidst thousands of New Yorkers looking at City Hall from the crowd, from skyscrapers, and from televisions across the country, Carter publicly signed a $1.6 billion relief bill.[73] Finally away from the confines of the Oval Office, Carter became more visibly active with this public signing. Days later, the President would propose a new Civil Service Reform Bill.[74] Soon after, he passed a different energy tax bill nicknamed the "The Gas Guzzler Levy."[75] Carter also exerted his power in a series of Congressional vetoes, one of which was against a Department of Defense Authorization bill and another $10.1 billion public works bill.[76] Finally, there was some reinvigorated action on the side of the president, and the news, both print and televised, were close behind with constant coverage to preserve that newfound presidentiality.

President Carter's biggest boon to his tough image, however, was his successful negotiation during the Camp David Accords with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. An article in the *Washington Post* would say, "The White House drama interrupted heavily publicized 'specials' on the three television networks on the heaviest viewing night of the week. Industry sources said it may have

[72] David S. Broder. "Suddenly, Mr. Carter has Grown." *Boston Globe,* Sep 19, 1978.
[73] Fred Barbash. "Thousands See Carter Sign N.Y. Aid Bill." *The Washington Post,* Aug 9, 1978.
[74] Hugh Echlo. "The Overselling of Civil Service Reform." *The Washington Post,* Aug 12, 1978.
[75] Robert Young. "Senate OKs two of Carter's energy bills." *Chicago Tribune,* Oct 10, 1978.
[76] Terence Smith. "Rafshoon Resists the Label of Image Maker." *New York Times,* Nov 27, 1978.
Paul Houston. "House Upholds Carter Veto of 'Wasteful' Works Bill." *Los Angeles Times,* Oct 6 1978.

drawn the largest audience of any event of the Carter presidency."[77] Audience was key - Rafshoon's policy made certain that people saw the President's political successes. The coverage had immediate effects, with Carter's approval rating on an ABC Louis Harris poll showing the president at 51%, a 12-point jump from his last poll in August.[78]

The surging amount of print that came with Carter's newfound political savvy and success were further greeted by more coverage supporting the president. With this initial burst of support from his more masculine and tough posturing came an increased focus on Carter's physicality. Days after Rafshoon's onboarding, Carter revealed a new official portrait with the goal of improving his presidential image. As an image-maker, Rafshoon was aware of the connection between physicality and masculinity. In comparison with Carter's 1977 photo, the new one featured a smaller smile, grayer hair, and clearer wrinkles on his face.[79] It was not enough to act masculine and tough to evoke leadership capability, one also needed to look the part. A rhetorical theme emerged in news headlines. The article, "Suddenly, a New Look for Carter," coincided with Rafshoon's masculinizing intervention, referencing the performativity of gender.[80] The change in Carter was seemingly sudden and unexpected. Quoted in the article, Carter's physician, Dr. William M. Lukash, referenced the president's physical state, stating that he'd lost weight, his resting pulse rate was down to 40 beats per minute, and he concluded, "He's really become more of a runner than a jogger."[81] There's a sentiment of physical prowess that's coupled with legislative success. After a haircut where Carter shifted his hair part

[77] David S. Broder. "Agreement Boosts Political Stock of President Sharply." *The Washington Post,* Sep 19, 1978.
[78] Broder. "Agreement Boosts."
[79] Jennings Parrott. "Portrait '78: The Graying of a President." *Los Angeles Times,* July 13, 1978.
[80] Terence Smith. "Reporter's Notebook: Suddenly, a New Look for Carter." *New York Times,* May 7, 1979.
[81] Smith. "Reporter's Notebook."

from right to left, reporters speculated wildly on the rationale why. Press Secretary Powell and Rafshoon insisted that it was not a part of their image-making schemes, yet the Washington Post saw the change in hairstyle as a political statement, drawing comparisons with popular leaders like Abraham Lincoln.[82] News organizations connected the amorphous ideology of masculine gender with the more tangible realm of political success.

Final Girls – "Abject terror personified"[83]

With this newfound masculinity created in the White House, it should not be a surprise that horror evolved in a similar way. Yet, as suggested, the evolution came with filmmakers' needs for political reflection. With the arrival of John Carpenter's *Halloween* in 1978 came the established trope of the Final Girl. To literary theorist Carol Clover, the Final Girl was, in some way, self-explanatory – through slasher films in the late 1970s and 1980s, the last survivor, the character who's left to escape or defeat the monstrous villain, was usually a woman. But, in Clover's theory, a blurring of binary gender took place; "The Final Girl is boyish, in a word. Just as the killer is not fully masculine, she is not fully feminine – not, in any case, feminine in the ways of her friends."[84] Echoing Kristeva, the Final Girl rejected binaries, aiming to survive by escaping not only the clutches of the monster, but also the clutches of feminine gender roles horror film has placed her in.

[82] "Hair" *The Washington Post*, May 1, 1979.
[83] Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*, 35.
[84] Ibid, 40.

Jamie Lee Curtis was a breakout star in John Carpenter's *Halloween*, playing the bookish Laurie Strode.[85] Unlike Carrie White, Laurie is social and global, she's intelligent, responsible, and, ultimately, the heroine of the story. Devoid of the supernatural, Carpenter evoked the fears of the everyday, with reporters saying, "With its tree-shaded small-town American setting, 'Halloween' does function metaphorically for the insecure times in which we live."[86] For this reporter, Hollywood directly responded to Washington. The threat to this normality, or rather, that societal insecurity was represented by masked killer Michael Myers. After escaping the sanitarium for which he was kept in for the murder of his sister, Myers haunted unsuspecting teenagers on Halloween night in Haddonfield. As her friends got picked off one by one, Laurie's ingenuity arrived by stabbing Myers in the eye with an unwound coat hanger and unmasking the killer, leaving enough time for the police to take a shot at the stalker before his timely escape.

To mark this change from Carrie White to Laurie Strode, it's crucial to look at their agency in the films. Carrie's powers were thrust upon her, and according to King and De Palma, were a manifestation of the power of femininity. With Laurie, her survival was because of her own agency, and while it would be irresponsible to attribute that as a masculine trait, Clover's Final Girl theory posited that both femininity and masculinity were crucial in overcoming Myers' assault. Laurie eschewed femininity, even getting nervous on the prospect of going to her Homecoming Dance with a boy; "I'm so embarrassed. I couldn't face him …"[87] It ran contrary to her bravery in facing off with a

[85] *Halloween,* directed by John Carpenter (Compass International, 1978).
[86] Kevin Thomas, "Movie Review: Slaughter, Fear in Grisly 'Halloween,'" *Los Angeles Times,* Oct 27, 1978.
[87] *Halloween.*

knife-wielding man, and yet, she was still a woman. So, if Carrie was a story of repressed femininity becoming unleashed, Laurie's was a story of the dynamism of womanhood, being able to readily reject aspects of femininity for aspects of masculinity. For Clover, "[horror] is a universe, in other words, of slippage and fungibility, in which maleness and femaleness are always tentative and hence only apparent."[88] This would also inherently mean that the killer, Michael Myers, also existed as a person whose gender lies in flux. His own backstory was one of stifled sex, murdering his sister while she had sex with her boyfriend.[89] Then, in a psychoanalytic lens proposed by Clover, to be stabbed in the eye with a coat hanger was, in some sense, phallic retribution – Laurie penetrated Michael.

But this sort of penetration was largely ideological. Reporters and the public would ask, "'What can be so good about a film involving a young man [sic] attacking young women?'"[90] In a sense, it was the formula that modern horror followed, as quoted by *Halloween* producer Irwin Yablans, "Put some nubile girls together and terrorize them. There's a common denominator there."[91] And it was this sentiment that Clover would argue against – horror was more than the terrorization of women, rather women's hybrid gender expression in horror films allowed audiences, consisting primarily of young men, to identify with the Final Girl.[92] But what I want to express through this project is a reconsideration of Clover's argument. Critic Roger Ebert cited the horror film, *I Spit on Your Grave*, as a "vile bag of garbage," and that it was, "an expression of the most diseased and perverted darker human natures."[93] The film featured the rape and

[88] Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws,* 14.
[89] *Halloween.*
[90] Gene Siskel, "Tempo Movies: 'Halloween': Some tricks, a lot of treats," *Chicago Tribune*, Nov 22, 1978
[91] David Rosenthal, "Rated H For Horrors," *New York Magazine*, Feb 18, 1980
[92] Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws,* 5.
[93] Ebert, https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/i-spit-on-your-grave-1980

torture of Jennifer Hills, who went on to murder her assailants after they mistakenly believe that she was dead.[94] Clover would argue that her survival was the focus of the film, that Jennifer's retribution and Final Girl status propelled the narrative. But what is more crucial to note is how women and feminine bodies have been treated on the horror screen.

Horror films are inherently tied to the body. Film theorist Linda Williams placed horror in a category of Body Genres, along with pornography and melodrama.[95] In these types of films, the viewers' bodies were sites of emotional reaction: Melodramas tap into our melancholic, sympathetic core. Pornography sparks sexual arousal. For horror, terror, fear, and anxiety rule the screen. Spectators scream as characters scream - spectators shudder as characters shudder. Fear is easily expressed in the human body. Specifically for women in horror, their bodies were prominent in the 1970s and 1980s, even before the start of the Final Girl trope in *Halloween*.

Carrie White's own body horror stemmed from womanhood and the supernatural strength of femininity, not masculinity. In his direction, De Palma's handling of the camera was intimate, reported that "[he]was always a sexual wit; now he's a voluptuary wit, with the camera coming very close to Sissy Spacek's body, and with closeups of her wraithlike, hair-veiled face. *We know her skin better than we know our own*."[96] It's this identification with screened bodies that makes the horror more salient. While authors and auteurs alike have touted the importance of feminism, their films have routinely subjugated women to torture, terror, and rape. Carpenter's own thoughts on film were

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[94] *I Spit on Your Grave*, directed by Meir Zarchi (Jerry Gross Organization, 1978).
[95] Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (Summer, 1991): https://doi.org/10.2307/1212758
[96] Pauline Kael, "The Current Cinema: The Curse," *The New Yorker*, Nov 22, 1976 (emphasis added).

relevant; “I think you should be able to go to a movie and see something you can’t see anyplace else and get moved by it. I think what movies do is get the audience to project their fantasies onto the screen.”[97] Film is participatory on multiple levels – spectator to filmmaker, filmmaker to spectator. Rafshoon’s own desire to masculinize Carter meant taking control of the White House image, therefore minimizing femininity. Clover’s argument was still salient in that masculine women, the Final Girl, operated in the margins, touting the fine binary of gender that persisted during the 1970s. But, like a critical examination of Rafshoon’s treatment of Midge Constanza, the mechanics, the methodology of achieving that image or ideology are crucial to understand. Women’s bodies should not simply be tools for ideology – and yet, in the 1970s and 1980s, they both reflected and broke gender norms.

“A White House in Disarray”[98] - The Threshold of Image-Making

This revitalized honeymoon period of positive press would be short-lived. Carter’s communications staff, the energizing center of the president’s newfound success, while humble in their own contributions, would find themselves once again at the center of controversy after the resignation of speechwriter Jim Fallows. Disillusioned with White House internal politics, Fallows took to the press to air his grief, with headlines in the *Washington Post* and the *Boston Globe* stating, “Carter Staff Seen as Dull, Drained, Lacking in Drive,”[99] and, “Ex-aide says few are loyal to Carter,” claiming that the ‘Georgia Mafia’ of Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan, Press Secretary Jody Powell, and

[97] Rosenthal, “Rated H For Horrors”
[98] Joseph Kraft. “A White House in Disarray.” *The Sun,* Aug 7, 1979.
[99] Associated Press. “Carter staff seen as dull drained, lacking in drive.” *The Washington Post,* May 20, 1979.

Jerry Rafshoon were too lax.[100] In a shift of perspective, the image-makers had their own images questioned by the press. Critics jabbed that their knowledge of politics came from *Rolling Stone* and *Playboy*.[101] After being so highly regarded by the press itself, it almost seemed inevitable that Jordan, Powell, and Rafshoon would re-emerge into the national spotlight. But Carter was not free from the scathing public eye. The energy crisis in the country loomed over the president and his crumbling administration. When faced with making a decisive choice in how to address the nation, the inner turmoil brought the previously strong team to a halt. On July 5th, 1979, Carter was set to air a speech on television, but, as a result of policy hesitation and doubt, abruptly canceled his airtime. *The New York Times,* seeing the lack of action, took control of the presidential image and outwardly criticized the president, saying, "President Cancels Address on Energy; No Reason Offered."[102] Camp David, a place where Carter once appeared as a tough and masculine international negotiator, became a hideaway from the larger Washington press. In the *Boston Globe*, Carter reportedly stated, "[I have] lost control of the government and did not have real leadership among the people."[103] The rhetoric was once again shifting towards an incapable, passive style of leadership.

The result of the administration's inaction was not as initially damaging. Carter's infamous "Crisis of Confidence," speech was co-written by himself and lead scriptwriter Rick Hertzberg and was meant to address the energy crisis looming over the country. The

[100] United Press International. "Ex-aide Says Few are Loyal to Carter." *The Boston Globe,* May 21, 1979.
[101] Michael Novak. "Has the President Correctly Diagnosed Our National Malaise?" *Los Angeles Times,* Jul 22, 1979.
[102] Hedrick Smith. "President Cancels Address on Energy; No Reason Offered." *New York Times,* Jul 5, 1979.
[103] Saul Friedman. "The Meeting." *Boston Globe,* Jul 10, 1979.

speech was enough to raise Carter's approval rate 12 points, up to 37%.[104] However, this rise was misleading; 77% of the people who were polled also agreed that the country was afflicted by ideological crises.[105] Despite the positive data of the polling increase, the dissatisfaction of the country and lack of confidence the public had in their leadership manifested in headlines in the Los Angeles Times and the Boston Globe. "71% Lack Confidence in Carter, Harris Poll Finds,"[106] and, "Carter cites crisis of American spirit, maps energy plan to revive confidence," were among the headlines in newspapers for weeks beyond July.[107] Akin to Rafshoon's hiring, stating that there was a lack of faith in the country was almost an admission of guilt. Carter and Hertzberg intended to frame this distrust as stemming from Watergate and past political blunders, but the connection was not as salient. Having 77% of people agree that there was a crisis of confidence in the American government when Carter himself was its figurehead, reflected the lack of foresight on behalf of the team. Like Fallows had stated before his resignation, the Georgia Mafia had become aloof yes-men. It's poetic that the energy crisis was the impetus for the "Crisis of Confidence" speech - physically and symbolically, there was no energy left to support Carter, and no energy left to uphold his own image.

In instances of negative press, the White House Communications Office were the ones to clean off the dirt flung at the president, however, amidst the Fallows departure and negative coverage, the internal team self-destructed. Power once again shifted from the White House to the press. Immediately after Carter's blunder of a speech, print

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[104] Adam Clymer. "Speech Lifts Carter Rating to 37%; Public Agrees of Confidence Crisis." *New York Times,* July 18, 1979.
[105] Clymer. "Speech Lifts."
[106] United Press International. "71% lack Confidence in Carter, Harris Poll Finds." *Los Angeles Times,* Jul 27, 1979.
[107] Thomas Oliphant. "Carter cites crisis of American spirit, maps energy plan to revive confidence." *Boston Globe,* July 16, 1979.

became critical of the communications team. In the *New York Times,* Press Secretary Jody Powell was seen as ineffective, Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan was too lenient on mistakes, and Jerry Rafshoon, the supposed mastermind of Carter's rehabilitated image, was absent.[108] Now under the negative magnifying lens of the press, the Carter administration itself had become linked to all the woes the media ascribed to the president. No longer seen as changing the president's image, the White House was just as passive as Carter. Amidst the media backlash, *The Sun* reported to the public, "Carter Cabinet, staff offer resignations."[109] With the Crisis of Confidence no longer just being a speech, print news was bent on reporting that even those surrounding the president had lost faith in him. "Armageddon happened today," a White House staffer was quoted as saying in the *New York Times*.[110] More crucially, Jerry Rafshoon, the one who was once critical in shaping public perception of the president, planned on resigning, "as soon as possible."[111] The image-makers were no longer capable of influencing the public's perception of the President and, as a result, began to implode.

It would be unwise to say nothing of First Lady Rosalynn Carter's impact on her husband's image - she was fiercely dedicated to her position. However, this tenacity would overshadow the president, and as a latch ditch effort, Rafshoon aimed to reduce her time in the spotlight. The *Los Angeles Times* relayed, "[...] she has too much control over her husband's Administration."[112] Similar to the dealings with Midge Costanza at the beginning of his tenure, Rafshoon would once again attempt to impose a strict visual

[108] Terence Smith. "White House Staff Also Scores Low in the Polls." *New York Times,* July 15, 1979.
[109] Lynne Olson. "Carter Cabinet, staff offer resignations." *The Sun,* July 18, 1979.
[110] Hedrick Smith. "Reshaping of Carter's Presidency: 16 Days of Shifts and Reappraisal."*New York Times,* July 22, 1979.
[111] Martin Tolchin. "Lipshutz to Resign as Carter Counsel in a Staff Shake-Up." *New York Times,* Aug 11, 1979.
[112] Eleanor Randolph. "Mrs. Carter Expected to Play Down Her Role."*Los Angeles Times,* July 30, 1979.

of masculinity in the Carter presidency. It wasn't enough that Rosalynn Carter was a powerful woman, but her masculine femininity overshadowed attempts of success with the president. A man needed to be masculine to be a proper leader, but when women took charge, took action, when women acted beyond their femininity, men who failed to take charge became emasculated in binary comparison.

As the trend went, when negative leadership was attributed to President Carter, news once again began to target Carter's physical body. One of the more damning stories of Carter's credibility and toughness was one that had re-emerged from an Easter fishing trip in the president's hometown of Plains, Georgia. While in the boat, a rabbit, supposedly fleeing in panic from another animal, swam in the pond with the intention of climbing in the fishing boat.[113] The startled president splashed water at it to fend it off. Headlines exploded, "A Tale of Carter and the 'Killer Rabbit,'"[114] and, "Attack of the 'Killer Rabbit': Carter Has Hare-Raising Experience on Plains Trip."[115] Nearly a month later, following this press storm, Carter passed out during a marathon, eliciting press coverage like, "Carter Collapse in Road Race: Symbol of Much, Much More."[116] If the presence of a competent communications team resulted in a strong, masculine presidential image, their departure signaled a grand decline of perception. If being 'attacked' by a rabbit in a pond and fainting during a marathon become linked to failing political decline, it showed that the press saw Carter as a joke - there was no longer anything presidential or tough about his leadership. Articles pointed to his age and

[113] Associated Press. "A Tale of Carter and the 'Killer Rabbit.'" *New York Times,* Aug 30, 1979.
[114] Associated Press. "A Tale of Carter."
[115] Eleanor Randolph. "Attack of the 'Killer Rabbit:' Carter Has Hare - Raising Experience on Plains Trip." *Los Angeles Times,* Aug 30, 1979.
[116] Colman McCarthy. "Carter Collapse in Road Race: Symbol of Much, Much More." *Los Angeles Times,* Sep 20, 1979.

appearance; his penchant for running and exercise was now to his detriment, resulting in a pallid and gaunt look that shocked unsuspecting staffers.[117] The staffing purge, the repeated national dilemmas, and the constant negative press had a clear effect on Carter's physicality; the fatigue and depreciation of the body, for the press, was a symbol on which they could attach gendered rhetoric to paint the president as a weak, frail, unmasculine leader. He would not recover in popularity until his defeat in November 1980.

"This Puts Me in Command"[118] – *Alien* and Final Girls in Leadership

> [Pitching a fight] "Ripley and Rush Limbaugh."
> "I'd make sure he'd get killed. Or terrified."[119]

Alien punctuated the end of the Carter Administration in 1979. While the White House Office of Communication could no longer change Carter's faltering image, Hollywood produced images of powerful leaders, ones that were tough and physically strong. But Ridley Scott differed in his treatment of horror. Like many horror films before it, *Alien* tackled themes of gender and gender violence, exploring the harrowing adventure of crewmates aboard the *Nostromo* spacecraft. What aimed to be a simple delivery devolved into a battle for survival after a fraudulent distress signal granted access for the Alien aboard. Through conception, gestation, birth, and evolving before the crew's very eyes, the Alien was a designed killer, ruthless and mechanical. However, the Alien found its match in Ellen Ripley. Played by Sigourney Weaver, Ripley was the archetypal Final Girl – masculine while still retaining her womanhood, and of course, the

[117] Martin Schram. "Carter Emerging as Stronger leader." *The Washington Post,* Dec 2, 1979.
[118] *Alien.*
[119] Stephen Rebello, "Sigourney Weaver," *Movieline.*

last remaining survivor on the *Nostromo*. To the bitter end, both forces fought, revealing not just the formidability of women, but also showcasing a delineation of identity – Ripley and the Alien were nearly one in the same. Through Carter's failed masculinization at the end of his term, we saw a focus on the body emerge as a means to portray gender identity. What did *Alien* reveal about the gendered politics of the early 1980s?

Swiss Artist H.R. Giger was the mastermind behind the design of *Alien*, and quite literally set the stage for the horror film to center itself around gender, sex, and the body. Veronica Cartwright, the actress who played crewmate Lambert said of the set, "[they] were so erotic and, I mean, these big vaginas and penises and I mean it's like you know the whole thing is like, you're going inside of, some sort of womb or whatever."[120] As the creator of the famed Alien and facehugger, Giger would inform the film's focus on the body.

While reviews were initially mixed, what critics could unanimously agree on was the performance of Sigourney Weaver as Ripley, praising the horror film as inherently feminist in nature. Ripley was the woman who took charge following the deaths of her crewmates and, against all odds, defeated the Alien. Her casting was in some regards controversial. *Alien* was originally written for an all-male cast.[121] But director Ridley Scott asserted its novelty, like most horror directors, gladly upsetting gender conventions. Ripley was Weaver's breakout role, and, in a similar vein to Jimmy Carter's masculinization after the hiring of Jerry Rafshoon, reviews and media coverage focused on Weaver's physicality. Reporters blared, "Sigourney Weaver - Six Feet Tall And Short

[120] De Lauzirika, *The Beast Within.*
[121] Knoedelseder Jr., "The Hero is a Woman"

on Angst," [122] "Weaver is wholesomely handsome," [123] and, "Sigourney Weaver is impressive as the Nostromo's executive officer, the second in command, a young woman who manages to act tough, efficient, and sexy all at the same time."[124] The commentary focused on her non-feminine traits, yet still held onto the notion of Weaver and Ripley, for that matter, as masculine women. But Weaver embraced her masculinity, seemingly using as a means to gauge her working relationships;

> If I walk into a room and people say, [*makes throat-clearing noises*] 'Too tall for our leading man,' I know right away that they are conservative, conventional people and I would not be happy working with them.[125]

Weaver channeled this mindset through Ripley, immediately stating after Captain Dallas's death at the claws of the Alien, "This puts me in command."[126] To illustrate this in the script, crewmate Parker, especially sarcastic and, at first reluctant to listen to Ripley, was described as, "[dropping] his bullshit,"[127] a clear sign of subservience.

Where Scott's film also deviated was in his treatment and direction of the two outwardly feminine characters; Ripley and crewmate Lambert. Ripley acted as the calculating leader, tough enough to outsmart the monster aboard the *Nostromo,* but what of Lambert? Following the chest burster scene, Lambert was easily the most hysterical of the remaining crew. She screamed and cried and was terrified just before her death, presented as someone who is weak-willed in the face of danger. Even actress Veronica

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[122] Samuel Allis, "Sigourney Weaver - Six Feet Tall and Short on Angst," The Washington Post, Jul 29, 1979
[123] Elaine Markoutsas, "Independence isn't an alien concept to Sigourney Weaver," Chicago Tribune, Jun 8, 1979
[124] Vincent Canby, "Screen: 'Alien' Brings Chills From the Far Galaxy: A Gothic Set in Space," *The New York Times,* May 25, 1979, https://www.nytimes.com/1979/05/25/archives/screen-alien-brings-chills-from-the-far-galaxya-gothic-set-in-space.html
[125] "Sigourney Weaver," *Premiere,* 1993
[126] *Alien.*
[127] Ibid.

Cartwright disliked this aspect of her character, but ultimately, according to Ridley Scott, "she was supposed to be the audience's identification character, behaving the way that the audience was hopefully feeling."[128] However, despite this designation, what Lambert's death signified was a rejection of binary identity. Like Quint in *Jaws*, whose pure masculinity cost him his life, Lambert differed from Ripley in that her hysteria was never quelled. To note, the choice to include Lambert as this hysteric identifier played on sexist tropes – a male crewmate could've easily been as weak, but the contrast with a traditionally masculine woman with a seemingly traditional feminine one served to make Ripley's character stronger. However, that was not to say that Scott does not deal with emasculation.

At its core, *Alien* was about rape. In investigating the abandoned vaginal alien spaceship, crewmate Kane disrupted the eggs containing the aliens and was subsequently impregnated by a face hugger. Likely the most famous scene in the film, the chestburster shocked audiences in primary screenings, sending viewers running to puke in the lobby or faint on the spot.[129] Male rape and pregnancy played on male fear, with screenwriters Ron Shussett and Dan O'Bannon wanting to avoid the cliché of rape-revenge films. Contrasted to *I Spit on Your Grave*, a woman could be the survivor without first being subjected to sexual assault. And yet, according to assistant producer Ivor Powell, this was not enough to alleviate the anxieties of female viewers, saying, "I think they found it deeply, Freudian-ly disturbing."[130] Whether that related to the act of pregnancy or the gory scene remained unclear, but the anxiety persisted – the destruction of the body,

[128] David A. McIntee, *Beautiful Monsters: The Unofficial and Unauthorized Guide to the Alien and Predator Movies* (Telos Publishing, 2005), 30.
[129] De Lauzirika, *The Beast Within.*
[130] Ibid.

through violence in its many forms, be it death or birth, transcended gender ideology, almost a way to more effectively break binary logic.

So, what of the Alien then? If it has been posited that diametric opposites are found in horror, where did the Alien fit within the gendered conversations in this horror film? With no dialogue, the Alien was portrayed by a Yoruba Nigerian man, Bolaji Badejo, going to school in London.[131] At nearly 7 feet tall, he was spotted in a bar and fit the inspiration for Scott's Alien – a troubling connection as producers, in this instance, would equate Blackness with insect-like qualities. In terms of gender, the alien is left ambiguous, with reporters saying, "The Alien is neither male nor female, overtly, but what it does is viciously masculine. Its first incarnation seizes and impregnates in a combination of hands-over-the-face violence and oral sex."[132] As one of two Black men featured in the *Alien* cast, not only was Badejo's skin tone obscured by the Alien costume, but also apparently his gender was obscured too. What can be problematic then is the coding of the hyper-sexual actions of the Alien as masculine - despite the Alien adopting an obscure gender identity, and additionally obscuring Badejo's Blackness, that Blackness becomes associated with sexually violent masculinity. Ripley, adopting masculine traits, now faces off against not simply a masculine Alien, but a Black masculine Alien, which, in an intersectional lens, raised more questions than answers – how did Blackness affect a non-binary view of gender?[133]

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[131] "Bolaji Badejo: The Nigerian giant who played 'Alien,'" CNN World, last modified Oct. 31, 2016, https://www.cnn.com/2016/03/07/africa/bolaji-badejo-alien

[132] Greg Bear, 'Alien': Fear from women within…" *Los Angeles Times*, Jul 29, 1979

[133] Race is unfortunately not examined nearly as much as I would have hoped in this project. Crenshaw's ideas about intersectionality I find very closely relate to the psychoanalytic structure that Kristeva's abject provide, in this instance, not only looking at breaking the boundaries between gender, but seeing what it means for boundaries of race to be broken and examined. See Robin R. Means Coleman, *Horror Noire: Blacks in American Horror Films from the 1890s to Present* (New York City: Routledge, 2011) for discussion on the differences in Black Horror versus Blacks in Horror.

In all scenarios, Kristeva's abject is a useful tool for analysis. Through the entry point of fear and anxiety, as Ripley battled the Alien aboard the *Nostromo,* losing colleagues she desired to protect along the way, her fear stemmed from a connection with the monstrosity - she identified with it. Both were cunning and decisive. Both were ferocious. But the Alien's hyper-sexuality was something that, in her adoption of masculine traits, Ripley only did in private after having seemingly escaped the grasp of the Alien, stripping down to her undergarments in the escape shuttle. Both characters were shining examples of fluidity in gender. Laurie Strode and Ellen Ripley, all the while maintaining their femininity, embraced masculinity to overcome their perpetrators, but it wasn't enough to say that, as a result of this embrace, masculinity was praised over femininity. And, in conversation with Kristeva's abject, what became more fruitful was how these women identified with the antagonist. As much as Laurie and Ripley existed as masculine/ feminine figures, they also recognized Michael Myers and the Alien exhibited the same qualities, as well. This was the horror of their situation, an example of perpetual gender in flux - in part, they *were* the monster.

Carter, the White House Communications Office, and even the public in the late 1970s failed to see the power of femininity. Their abjection of the feminine, determining that it is not what they are and want to be as political leaders, only further led to their decline in popularity with the public despite previous successful efforts of masculinization. Scott's *Alien* was made in mind of the audience:

> That sounds commercial but, in reality, you have to be. Even my most personal projects are broad in appeal. I suppose it's because I come from advertising, where you're interested in pure communication.[134]

[134] "Ridley Scott's Tightrope," *Variety*, July 9, 1980

What ended up being communicated was the strength of the non-binary leader. Ripley's rejection of binary terms of gender allowed for her survival, in contrast with the single-term Carter. What stemmed from *Alien* was a conversation regarding not only the place of gender in political leadership but also about how binary formations, not simply just in gender but also in political belief, limited success and flexibility.

The Iran Hostage Crisis began on November 4th, 1979, seemingly at the lowest point of Carter's political reputation. This issue became the insurmountable dilemma for the president. Despite action, and without Rafshoon to create the president's image, news organizations still displayed doubt of Carter's abilities to achieve any realm of success. Success for the Carter administration, in this case, was the release of the hostages, which would not take place until January 19, 1981, the end of his tenure. In the interim, the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* headlined, "Iran Hostage Crisis Settling Into a Frustrating Pattern," and "Carter Shifts Stand: Talk of Military Action Had Been Discouraged but Now is Promoted." Press Secretary Jody Powell assured that the Carter administration cared about the well-being of each and every hostage but could only give progress updates by saying that diplomacy between the US and Iran was still ongoing. Without the optics of freed hostages, the public would only see the drama and turmoil continue within the White House as Carter fronted leadership qualities; he was all bark and no bite. The promises he made at the beginning of his Presidency were empty. Action was equated with masculinity, and, amidst a constant barrage of social and political issues, Carter and his communications team could not sustainably produce results. Despite the thorough efforts of Rafshoon and the Communications Office, their

masculinizing image-making was shown to be a temporary fix to a larger issue; masculine image was but one sign of success for a leader during this period of time. Action and results, which Carter could not consistently achieve, were another. Print and TV media, seeing through the gendered facade placed upon the president, were able to enact their own gendering of the president. While his staff supported and confirmed his masculinity, the media's power overwhelmed public perception.

In contrast to the horror films during Carter's first years as president, horror in the latter half from 1978 to 1981 confronted his gendered leadership style. Women were at the forefront of 1980s horror. Starting with De Palma's *Carrie* in 1976, to the rape-revenge genre with *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978), to the genesis of the slasher genre and the first ever 'final girl' in John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978), or channeling Ellen Ripley in *Alien* (1979), women, despite being tortured, maimed, and dehumanized by their attackers, prevail in the end. Their powerful masculine-femininity lay in stark contrast to Carter's faulty performance of masculinity.

Chapter 2 - Reagan's First Term

Putting on the Sheriff's Badge

At the end of the 1953 western *Law and Order,* Sheriff Frame Johnson, played by Ronald Reagan, removed his badge from his blood-stained shirt, saying, "I'm taking it off for good this time."[135] Having already rebuked the badge once before, Reagan's Frame toyed with the flexibility of power; he would claim policing power when he needed it and cast it off when he didn't. At any point, Frame Johnson was neither a sheriff nor a civilian. Rather, he had always existed as both in varying degrees, with the only separator being the symbolic power of the badge. After this role, Reagan would once again don the badge of authority as the Governor of California, and then, in 1979, once more as a candidate for the President of the United States. The 1980 Election ended with a landslide victory for the Republican challenger. It is important to understand how expressions of masculinity played a role in turning the public away from Carter and towards Reagan, especially in terms of how American media, including film and news, gendered the candidates. With Reagan came Frame Johnson, a caricature of law and order, someone who would defend small-town America, a masculine man. This masculine cowboy image was what he brought to the election, this time with the badge on tight. In the 1980s, masculinity *was* political power.

So where did the power of the cowboy politician come from? With the introduction of Reagan as a player in this historical project, did the cowboy survive in a horror film? In a continuation from Carter's attempts at masculinization, the masculine body was punished, beaten, and bloodied by an ephemeral masculine-woman in horror.

[135] *Law and Order*, directed by Nathan Juran (Universal, 1953).

Laurie Strode evaded the grasp of Michael Myers. Ellen Ripley defeated the monstrous Alien. The slasher genre continued to evolve during this period of political evolution; masculine women, women who would flex the binary structure of gender, were in charge. But as the continued focus on the relationship between the physical body and gender continued, the emerging genre of body horror was able to provide holistic, expository commentary on the weakness of masculinity. While Carol Clover carefully examined the mutual gendered relationship between killer and victim and Jack Halberstam's *Female Masculinity* further highlighted the flexibility and overlap between masculinity and femininity, there was a hesitation between these authors to look deeply in how a fluid gender was represented and examined through the physical body.[136] Body horror tied closely with how gender is analyzed in the body. Film theorists Linda Williams and David Huckvale filled this intellectual gap by further defining and analyzing the importance of the bodily figure in horror studies.[137] To be clear, horror is a body genre - the physical body is mutilated, abused, and bloodied. And, as we saw, Carter's own image and physicality were placed into question of his performative masculinity.

In analyzing *Alien* (1979) and *Halloween* (1978) from a gendered perspective, Reagan, like Carter, should be seen not only in characteristics from Ripley and Laurie, but also within the Alien and Michael Myers: cunning, decisive, and opportunistic. And like Carter, Reagan's proclivity to binary masculinity encouraged his communications team to hyper-masculinize the presidential candidate. So, despite the wide spectrum gender falls in, Reagan's posturing still skewed heavily into masculinity. Femininity was

[136] Clover, *Men, Women, and Chainsaws.* Halberstam, *Female Masculinity.*
[137] Williams, "Film Bodies." David Huckvale, *Terrors of the Flesh: The Philosophy of Body Horror in Film* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2020).

not a characteristic necessarily embraced by the candidate. He expressed masculine qualities while exhibiting few of the feminine qualities Ripley and Laurie maintained. Reagan's candidacy and symbolic reapplication of the sheriff's badge during his run in the 1980 election signaled the fulfillment of Carter's and his administration's attempts at masculinizing the presidency, the only difference being Reagan's successful co-option of masculine power as a result of connecting physicality with gender. Horror provided deeper insight into the fallibility of masculine leadership in the 1980s, disrupting gendered boundaries to reveal Reagan's own performative masculinity – the badge was nothing without the body.

"The time is now for strong leadership"[138] – Masculine Politics Personified

From the moment Reagan announced his bid for the 1980 election, his Hollywood cowboy image was, in a sense, something that did not need management. However, advertisements for Reagan's Election campaign, the most damning of which were developed by the Democrats for Reagan, painted a picture for the public. One ad showed Senator Edward Kennedy as he stood in a busy street, shouting loudly to the crowd, "No more American hostages. No more high interest rates. No more high inflation, and no more Jimmy Carter."[139] Another ad showed disparate groups of Iranian men with guns, with a narrator claiming that they "prefer a weak and manageable U.S. president."[140] The images these ads created was one of chaos, one of danger that loomed not just around the world, but in the United States itself. Jimmy Carter was the one who'd let this happen. In

[138] "Kennedy/No More," Democrats for Reagan: An Affiliate of the Reagan-Bush Committee, 1980 www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1980/kennedyno-more.
[139] Ibid
[140] "Safire," Reagan Bush Committee, 1980, www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1980/safire

a horror film sense, he was painted like Mayor Vaughn from *Jaws,* incapable and acting against the country's best interest.

The *New York Times,* incensed by the new candidate, had already commented on Reagan's physical capabilities as a leader. They reported that he was running more and eating fewer jellybeans to keep the weight off, and he wanted to show that his age was not a potential issue in his leadership capabilities.[141] Carter's Communication Office had to change the assumptions of national print news organizations first before actively masculinizing his speech and manners, meaning that their work involved change. Reagan's communications team and affiliated campaign groups only needed to enhance his image during the election cycle. To frame his character, speeches were set in front of iconic American sites like the Statue of Liberty or the peaks of the Rocky Mountains.[142] During a Labor Day speech at Liberty State Park, with the Statue of Liberty and the New York City skyline as his backdrops, Reagan, off the cuff, jabbed at Carter's handling of the economy, saying, "A recession is when your neighbor loses his job. A depression is when you lose yours. And recovery is when Jimmy Carter loses his."[143] The challenger's campaign staff knew that the governor's skills lay in his ability to sell himself; all that was needed on their end was a platform to speak and policy to propose.[144] Across the campaign cycle, headlines in the *New York Times* were active and forceful in describing

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[141] Adam Clymer. "Reagan: The 1980 Model." *New York Times,* Jul 29, 1979.
[142] Howell Raines. "He Has a Way With Words." *New York Times,* Nov 6, 1980.
[143] Bob Schieffer and Gary Paul Gates, *The Acting President,* Bob Schieffer and Gary Paul Gates (New York: Plume, 1990), 90.
[144] Schieffer and Gates, *The Acting President,* 90.
There is some hesitation in fully using this source. Taken directly from John Maltese's *Spin Control,* this work from Scieffer and Gates contains no instances of citations of sources they've used or interviews they've conducted. It is, at this point in time, one of the secondary works that most directly addresses the work of Reagan's 1980 campaign staff.

Reagan's successes; "Reagan is Promising a Crusade to Make Nation 'Great Again,'"[145] and, "Newcomers to South and West Reinforcing Reagan's Strength."[146] The image created by these words encapsulated a masculine air to Reagan's political style. It wasn't just a plan to make the nation better, it was a 'crusade,' and newcomers didn't just reinforce his policies or ideas, but instead made him 'stronger.' In comparison to Carter, Reagan embodied masculinity.

The debate stage was one where the public could see and hear the differences in style between Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan. The Reagan campaign team felt that debate could cost Reagan the small lead he had, but at the behest of aide Jim Baker, convincing Reagan to engage in a televised, head-to-head debate with Carter was crucial.[147] While there were concerns about any slip up closing the voting gap between him and the incumbent, Reagan did not let that thought dominate the press, instead saying in an interview, "[...] I've always said that I'm willing to debate. Mr. Carter's the one who's ducked every debate, and that goes through his whole political career. He's reneged on every debate, including his gubernatorial race. And in this campaign also."[148]

During the debate, Reagan was not only able to shine on television once more before the election, but against Carter, he was able to display a sense of his masculine political style. In a rhetorical analysis of the debate, Reagan verbally confronted with Carter a total of 16 times in comparison to Carter's 21. Here, he was depicted as the

[145] Hedrick Smith. "Reagan is Promising a Crusade to Make Nation 'Great Again.'" *New York Times,* July 15, 1980.
[146] Howell Raines. "Newcomers to South and West Reinforcing Reagan's Strength." *New York Times,* May 3, 1980.
[147] Raines. "Newcomers to South and West"
[148] Edward Walsh, Lou Cannon. "Reagan, Carter Plan Debate." *The Washington Post,* Oct 18, 1980.

aggressor.[149] According to this data, Reagan was able to show to a televised audience that Carter's claims were questionable. He didn't necessarily have to be correct, he just needed to create the image that Carter was not being accurate in providing information. The Hollywood actor knew how to create a soundbite; he knew what the press would latch onto. "There you go again,"[150] he would say, referencing Carter's insistence that the governor was against Medicare. To the sound of audience laughter, Reagan smirked at his deflection. It was a phrase that would be reprinted immediately in reaction to the debate and reused in election cycles to come. And thanks to scriptwriter David Gergen, Reagan would conclude, "Are you better off than you were four years ago?"[151] Immediate reactions were in favor of Reagan, once again equating his aggressive and defensive style with a more masculine one. Reagan himself, although not an unbiased source, was able to relay to the press that he was not afraid of debating Carter, after all, "[...] [he'd] been on the same stage as John Wayne."[152] Evoking his Hollywood-western past, and, especially calling upon the image of the most famous masculine American actor at the time, Reagan sought to present himself as recreating that persona - the Hollywood cowboy had come to Washington.

On November 5th, the day after the 1980 election, front pages of papers like the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette were adorned with the smiling faces of Ronald and Nancy

[149] Robert K. Tiemens, Susan A. Hellweg, Philip Kipper, Steven L. Philips, "An Integrative Verbal and Visual Analysis of the Carter-Reagan Debate," *Communication Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (1985): 36, https://doi.org/10.1080/01463378509369576
[150] Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter, debate, Oct 28, 1980, transcript, The Commission on Presidential Debates, https://www.debates.org/voter-education/debate-transcripts/october-28-1980-debate-transcript/
[151] Elisabeth Bumiller. "Star Spokesman." *The Washington Post,* Jul 15, 1981.
Sean Wilentz, *The Age of Reagan: A History, 1974-2008* (New York City: Harper Perennial, 2009), 124.
[152] Adam Clymer. "Carter and Reagan Dispute Views on Arms Policy, Economy and Iran in a Broad Debate Before Nation." *New York Times,* Oct 29, 1980.

Reagan, who had defeated Carter in the race: "Reagan in a landslide."[153] Reagan amassed a popular vote of 24.6 million and an electoral vote of 451 in comparison to Carter's 20.8 million popular and 80 electoral votes. 55% of men voted for Reagan as opposed to 38% for Carter, and women were fairly even, 47% for Reagan and 46% for Carter.[154] The overwhelming victory was only accented by the sheer difference in the strength of Reagan's image in comparison with Carter. The public spoke. They chose a tough, active president over one that was timid and out of his element. The staffers and campaign officials, while remaining out of the immediate spotlight, were integral in framing the cowboy's masculine politics. The actor was nothing without his crew. While the masculine, conservative leadership style seemed innate in the president-elect, it is crucial to note that, in coordination with his communications team, Reagan's masculinity was performative.[155] For the public, the image that they gravitated towards was not necessarily always the one that was the most accurately representative of a politician, but rather, one that attained all the qualities they desired. It was presidentiality personified.

(In)destructible Men – What it Meant to Survive

The 52 Americans taken hostage at the American embassy in Iran in 1979 were released after 444 days.[156] Hours after the news broke, Jimmy Carter would no longer be President of the United States. At the cost of his reelection, Carter, after long struggles, was able to accomplish his end-of-term goal to free the hostages during the Algiers

[153] Associated Press. "Reagan in a landslide: Carter concedes defeat." *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, Nov 5, 1980.
[154] "How Groups Voted in 1980," Roper Center for Public Opinion, https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/how-groups-voted-1980
[155] Lou Cannon. "His Style in Office: Pragmatic And Adept at the Compromise." *The Washington Post*, Apr 17, 1980.
[156] Tribune Wire Services, "Nations hail end of hostage crisis," *Chicago Tribune*, Jan 21, 1981

Accords. While Carter and his administration were the ones integral to the mission's success, the timing with Reagan's inauguration was enough to tie the newly-elected president to the event. Internationally, congratulations from Canada to Germany were given to both Carter and Reagan.[157] Articles touted the 'Reagan Factor,' a signal of tough, unpredictable politics amidst an agreed weakening of the American image and power overseas.[158] As demonstrated with Reagan's presidential campaign, his communications staff did not need to change much about the president's public persona, rather, they were in charge of building the set around Reagan to best highlight his masculine leadership qualities. Jim Baker, now promoted from his role in the Reagan campaign as the White House Chief of Staff, was fully aware of the powerful image that the president could create himself, saying, "We think we have the best communicator president since John Kennedy. We want to husband that resource. We want to use it properly."[159] To Baker and the newly hired communication team of David Gergen (Staff Director), Jim Brady (Press Secretary), and Frank Ursomarso (Communications Director) among many others, the president acted as a utility to them. With Reagan's knack for communication, their role fell to sharpening and clarifying a unified agenda for this presidency. In conjunction with Ursomarso's Office of Communications, the Office of Media Liaison headed under Lou Gerig sought to organize their strategy immediately unlike the beginnings of the Carter administration.[160] Proactively, Ursomarso would prioritize themes and issues for Brady's briefings and Gerig specifically worked with

[157] Tribune Wire Services, "Nations hail..."
[158] Daniel Southerland, "Free at last - hostage release frees Reagan, too" *The Christian Science Monitor* Jan 21, 1981.
[159] Maltese, *Spin Control,* 180.
[160] Ibid, 183.

press representatives in areas where Reagan needed the most support; their goal, unachieved by Carter, was to continuously show the successes and goals of Reagan to targeted areas of the public.[161] It was a flooding of Reagan information that mirrored Orman's active, macho style of leadership. As long as Reagan was seen as active and engaged with the American public at opportune, hand-selected times, his extant masculinity would only be further highlighted.

While the White House Office of Communications team was a directed, well-oiled machine, they were still as rowdy as Carter's Georgia Mafia. In displaying this sense of good-nature and humor, Reagan attended a roast of Press Secretary Jim Brady at Georgetown on March 21st, 1981.[162] At the end of his jabbing of Brady, insisting that media coverage might not be very kind to him, he said as he departed, "Enjoy! We're on our way to Ford['s] Theatre."[163] Nine days later, on March 30th the newly elected Reagan, along with Press Secretary Brady, Police Officer Thomas Delahanty, and Secret Service Agent Tim McCarthy, were shot outside of the Washington Hilton Hotel. It was a scene of panic, a scene of horror - someone shot the president. Amidst the sound of gunfire, Brady and Delahanty lay on the concrete motionless, and McCarthy fell towards the rear of the Presidential Limousine as Agents Jerry Parr and Ray Shaddick pushed the president inside the vehicle and sped away from the hotel.[164] The shooter, John Hinckley Jr. was apprehended and buried underneath a mountain of officers and agents. His plan to assassinate Reagan to get the attention of Hollywood actress Jodie Foster had failed, but,

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[161] Ibid, 185.
[162] Reagan Library, "President Reagan's Remarks at a Roast for James Brady on March 21, 1981," Feb 5, 2018, video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hF7Fr1yANrY
[163] Ibid
[164] Del Quentin Wilber. *Rawhide Down: The Near Assassination of Ronald Reagan.* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2011), 81-86.

for a moment, the imagery of the Reagan Presidency was greatly affected by this graphic, calculated event.[165]

Ursomarso's plan to stay ahead of and control media coverage was instantly challenged and thrown into turmoil after the assassination attempt. Not only had the president been attacked, but a member of his communication's team was seemingly fatally wounded. Outside George Washington University Hospital, Jim Baker and aide Lyn Nofziger were providing communication on 2 fronts, one to reporters at the hospital and the other to those at the White House Situation Room.[166] Both asserted the stable condition of Reagan, with Baker even saying that the president, despite having a bullet in his chest, walked straight into the hospital from the limousine. Even in crisis, the goal was to represent Reagan as a physically tough leader. At the White House press room, both Deputy Speaker Larry Speakes and Staff Director David Gergen were at the mercy of reporters, who barraged the two with questions about Reagan and Brady's conditions at the hospital. With Reagan hospitalized, the country and reporters were asking questions related to power; who was going to be in charge? Secretary of State Al Haig, livid at the stuttering of Gergen and Speakes and against the will of Ursomarso, took to the podium of the press room and firmly stated, "I am in control here."[167] This was the culmination of the Communication Office's day during the assassination: a hasty grab at power, the illusion of control, and a bout of projection as, moments before, Haig eschewed those who panicked under the uncertain circumstances. The press room

[165] John Hinckley Jr. to Jodie Foster, March 30, 1981, University of Missouri-Kansas City, Kansas City, MO, https://web.archive.org/web/20110108054234/http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/hinckley/jfostercommun.HTM
[166] Wilber, *Rawhide Down*, 150.
[167] Schieffer and Gates, *The Acting President*, 119.

laughed – Haig's outburst was an improper showing of masculine leadership.[168] The event of an assassination was bound to bring stress upon a newly formed communications team, but their lack of control lent more power to news organizations to take charge of the assassination story. Later that night, Vice President Bush would appear on television to assure the country that the President was stable and that Reagan was still in control.[169]

In horror, survival took on different meanings. In the case of slashers sequels like 1981's *Halloween II*, Michael Myers seemed to stay alive, no matter how brutally he was attacked, perpetuating the notion of a tough masculine body. In these sequels, viewers were also treated with more gendered contextualization of the killers and the victims. In *Halloween II*, Laurie Strode recovered in a hospital from the events of the first film, having narrowly escaped death's clutches. But what was further revealed was that Laurie was the younger sister of Michael Myers - after the Myers family sent Michael to the sanitarium after he had murdered his older sister, they died in a car crash shortly following Laurie's birth. She was actually adopted by the Strodes. Laurie's mere existence, then, acted as a foil for Michael's - his arc rested in a cyclic attempt to kill a second sister, solidifying each other's connection. Despite staying on *Halloween II* as a writer, John Carpenter was less than thrilled to continue the story between Laurie and Michael, saying, "What was I going to say? There was nothing more to say. That night's done, that story's over. Why are we beating this to death? But I couldn't stop it from

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[168] "Reagan Officials on the March 30, 1981 Assassination Attempt," Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia, https://web.archive.org/web/20110522150733/http://millercenter.org/academic/oralhistory/news/2007_0330

[169] Adam Peppard, "Command and Control: Tested Under Fire," May 13, 2015, http://res.dallasnews.com/interactives/reagan-bush/#_ga=2.37059236.507291374.1543702032-204660552.1540876923

being made."[170] So rather than an organic feud, the conflict between the newfound siblings was artificial, and like Carpenter said, manifested in powers beyond his control. Hollywood found a monetary reason to establish this Kristevan connection – with Meyers' immortality, and, consequently, the profitability of Laurie's cunning escape led to the continuation of more violence in theatres.

Amidst the chaotic first year of the Reagan presidency, the 1980 election campaigns, and horror film releases, violence in American media had become increasingly more controversial. In 1981, the National Institute of Mental Health conducted a study based on the 1972 Surgeon General's report on television violence, culminating in a "'Causal' Link Drawn Between Television and Acts of Violence," as headlines in the *Wall Street Journal* and *Washington Post* raved.[171] While the report was exclusive of film's effects on violence, the study resulted in a resurgence of panic among politicians, House of Representatives subcommittees, and concerned citizens fearful of the supposed effects of violent media on their children. Literary theorist Joel Black argued that, "nowhere has the blurring of fiction and reality occasioned more confusion and controversy than in the media's depiction of violence."[172] Reagan's assassination was read in this light. The accounts and urgency displayed by his Communication Office, security detail, and news coverage serve only to further frame the President as this masculine leader – what would happen if the manly president had died? As Senator Haig and Reagan's aides fumbled with the chain of command and clear presentation of information, it highlighted the White House's masculine leadership. Unlike *Halloween*,

[170] Murray Leeder, *Devil's Advocates: Halloween* (Liverpool: Auteur, 2015), 12.
[171] Jane Mayer, "'Causal' Link Drawn Between Television And Acts of Violence: Report by National Institute Of Mental Health Disputed By CBS Broadcast Group," *The Wall Street Journal*, Oct 22, 1981.
[172] Joel Black, *The Reality Effect: Film Culture and the Graphic Imperative* (Taylor & Francis, 2013).

Reagan was not immortal like Michael Myers. With the imagery of Jim Brady laying face-first on the concrete, with John Hinckley Jr. pinned against the wall, and President Reagan being rushed away to the hospital in his limousine, this assassination attempt had entered the already tumultuous perception of increasing media and real-life violence, especially highlighting that men were not immune to being killed. Reagan, no matter his supposed strength and no matter his hyper-masculinity, was still as vulnerable as everyone else was — at least for a moment?

Recovery

After the initial media maelstrom, print news organizations were quick to cover Reagan's assassination. Of course, this was not a small event, but from the disorganized showing of the Communications Office, reporters were set to run with stories from their own amassed sources and information. Immediate print news coverage from the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* a day following the assassination attempt assured the public of Reagan's well-being, saying, "Reagan Wounded by Assailant's Bullet; Prognosis Is 'Excellent,'"[173] and, "A Bullet Is Removed From Reagan's Lung In Emergency Surgery."[174] In contrast to the vague briefings by Gergen and Speakes, headlines spoke clearly in interviews with the George Washington University Hospital's chief of clinical affairs, Dr. Dennis O'Leary, the public was assured that Reagan was never in any life-threatening or serious danger; O'Leary asserted that the president was

[173] David S. Broder, "Reagan Wounded by Assailant's Bullet; Prognosis Is 'Excellent'; 3 Others Shot," *The Washington Post,* Mar 31, 1981.
[174] Robert Reinhold, "A Bullet Is Removed From Reagan's Lung In Emergency Surgery," *The New York Times,* Mar 31, 1981.

"an excellent physical specimen."[175] Immediately de-mystifying the chaos and confusion around the assassination attempt, these articles served to provide necessary contextual information to the public, especially in relation to his physical fortitude. However, rhetoric following the event would focus less on the certainty of Reagan's health and the details of the operation and more on Reagan's own agency in his recovery. *The Boston Globe* and *The Sun* remarked on the miraculous speed with which the President was recovering, headlining, "Reagan makes rapid progress,"[176] and, "Reagan's recuperation going 'extremely well."'[177]Articles would express his physical prowess, almost in defiance of medical bounds, quoting Dr. O'Leary as saying that despite surgery, he was taking almost no medications.[178] This period of time exemplified the media's role in also shaping the image of the president. As the rhetoric of these journalists changed from highlighting the president's sure survival to their discussion of his own physical prowess in relation to his recovery, they reinforced a relationship of masculinity and politics. In the "Letters to the Editor" section of the *Washington Post,* readers were able to submit their reactions to Reagan's recovery. People were inspired by his masculinity and strength, saying that his relaxed and jovial nature in the hospital, "[was] the measure of the man," that he was, "fit enough to survive a potentially fatal wound," and, in harkening back to his Hollywood roots, compared his toughness to that of the Western cowboy.[179] Reagan's survival was assured by medical professionals, but news

[175] Ibid
[176] Loretta McLaughlin, "Reagan makes rapid progress," *The Boston Globe,* Apr 1, 1981.
[177] Gilbert A. Lewthwaite, "Reagan's recuperation going 'extremely well'; other victims improving," *The Sun,* Apr 1, 1981.
[178] Gilbert A. Lewthwaite, "Reagan makes good progress; walking already," *The Sun,* Apr 2, 1981.
Lee Lescaze, "Reagan, in Good Spirits, Making a Fast Recovery," *The Washington Post,* Apr 1, 1981.
[179] "Letters to the Editor: The Assassination Attempt," *The Washington Post,* Apr 4, 1981.

organizations like *The Boston Globe* and *The Sun* took his survival as an act of masculinity. To them, Reagan epitomized leadership just by willing himself to live.

In contrast to this notion of physicality and masculinity becoming further reinforced by the press, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* took steps to discredit John Hinckley Jr.'s image and masculinity. Headlines like "Six Shots: A Presidential Assassin Fails - Just Barely,"[180] and, "Suspected Gunman: An Aimless Drifter," sought to reduce Hinckley's standing against Reagan.[181] Of Hinckley's image and background, one stated, "Snapshot pictures of Hinckley over the years show the dissolution of a young man from a healthy, clean-cut kid in suburban Dallas to a disheveled, glassy-eyed drifter looking for odd jobs near his parents' new home just outside the wealthy Denver suburb of Evergreen."[182] He was a failure and physically deprived while, in articles on the same print page, Reagan's physical superiority was extolled. What did these organizations have to gain by openly criticizing Hinckley's image? In theory, the denigration of Hinckley's masculinity served to further reinforce a sense of positive masculinity - men who lacked masculinity could be seen as less capable and less fit to lead, as was the case in the *Washington Post's* description of the would-be-assassin. Newspapers have the ability to recognize the fallibility of all bodies, but are solely selective in pushing masculine strength and non-masculine weakness.

What further resulted from the constant press coverage of Reagan's hospital stay was the connection of physical recovery to not only Reagan's increase in popularity but also his political programs. Days after Reagan was shot, he saw a surge of 11 points in a

[180] "Six Shots: A Presidential Assassin Fails - Just Barely," *New York Times,* Apr 5, 1981.
[181] Ron Shaffer and Neil Henry, "Suspected Gunman: An Aimless Drifter," *The Washington Post,* Mar 31, 1981.
[182] Shaffer and Henry, "Suspected Gunman..."

Washington Post/ ABC News popularity poll.[183] This was further expanded in a *Sun* article entitled, "Reagan's rebounding should help programs," where the author celebrated Reagan's 'performance in adversity' at the hospital; his swift recovery signaled to the American public that he was a tough fighter, even going as far to sign an executive order during his recovery.[184] During Reagan's recovery process, no images of him were allowed to be taken, as requested by the Communications Office. So, for the public reading these articles, their own construction of Reagan's masculinity depended on their own imaginations. To these readers, what did someone who survived a gunshot to the chest look like? Whether the White House Office of Communications or news organizations controlled the public image of the presidency, the recipients of these images were always the citizens of the US. As much power as the image-making machines had, what they created would only benefit the president if the public readily consumed it. In this regard, if the public accepted the image-makers' reinforcement of Reagan's masculine prowess in Washington, it could mean that the people of the country were more attuned to see masculine traits as a positive aspect in political leadership.

While political violence and its aftermath were being hidden from the public eye, horror continued its rampage of gore onscreen. Through the film *Scanners*, released in 1981, David Cronenberg emerged as a leading director of Body Horror.[185] As discussed previously, horror engages the audience in a visceral experience – fear manifests physically on the body. But what came with Cronenberg was heighted violence. In

[183] Barry Sussman, "Shooting Gives Reagan Boost In Popularity," *The Washington Post,* Apr 2, 1981.
[184] Ernest B. Furgurson, "Reagan's rebounding should help programs," *The Sun,* Apr 1, 1981.
Howell Raines, "Reagan Sees Aides and Actos on Trade; Continues to Gain," *New York Times,* Apr 2, 1981.
[185] *Scanners,* directed by David Cronenberg (Avco Embassy, 1981).

Scanners, scanners were people who have supernatural powers of psychokinesis, being able to control others' minds. The most prominent scene in the film was especially gory; at a military conference recruiting these scanners, a rogue scanner named Daniel Revok used his power to infiltrate the mind of the presenter and force his head to explode, sending red sludge and brains in all directions. Cronenberg's films lasciviously relished in gore and violence, embracing the fantastical imagery – to him, it's a moment of catharsis. The cultural anxiety placed on the many bodies involved in the assassination attempt had been purposefully obscured by the Reagan administration, hoping to keep elements of the president's masculine physique intact. Cronenberg responds by saying,

> When you begin to mix your blood with the characters' in the film, or if it's a scary film and you're mixing your own anxieties with the anxieties that are being played out in the film, the catharsis does not purge; *it makes clear*.[186]

Like the many forms of identification that took place during the chestburster scene in *Alien*, Cronenberg's violence aimed to allow the audience to explore their anxieties from the comfort within the movie theater – like having your head explode.[187] Horror directors saw the importance of fictional violence, seeing how it was able to break down boundaries of gender and power. While Cronenberg claimed his films like *Scanners* were apolitical, the cultural politics of horror would inevitably contradict and challenge the masculine American political style.[188] He stated:

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[186] David Breskin, *Inner Views: Filmmakers in Conversation* (New York: Faber & Faber, 1992). (Emphasis mine)
[187] Mick Garris, "Take One: Landis, Cronenberg, Carpenter – Part 1," *Fangoria*¸ May 1980.
[188] Breskin, *Inner Views*.

> I don't want to make movies with a message. I want to scare people; I want to provide a mood that combines the physically terrifying and mentally unsettling – and I think I've accomplished this in *Scanners*.[189]

"The culmination of Brady's dream"[190] - The Able-body and Masculinity

Contrasted with Reagan's own resilience and recovery, Press Secretary Jim Brady's own recovery charted a different trajectory. Hours after the assassination attempt, TV news outlets showed the gruesome scene at the Washington Hilton, with Brady lying face first on the sidewalk after being shot in the head by Hinckley Jr.[191] At first, he was incorrectly reported as deceased, but would immediately get the same print recognition as Reagan did in newspapers, with the Chicago Tribune stating he was, "irreverent, witty, and very solid,"[192] and the Los Angeles Times stated that he was making an "Amazing Recovery."[193] This was not a case of forgetting, but rather, a change in perception over time. Unlike Reagan, Brady's recovery was severely complicated by his injuries. Damage to his brain led to small changes in behavior and speaking patterns, paralysis of his left arm, partial paralysis of his left leg, and a condition of spasticity that left him with uncontrolled muscle contractions.[194] Brady now required a wheelchair and resided in the hospital for physical therapy and checkups. In contrast to the certainty of the articles published days after he was shot, tracking his recovery seemed to linger month by month. An article titled "The Long Ordeal of James Brady,"[195]

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[189] Publicity Department, Avco Embassy Pictures Corp., "Feature: Writer-Director of New Thriller 'Scanners' Known as 'Master of the Macabre."
[190] Steve Daley. "The culmination of Brady's dream." *Chicago Tribune Sep 19, 1982.*
[191] Wilber. *Rawhide Down,* 149
[192] Raymond Coffey, "Jim Brady: irreverent, witty, and very solid," *Chicago Tribune,* Apr 2, 1981.
[193] Times Wire Service, "Brady Likely to Survive, Doctors Say," *Los Angeles Times,* Mar 31, 1981.
[194] Richard E. Cytowic, "The Long Ordeal of James Brady," *The New York Times,* Sep 27, 1981.
[195] Cytowic, "The Long Ordeal…"

in the New York Times in September 1981 was followed by a similarly titled article in the Washington Post, "Jim Brady's Long Ordeal," seven months later in March 1982.[196] It was clear that the rest of the course of Brady's career would be marked by his physical and psychological wounds. Again, in contrast with Reagan's own agency in his recovery, according to news reports, Brady did not recover by his own efforts. Rather, *The Sun* claimed that the brain itself, in all its own marvels and mysteries, saved Brady and the *Chicago Tribune* credited his daughter, Melissa, in the press secretary's 'miracle' of a recovery after he responded to her saying, "Hi, Dad!"[197] Brady wasn't tough like Reagan was - he was lucky. For these news organizations, what would recovery, the end of the Long Ordeal, look like? Was it a return to his highly visible role as Reagan's Press Secretary? As a result of the lengthy duration of his hospital stay, Brady, much to his objection, was replaced as Press Secretary by his deputy, Larry Speakes.[198] From physically representing and communicating the Reagan administration's goals, Brady had now been sidelined, and would not return to his Press Secretary appointment.

A valid argument existed for Brady's removal from the public eye. The limitations of his physical capabilities and resulting vocal slurring made him partially unable to carry out the role of the Press Secretary. He was shot in the head. It was a perfectly understandable condition that was difficult to recover from. But then why was there a difference in rhetoric surrounding his recovery versus Reagan's? We must consider the representative role the Press Secretary plays as a communicator for the

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[196] Elisabeth Bumiller, "Jim Brady's Long Ordeal," *The Washington Post,* Mar 31, 1982.
[197] Charlotte Moser, "Brain's unfathomed powers helped doctors save Brady," *The Sun,* Sep 20, 1981. Storer Rowley, "The Brady 'miracle' - 'Hi, Dad!'" *Chicago Tribune,* Apr 11, 1981.
[198] Maltese, *Spin Control,* 188.
Note that Brady retained the title of Press Secretary, and Speakes retained his title as Deputy Press Secretary.

President.[199] If Reagan was defined by his tough, action-oriented leadership, what would a Press Secretary who used a wheelchair do for his image? The visual of able-bodied physicality was equated with masculinity. Make no mistake, Brady was far from incapable. Even in his Long Ordeal, doctors noted that nothing was fundamentally different about his intelligence or personality.[200] But to the press and to the Reagan administration, Brady's wheelchair could be seen as a reminder of masculine fallibility; the performance of masculinity relied on the able-body.

The Economic Body – What it Cost to Survive

"*We'd make people sick, then ask them to invest*."[201] – Sam Raimi

Jim Brady's resignation meant new challenges for the Reagan administration. In a reorganization of Reagan's White House Office of Communications, Ursomarso offered his resignation, leaving space for David Gergen to assume the role of Communications Director in 1982. As a veteran member of President Nixon and Ford's Communications Offices and under the strain of controversy surrounding this presidency, Gergen's goal with Reagan was to reestablish trust in the government among the American public, saying, "All of us came out of the Watergate years feeling very strongly about the importance of trust in government, of developing relationships in this town that stood on something more than simply power."[202] This, notably, was something Carter failed to do. But this reestablishment of trust came with the optics of managing image - trust and truth

[199] Michael J. Towle, "On Behalf of the President: Four Factors Affecting the Success of the Presidential Press Secretary," *Presidential Studies Quarterly,* 27 (2), 1997: 299.
[200] Cytowic, "The Long Ordeal…"
[201] "Breaking Into Movies By the Horror Route," *New York Times*, Apr 15, 1983.
[202] Mark Hertsgaard, *On Bended Knee: The Press and the Reagan Presidency* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988), 16.

did not necessarily coincide. Far from having malicious intent, Gergen's role was to frame President Reagan, already in good standing with his own image, in the best light possible.

Although Frank Ursomarso led the Communications Office during the beginnings of the Reagan Presidency, David Gergen was committed to perfecting and developing the administration's communication strategy. Much like Jerry Rafshoon in the Carter administration, establishing a level of control between the White House and media outlets was crucial, and Gergen especially enjoyed the prospect of meeting with reporters.[203] With his own background in journalism, he would be able to cultivate friendly relationships with those who would be reporting on his coworkers and administration. But beyond a friendly face, Gergen worked hard to amass a positive image of Reagan. He proactively called news networks before broadcasts not only to learn what they were going to say about the administration, but also to prepare fact sheets and schedule television time to rebuke any negative claims. To place less personnel strain on the Communications team, Gergen outsourced privately funded organizations to provide education campaigns that could spread the themes and goals of the Reagan campaign among the public.[204] This work was not necessarily new, but the specific challenge came in with being able to manage Reagan's image.

Following the assassination attempt and the news of Reagan's certain recovery, Gergen and the Communications Office conveniently attained new material to work with. Upon Reagan's release from George Washington University Hospital, Gergen was the

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[203] Frank Ursomarso, interview with John Anthony Maltese, June 26, 1990.
[204] Dick Kirschten, "Communications Reshuffling Intended to Help Reagan Do What He Does Best," *National Journal,* Jan 28, 1984, 156.
Maltese, *Spin Control,* 194.

one credited with masterminding the idea of having the president's first public appearance during a joint session of Congress to address his economic plan, saying, "This would focus official Washington's and therefore the news media's attention back on the economy, the issue the apparatus wanted to stress[...]."[205] On April 28th, 1981, just under a month from the assassination attempt, Reagan stood on the floor of Congress to thunderous, bipartisan applause. He would make it clear that he was not there for clout, but rather to address rising inflation, saying, "[...] my health is much improved. I'd like to be able to say that with regard to the health of the economy."[206] The combination of physical health and the American economy became a metaphor that persisted in headlines. The *New York Times* published an article titled, "Reagan Appeals to Congress for his Economic Plan, Saying he is Recovered but U.S. Isn't," further citing medical and health-related allusions in his speech, like "the country's economic sickness," or presenting his economic plan as "the cure."[207] Continuing this medical metaphor in the context of Reagan's survival, the Reagan Communications Office had achieved an ideological state that connected the president's physicality, masculinity, and, now, with the economic plan in tow, political goals, as well. What had been a tragedy for the country became an opportunity for Gergen and the White House Communications Office. "For the first time in any presidency, we modeled a communications policy around our legislative strategy," Gergen would say after Reagan's plan passed through Congress.[208]

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[205] Ibid, 189-193.
[206] Ronald Reagan, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on the Program for Economic Recovery" (speech, Washington, D.C., Apr 28, 1981), Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute, https://www.reaganfoundation.org/media/128629/congress.pdf
It is unclear of who should be given credit for this speech. Ken Khachigian was his speechwriter in 1981, but Reagan was also known for writing his own speeches.
[207] Steven R. Weisman, "Reagan Appeals to Congress for his Economic Plan, Saying he is Recovered but U.S. Isn't," *The New York Times,* Apr 29, 1981.
[208] Hertsgaard, *On Bended Knee,* 22-23.

Reagan's body, supported by the American public and news organizations as tough and masculine, would become associated with his politics. His survival now certain, newspapers touted his recovery as miraculous – not the work of medical professionals, but of the president's own will. Reagan was a manly leader, and his economic politics would be seen as tough too.

Horror and violence are profitable, at least, that's how director Sam Raimi felt. Raimi's *The Evil Dead* (1981) featured the standard formatting of slashers; a group of college-aged students were picked off one-by-one by monstrous forces, in this instance through the possession of ancient Sumerian demons.[209] What separated this from the standard slasher, however, was the perpetual decay and gore exhibited by the possessed students. Viscera and skin were peeled off to reveal rotted and discolored flesh, red blood and milky white vomit covered their bodies, and as Ash, the sole survivor, burned the ritual book, the possessed bodies melted and rotted to reveal the skeletons within the disfigured corpses. While David Gergen found success in connecting the Reagan Administration's economic plan with Reagan's own physical recovery, Raimi posed gory, low-budget horror as a means for easy profit, "We'd make people sick, then ask them to invest."[210] It was a seemingly contrary venture – products that made people throw up or faint from the sight of blood or mashed up body parts would be popular forms of media. In fact, *The Living Dead* had initially received an X-Rating, usually reserved for pornographic films. But in the years after its release, it's regularly seen as a cult film, a classic. As seen with Cronenberg's belief in horror as a cathartic art form to release cultural anxiety, Raimi doubled down and noted its economic benefits – people

[209] *The Evil Dead*, directed by Sam Raimi (New Line, 1983).
[210] "Breaking Into Movies"

will pay to see films where teenagers get their heads eaten by zombies. And regardless of budget, "No matter how badly you make horror movies, they will find a market."[211] The body in horror films, akin to Reagan's own wounded body, can then also carry meaning, in this case, the most salient meaning being economical. In this case, then, this was where the two realms intersected – both politics and horror, using the medium of the physical body, greatly benefit from capitalism. Reagan's administration used the president's recovery to ideologically tie his economic reform to his tough body, and enterprising filmmakers like Raimi see the disfigured bodies in horror as a means for viewers to pay for cathartic fiction.

Final Boys – Monsters and Paranoia

> *Childs*
> Now how's this motherfucker wake up after thousands of years in the ice, huh?
> *MacReady*
> (Annoyed)
> I don't know how. Because he's different than we are. Because he's a space guy.[212]

The attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan put the presidential body front and center of media and politics. But the imagery was far from consistent – different bodies were inscribed with different meanings. Jim Brady was cast aside during his recovery while Reagan's body became aligned with a tough masculine economy. The culmination of this tumultuous entry point into Reagan's presidency and the incubation of the body horror and slasher genres lay ultimately with John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982).[213]

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[211] Jami Bernard, "Horror's cult & hack Raimi," *New York Post,* Apr 2, 1987
[212] *The Thing*, directed by John Carpenter (Universal, 1982).
[213] *The Thing.*

Evolving from the *Halloween* series, this was his first film for a Hollywood studio, Universal, giving him a much larger budget of $15 million.[214] Now in a much more complex setting with a more complex cast of characters, he tackled an apocalyptic topic – what if couldn't trust our own bodies? Michael Myers' and Laurie Strode's survivals depended on the flexibility of their gendered bodies, but in this film, we see how rigidity doomed these men.

Set in an Antarctic research station, Carpenter's film followed the perils of a group of men against a shapeshifting alien; the alien looked and acted human but subtly killed off each of the members at the station one by one. In each transformation the titular Thing gorily transformed into a monster that represented a bastardization of the human form; appendages and phalanges were stretched to their limits, joints twisted and contorted, and a hideous, inhuman screech erupted from whatever orifice the Thing created. Pilot MacReady, played by Kurt Russell, and mechanic Childs, played by Keith David both were in contention as the masculine leader to root out the monstrous Thing, but fear and paranoia ultimately dominated the group. At the end, after trials and tribulations killed nearly all of the men, the station was lit aflame with only MacReady and Childs left alive, both mistrustful of the other – how could they trust that the other was not the monster? *The Thing* ended in ambiguity, suggesting to the viewer that the true identity of the monster did not matter - what had transpired in the research station was monstrous enough.

Per Carpenter, violence was merely a means to display the powers of paranoia; "It's more about a creature that can become you, rather than [about its ability] to kill you.

[214] Dale Pollock, "Carpenter: Doing his 'Thing' Despite Critics," *Los Angeles Times*, Jul 9, 1982

Imitate you perfectly, cell for cell."[215] The gratuitous violence and destruction of the body merely acted as entry points to the psychological chaos. Akin to the scramble when President Reagan was shot, there was meaning underneath the madness. Furthermore, the body was central – the body itself was the Thing. Unlike previous body horror films like *Scanners*, Carpenter's film was overtly gendered - there were no women present at the station. Scriptwriter Bill Lancaster made this choice to replicate realism, saying that "there aren't any women in these kinds of situations. I remember thinking as a kid that the obligatory love scenes in horror movies interrupted the action."[216] Sexism aside, this logic was representative of the time period. Men were seen as being more equipped for Antarctic research - they're the ones who could tough out the harsh weather, while women just existed as romantic partners. What this assertion by Lancaster did allow for, however, was a closer examination of the gendering of the Thing itself. Since there were no women, what did the Thing represent to the crew? What did it mean that scientists, mechanics, and gun-wielding men couldn't take the monster down?

What seemed to transpire in Hollywood during the early 1980s was the push for more men in horror, especially as it related to the destruction of their bodies. In both the *Evil Dead* and *Scanners,* both of the protagonists were men. Slashers still existed, of course, but now, with the emergence of Cronenberg's and Carpenter's body horror films, the Final Girl had to now share the spotlight with the Final Boy. Taking the case of MacReady and Childs, these were men's men – they're angry, they had short tempers, they cursed and drank, and neither could decide on who the leader was. With flamethrowers and dynamite as their chosen weapons, the fear and paranoia that set in the

[215] Mick Garris, "Take One: Landis, Cronenberg, Carpenter – Part 2" *Fangoria,* July 1982
[216] Noah Berlatsky, "What 'The Thing' Loses by Adding Women," *The Atlantic,* Oct. 13, 2011.

research station only caused more chaos and destruction. One of their colleagues was not their colleague – they weren't actually a man. This was one of the cruxes of *They Live*. Masculinity is threatened by anything that deviated from it.

While the Thing took a male form while hunting its victims, the gruesome transformation it underwent at the sign of danger was far from masculine or feminine – it was genderless. While gender was not explicitly discussed by the men at the research station, the human/ alien nature of the Thing itself absolved it of any gender identification – at no point to the men describe the Thing in binary gender terms. *Alien*'s Ripley saw herself in the Alien birthed from the crewmate Kane, leading herself to react beyond a binary system of gender and continue to embrace the masculine. But these men were not Ripley – she had the flexibility to lead and survive. Identification with the Thing became more complicated because the thing *was* them. Their masculinity and adherence to a binary logic of gender was monstrous, but their actual bodies and actual physical prowess paled in comparison. Even though the monster was physically strong, what it had done most successfully was to sow discord into the research station – the paranoia that anyone, any *body*, could be the Thing was the central site of conflict. This was how body horror made its mark for Carpenter, as he asserted,

> I gradually realized that I was more interested in the things that happen inside you – mentally and physically – than I was in a kind of exterior threat, which is why you could legitimately say that none of my films are monster movies. *To a certain extent, it's your own body that's the monster, your own existence*.[217]

Carpenter would argue then, that even though there's a murderous alien on the loose, the people, the men, were the true monsters. Their paranoia, deceit and unwillingness to

[217] Garris, "Take One."

temper their masculinity was the true downfall of the research station – the Thing only exacerbated it.

In a way, body horror also provided an outlet of justice for Jim Brady's termination as a result of his physical and intellectual difference. The Thing was far from the masculine physical ideal - while powerful and quick, it wasn't the appealing Reagan cowboy. The Thing's body was warped to something foreign and disgusting, spitting slime, covered in teeth, bulbous and elastic. As a matter of fact, it spent most of its screen time appearing human - it didn't even seem to want to be its true self. And yet, at its most disgusting, the Thing was at its most capable. While also challenging masculinity as the ideal gendered ideal, it also challenged the dominance of the able-body. *The Thing* provides a challenge between the regular, male body against the monstrous, deformed body. This isn't to say the result of Brady's wound left him as a monster, but rather that his acquired physical difference should not have immediately been a detriment to his position. Body horror thrived on one's fear of their own body and how their body functioned. The Antarctic crew in *The Thing* feared that their body would be assimilated into the alien's body. Jim Brady was a subject of fear and anxiety for those who wished his resignation; they feared that their body could become his. Reading the Thing's body meant inscribing within its slimy tendrils and sharp teeth, characteristics and ideas that lay beyond dominant masculinity.

> To write about monsters, you have to understand them. To write about fear you have to know a little bit about it. But everybody knows about fear. It's how you use it.[218]
>
> - John Carpenter

[218] Joe Rhodes, "'I Can Get People to Scream,'" *Newsday*, Aug. 8, 1993.

With the stealthy tactics the shapeshifting Thing used to confuse and manipulate the men in the Antarctic base, it delineated the line between predator and prey and challenged the dominant perspective of the able, masculine body. Each grotesque imitation took place with the breaking of bones, alteration of organs, and demonic, inhuman sounds, nothing quite the same as normal bodily functions. And yet, this body, covered in blood (both because of self-inflicted injuries and because of those accrued from others), was the most capable organism amidst the all-male Antarctic research station filled with doctors, pilots, and military men; their weakness came from the inflexibility of their bodies and gender norms. Their own masculinity, their constant claims to leadership, allowed for the Thing to foment distrust amongst the crew. John Carpenter told viewers to doubt the efficacy of physical and masculine prowess - communication in leadership was a much more crucial skill. *The Thing* went mad in Kracauerian terms – in the arctic labs brute strength was a detriment, not an asset, especially in times of leadership. During the growth of the horror genre, it's seen tremendous capability to confront binary systems of logic and gender. David Gergen's choice to utilize Reagan's masculine body following the recovery of his assassination attempt laid in direct contrast to the positions of Carpenter, Cronenberg, and other horror directors during Reagan's tumultuous first years as president. Horror directors have proved themselves as capable intellectuals, especially in relation to gender norms and politics. In continuity from Carter's attempts at masculinization, to Reagan's connection between the physical body and masculinity as a result of his injuries, the realm of politics and the representations of horror remained in stark contention. The reemergence of Jason Voorhees and Michael Myers' indestructible bodies revealed their connection to the

feminine, and the Thing broke the illusion of the superior masculine body. Horror and its evolving subgenres illuminated how fear manifested itself in political leadership - those in power sought to normalize a privileged, ideal, masculine form, one that was, inevitably, more fallible.

C3 - Reagan's 2nd Term

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it." [219] – The PG-13 Politics of Violence

> Billy flips the oven switch to 'bake.' The microwave purrs.
> Inside, Mogwai screams and pounds against the glass door. Soon, the creature falls. Its body quivers. The armor-like skin bubbles and pops. Mogwai boils to death.
> Billy wipes the sweat from his brow and exits the kitchen.[220]

In Joe Dante's *Gremlins* (1984), the Mogwai were an alien species that had two forms – one with a small, cuddly, and precocious demeanor, and the other, if it had gotten wet, was monstrous, mischievous, and violent. The more violent Mogwai terrorized not just the fictional town, but the real-life parents, psychologists, and politicians of the United States in the mid-1980s. Under Jack Valenti in 1968, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) established a rating system designed to give agency to viewers – instead of managing the content of Hollywood productions, viewers themselves curated their own experiences by choosing appropriately rated films. Ratings ranged from G (general audiences), PG (parental guidance suggested), R (which restricted children under 17 without adult guardians), and, as seen with Sam Raimi's *The Evil Dead*, X (restricting anyone under 17 from watching).[221] Dante's *Gremlins* was rated PG, something highly protested by viewers. Horror was but one genre that contributed to a growing prevalence of media violence. According to groups like the Action for Children's Television and the National Coalition on Television, violent acts would become embedded in the psyches of children and adults.[222] Some would even go as far to

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[219] Aljean Harmetz, "Some Groups Unhappy With PG-13 Film Rating," *The New York Times*, Aug 13, 1984.
[220] *Gremlins*, directed by Joe Dante (Warner Bros., 1984).
[221] "Film Ratings," Motion Picture Association, https://www.motionpictures.org/film-ratings/
[222] Harmetz, "Some Groups Unhappy…"

call upon the government to "[reshape] a milieu in which violence is unambivalently viewed as negative."[223] Ultimately relenting, Valenti and the MPAA would develop the PG-13 rating as an intermediary between the PG and R ratings, strongly recommending that parents take caution in bringing children to these films.[224]

What's important to understand in this development in 1984 was that Washington and Hollywood were not islands. As much as horror directors could criticize the president's gendered image in their own terms, that very same Washington institution could likewise address Hollywood's own obsession with the destruction of bodies. Film theorist Asbjørn Grønstad stated that "more than perhaps any other textual event, violence makes us aware of our own act of watching."[225] Following Reagan's assassination attempt, conservative ideology could be seen in the presidential body. For Reagan and his image-makers in the Office of Communications, this required a tough, masculine body to work with. Through Grønstad, what did the conservative cultural and political shift against media violence aim to solve? What did conservatives see when they saw excessive violence in horror film?

Body Policy - Small Government with a Big Stick

Passing the 1981 Economic Recovery Tax Act allowed Reagan to ideologically attach his physical being to the American economy so that he, himself, and the American economy were bound. Reaganomics, developed in part by the Director of Management and Budget, David Stockman, sought to reduce the marginal tax rate of all individuals,

[223] John R. Lion, "Violence: Is rejecting it the answer?" *The Sun*, Apr 26, 1981
[224] "Film Ratings"
[225] Asbjørn Grønstad, *Transfigurations: Violence, Death and Masculinity in American Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011).

regardless of income, from 70 percent to 50 percent.[226] It was a policy derived from capitalist ideology; the economy, amidst these "supply-side economics," would grow faster because it fostered and encouraged innovation and creation from businesses.[227] Of course, in introducing a flat tax cut, the wealthy were the ones benefiting the most, widening the gap between the haves and the have nots and marginalized some social groups. With conservative ideology set in place and in line with Reagan's control over the American economy, a budgetary reduction in selected parts of the government was seen as necessary. Manipulating spending became a marker of control and influence for the Reagan administration. Aligning with conservative ideology, budget cuts reflected the reduction of large-scale government intervention. Of the government programs cut, social security and welfare programs expanded during the Carter administration were among those most affected, and, in turn, the Reaganomics' cuts disproportionately affected Black people, women, low income families, and people who did not represent the white, binary masculinity that Reagan evoked and championed.[228] Little did it matter that these cuts to welfare programs were done in spite of 49% of surveyed Americans' opposition.[229] Welfare was not an overwhelmingly unpopular policy expanded upon during the Carter administration, it was government spending that was out of control.

Domestically, in 1984, during a prayer breakfast, Reagan emphasized his growing belief that religion and politics should intertwine, saying, "Without God, democracy will not, and cannot, long endure. If we ever forget that we're one nation under God, then we

[226] Congresshttps://www.congress.gov/bill/97th-congress/house-bill/4242?r=48
[227] "Reagan signs Economic Recovery Tax Act (ERTA)," History, https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/reagan-signs-economic-recovery-tax-act-erta
[228] Danziger, Sheldon and Haveman, Robert, "The Reagan administration's budget cuts: Their impact on the poor," *Challenge, 24,* (May-June 1981), 5-13.
[229] Lydia Saad, "Spending Cuts Popular in Reagan's 1981 Budget," *Gallup,* May 25, 2017, https://news.gallup.com/vault/211076/spending-cuts-popular-reagan-1981-budget.aspx

will be a nation gone under."[230] Reagan spoke to the emerging Religious Right cultivated from Billy Graham's Fourth Great Awakening. Echoes of Evangelical Protestant protest collided with American conservative politics, namely thanks to pro-life and 'pro-family' religious lobbying organizations like Reverend Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority.[231] Established in 1979, groups like these under Falwell were initially apolitical until the country's perceived moral decline and the *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973. After consulting conservative-leaning people, Falwell began his foray into the merging of Fundamentalist religion and American politics, saying, "I was convinced that there was a moral majority out there among those more than 200 million American sufficient in number to turn back the flood tide of moral permissiveness, family breakdown and general capitulation to evil and to foreign policies such as Marxism-Leninism."[232] Injecting religion into American politics was not a remarkably new strategy, but in the case of Reagan's first term, in shifting the perspective away from what was perceived as a weak presidency under Jimmy Carter, religious identity and conservative politics aligned to uphold patriarchal, masculine leadership. Fundamentalism was a perfect match. Social scientists studying Moral Majority membership discovered that those who followed this organization conflated government practice with religious belief, citing factors like stances toward abortion and defense spending, and beliefs on school prayer and the Equal Rights Amendment.[233] For these groups, and as Reagan presented in his speech in 1984, religion became the rationale conservative policy was founded upon, and in the same speech

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[230] Benjamin Taylor, "All politicians need religion, Reagan says," *Boston Globe,* Aug. 24, 1984.
[231] Gil Troy, *The Reagan Revolution: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 38.
[232] "People & Ideas: Jerry Falwell," PBS, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/godinamerica/people/jerry-falwell.html
[233] Clyde Wilcox, "Evangelicals and the Moral Majority," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion,* Dec, 1989, 28, 4

Reagan stated that, "The truth is, politics and morality are inseparable, and as morality's foundation is religion, religion and politics are necessarily related."[234]

Fundamentalist Christian belief was binary and patriarchal, focusing on God as the central, masculine leader. But within religion, and within the rhetoric of Evangelicals, the Moral Majority, and to a larger extent, the Republican party, there lay an undercurrent of fear. As political theorist Corey Robin states, "Fear is the first emotion experienced by a character in the Bible. Not desire, not shame, but fear. Adam eats from the tree, discovers he is naked, and hides from God, confessing, 'I was afraid, because I was naked.'"[235] Religion and fear are intertwined because of the power God has over sinners; those who fall out of line with his doctrine and teachings are subject to damnation. In the case of Evangelical belief and the preaching of Jerry Falwell in the early 1980s, families were breaking apart because of feminism, school systems prevented students from praying, people killed babies in the womb, and the world was being offered up as a buffet for communists; in his view, there was a lot to be afraid if you were a religious American, and only religion could stop the threat.

Being overtly masculine and tough, in this case, was a signal that the state of things might not have been as secure as originally thought. We see lapses of continuity of masculine leadership and conservative ideology. Masculine leadership and patriarchal religion were always in crisis because of this relational nature; masculinity was not defined by anything besides itself, and anything, or any identity that did not align with that image was not masculine. Women, queer people, people of color, and people who

[234] Phil Gailey, "Reagan, At Prayer Breakfast, Calls Politics and Religion Inseparable," *New York Times*, Aug. 24, 1984, https://www.nytimes.com/1984/08/24/us/reagan-at-prayer-breakfast-calls-politics-and-religion-inseparable.html
[235] Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1.

did not adhere to the gender binary, as marginalized as they were, threatened white masculine politics and politicians because they continued to exist outside of masculinity – that in itself threatened the binary system and threated their positional power. So, during Reagan's first term from 1980 to 1984, the culture developed by his administration and by the Religious Right out of fear served to develop Reagan's image as emblematic of masculine conservatism and patriarchal religion; this was the physical image and the real body that were prioritized by policy. "Paint Reagan as the personification of all that is right with, or heroized by America. Leave Mondale in a position where an attack on Reagan is tantamount to an attack on America's idealized image of itself - where a vote against Reagan is, in some subliminal sense, a vote against a mythic AMERICA."[236] This quote by a Reagan staffer confirmed the culture of embodiment that President Reagan and his team championed; his physical body was now a constructed and reciprocal 'mythic America.'

Examining the violence and fear of 1980s horror films and looking at moments where masculine muscle was figuratively and sometimes literally pulled back was where we could examine the separation of the binary logic of gender. The sociopolitical climate of the increasingly right-leaning United States following Reagan's assassination attempt in 1981 continued to encompass gendered themes, evolving during his 2nd term from 1984 to 1989 in affecting the individual bodies of the populace, especially non-white, queer, and non-masculine bodies.

[236] Michael Schaller, *Right Turn: American Life in the Reagan-Bush Era, 1980-1992* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 152.

"Ferraro Sees Juggernaut Crush Dream"[237] – Women in Politics

This harsh headline posted in the *Washington Post* a day following Democratic Presidential Candidate Walter Mondale's and vice-presidential Candidate Geraldine Ferraro's historic loss in the 1984 election belied Ferraro's spirit in her defeat; no, she actually didn't appear crushed. Very much motivated, she spoke on November 7th, "Campaigns, even if you lose them, do serve a purpose. My candidacy has said the days of discrimination are numbered. American women will never again be second-class citizens."[238] Exhausted from a difficult election, her concession embodied certain questions and sentiments about women, femininity, and politics during the continued Reagan Revolution of the mid-1980s. Ferraro argued that a woman's hierarchical status from that point in history, despite an overwhelming defeat, was forever changed after almost attaining the 2nd highest position of political power in the country. Gendered representation, in her case, was crucially important during her candidacy. But how did the public vote? Despite talk of a 'gender gap' in Reagan's lack of support from women, the majority of women in the United States voted for the incumbent Republican, 57% to 42%. Notably, this was a 10 percent increase from his victory over Carter in 1980.[239] The male gender gap grew even wider, voting 61% to 37%. In the wider congressional landscape, of the 9 women challengers to Senate seats, none had succeeded in their campaigns. And, for the 41 women who ran for the House of Representatives, only 2 had won.[240] It was an overwhelmingly large visual loss. The Democratic Senate Candidate

[237] Rick Atkinson, "Ferraro Sees Juggernaut Crush Dream: Women's Advance Will Last, She Says," *Washington Post*, Nov. 7, 1984.
[238] Geraldine Ferraro, "Ferraro's remarks at end of campaign," *Boston Globe*, Nov. 7, 1984.
[239] Maureen Dowd, "Setbacks Leave Women Leaders Viewing Their Political Progress in Inches," *New York Times*, Nov. 8, 1984.
[240] Dowd, "Setbacks…"

from Minnesota, Joan Growe, however, contrasted with Ferraro, pointedly saying, "There's a double standard placed on women, a different kind of scrutiny. If you're tough, you're called mean. If you speak out for fairness, the poor, and the elderly and are compassionate, you're called naive."[241] It's a lose-lose situation. No matter the valence in which a woman acted, either in a traditionally masculine or feminine way, criticism was levied simply because of her womanhood.

According to Ferraro, this was the new starting point for women in the country: conflicted in outlook and still set to a different and unfair standard than their male counterparts. For women in horror, their placement is unquestioned. They belonged to that genre. Final girls like Laurie Strode and Tina Gray in the newly released slasher, *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) by Wes Craven allowed for the wide depiction of women on screen, able for wide gendered interpretation – but of course, they were often the target of violence. For women in Washingtonian politics, their presence was novel and uninvestigated. Of course, Ferraro was running 'underneath' Walter Mondale, the former Vice President of Jimmy Carter, but her unique position as a female political figure in the midst of Reagan's masculine conservatism warranted close investigation. So, for the Mondale/ Ferraro ticket, despite their loss, what *was* the purpose of their campaign?

In November, Geraldine Ferraro was vastly different from the Geraldine Ferraro that stated on April 29th, 1984, "I know full well the only reason I'm on that short list [of Vice Presidential Candidates] is because I'm a woman."[242] Regardless of her success as

[241] Ibid.
[242] Elisabeth Bumiller, "The Rise of Geraldine Ferraro: Mastering the Process of Politics With a Careful Eye Ahead," *The Washington Post*, Apr. 29, 1984.

an educator, as the New York District Attorney in Queens County, and eventually as a Democratic House Representative in 1978, she still retained her social intuition; her gender was a target placed on her back, and yet, that same target was marketable for political gain. Announcing Ferraro's selection as the Democratic vice-presidential candidate on July 12th, 1984, headlines in *The New York Times* read, "'Difficult' Decision," almost in self-reference to the unprecedented nature of her nomination.[243] Why was it so "difficult" to have a female vice president? Following in the footsteps of Shirley Chisholm in 1972, Geraldine Ferraro was one of the few women considered on any ticket for a major political party.[244] Women were actively working towards and campaigning for the Presidency, but never with the nationwide platform of the Democratic or Republican parties at their side. Upon her selection, defining Ferraro was an auspicious task for reporters and politicians alike; potentially having a woman in a space created by and *for* men evoked conflicting reactions.

For the Democrats and Democratic supporters, Ferraro's nomination was a means of reinvigorating an otherwise dull campaign by Mondale; headlines from the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Sun* days following the announcement reflected excitement: "Ferraro Choice, Gains in Polls Cheer Democrats," "Ferraro is received exuberantly as she courts blacks, Hispanics, Asians."[245] Allusions to her Italian-American, Roman Catholic, and working-class, blue collar backgrounds and her House experience as the New York representative in the diverse Queens neighborhood illustrated her wide range

[243] Bernard Weintraub, "'Difficult' Decision: But Likely Nominee Says Representative From Queens Is 'Best,'" *The New York Times,* July 12, 1984
[244] "Women and the Presidency: History & Facts," Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers Eagleton Institute of Politics, https://cawp.rutgers.edu/women-and-presidency-history-facts
[245] Robert Shogan, "Ferraro Choice, Gains in Polls Cheer Democrats," *Los Angeles Times,* Jul 15, 1984 Stephen Nordinger, "Ferraro is received exuberantly as she courts blacks, Hispanics, Asians," *The Sun,* Jul 19, 1984.

of identity. As the Vice-Presidential nominee, she was not just a feminine woman; she needed to be more than her gender to be a credible candidate. In that same vein, masculinity and masculinization were additional ways media framed Ferraro as a politician; she was tough and wouldn't back down from her male colleagues in Congress. To many, she held the same progressive political beliefs as Walter Mondale, but was more outspoken.[246] And in many ways, reporters were right in this assumption. She had to adopt and be ascribed masculine traits to survive in the male-dominated political sphere. In her first public appearance as the Vice-Presidential candidate for the Democratic Party, she 'attacked' Reagan's identity as a good Christian, and 'challenged' Bush to a debate. She was as quick to be compared with the incumbent President as she was to her Republican counterpart, George H.W. Bush.

Killer Female Cars and Women with Penises

Discussion of Carol Clover's Final Girl involved a close look at the complexity of gender in both the feminine who survive and the masculine who kill. With the evolution of Reagan's connection between masculine politics and the masculine body, Ferraro's gendering, as designated by media surrounding her nomination and rise to the House of Representatives, remained visual, drawing comparisons to other women in power like Princess Diana.[247] Her image, like Reagan, was a focus of conversation. However, unlike Reagan, the body was just one aspect of womanhood. Press honed in on the other identities that arose from her femininity: "America's Bride,"[248] she was a "mother and a

[246] Steve Neal, "Ferraro jabs Reagan, asks Bush debate," *Chicago Tribune,* July 14, 1984.
[247] Gail Sheehy, "Ferraro: Always a contender," *Chicago Tribune,* July 15, 1984
[248] Maureen Dowd, "Taking the Toughness Test," *New York Times,* Nov 3, 1985

feminist."[249] The body was one aspect of identity for women, but it did not define them entirely, especially in the face of men. Horror films released after the 1984 election reflected this notion; femininity, as it related to the final girl, was more abstract and complicated than masculinity.

In 1983, horror director John Carpenter released an adapted version of Stephen King's novel *Christine*. Within the film, it's accepted by each character that the titular vehicle is female; Arnie and his girlfriend, Leigh, continuously use she/ her pronouns to describe Christine.[250] Critics were split on the issue of gender, either distancing gender from object by using 'it' pronouns to designate Christine, or playing directly into the theme, describing each and every curve and body part of the vehicle.[251] The glossy red 1957 Plymouth Fury, a possessed car since its factory 'birth,' served different purposes as the killer and love interest. At the start of the movie, Arnie Cunningham is presented as a man without masculinity: bullied by those tougher than him, intelligent to a fault, and unappealing to women. 'Cuntingham,' as his bullies called him, was the counterpoint to Christine's seduction. Upon purchasing Christine, Arnie's masculinity surged. He began to disobey his parents, changed his nerdy look to a more slick and masculine one, and got a girlfriend, the aforementioned Leigh. This was only possible because of Christine. His appropriated masculinity was the result of his literal purchasing power over femininity. Carpenter's film highlighted both the appeal and subordination of femininity in the fact that it further served to define masculinity. Gender here was created through relationships with others who presented themselves on different scales of gender. It did not matter that

[249] Maureen Dowd, "Ferraro Campaign: Perspectives that Startle," *New York Times*¸Oct 10, 1984
[250] *Christine,* directed by John Carpenter (Sony Pictures, 1983).
[251] Janet Maslin, "Film: 'Christine,' a Car," *New York Times,* Dec 9, 1983.
Jay Carr, "'Christine' unleashes a demonic Fury," *Boston Globe,* Dec 10, 1983.

Christine did not have a human body. Giving the vehicle the female moniker and treating it as such made the car feminine. Leigh's challenge to this relationship quite literally drove the plot forward, making the horror film a bitter and bloody love triangle. Femininity, then, and to a certain extent, gender as a whole, conceptually extended beyond the human body.

We've seen attempts by White House Communications teams in the Carter and Reagan administrations to masculinize the President, but with Ferraro now in the public eye, how would she be presented? The novelty of womanhood in politics was enough to spark excitement in the Democratic platform; like Christine, it was seductive to have a woman in power. Despite Mondale's assurance that she was the best candidate for the job due to her Congressional experience, her womanhood could not be ignored.[252] What media had issues in reporting then, were the conflicting elements of gender.

> These are two sides of Ferraro, the mainstream Democratic congresswoman from Queens - 'one of the guys,' as they call her on the House floor - and Ferraro the feminist, wife and mother. Those two identities promise to make her position on the Democratic ticket the most intriguing and unpredictable factor of the presidential race.[253]

In the politics of the 1980s, women couldn't just be women, they had to be men. News reports like these only added to the performance of gender that she had been displaying during her candidacy. Ferraro's prowess and skill were qualities that made her masculine, or, 'one of the guys,' as if to say feminine characteristics were not a factor in successful governing. Akin to Arnie Cunningham, Christine wasn't just a car, but a female car.

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[252] Weintraub, "'Difficult Decision.'"
[253] Peter Behr, "Geraldine Ferraro's Perspective On Women and the Economy," *The Washington Post,* July 15, 1984

Thus, in gaining the Vice-Presidential nomination, Ferraro's womanhood was absolutely a political tool, but that very womanhood still undermined her accomplishments. While she undeniably held powerful positions in government, and in 1984, would be in the running to hold the 2nd highest political position in the country, her legitimacy as a candidate was also questioned simply for being a woman in a place where only men were supposed to belong.

In complicating this narrative, Robert Hiltzik's *Sleepaway Camp* (1983) was framed as a traditional camp slasher filled with the dead bodies of promiscuous teens, but the central character, Angela Baker, complicated what it meant to be the Final Girl.[254] Angela attended Camp Arawak with her cousin Ricky as a quiet and awkward girl; she didn't talk much and was picked on by the other girls in the camp. Regardless, people were suspicious of Angela since death seemed to follow her around until the climactic end to the film. She complicated the notion of ideological feminine-masculinity. After it's discovered that she decapitated the only camper that attended to her quiet and reserved nature, Angela stood naked on the lakeshore with a visible penis, as a camp counselor says, "Oh my God, she's a boy." *Sleepaway Camp* began with the premise that after a boating accident had killed her father and brother, Peter, Angela was sent to live with her aunt, Dr. Martha. However, in this reveal of genitalia, a flashback complicated the original narrative; Angela, not Peter, was the child who died in the accident, but Dr. Martha still raised Peter as a woman, as Angela.

Critics panned the film as somewhat generic: "More teenage murders in a summer camp setting."[255] Angela's reveal, within the sparsity of reviews, was likewise taken

[254] *Sleepaway Camp*, directed by Robert Hiltzik (Sony Pictures, 1984).
[255] Gene Siskel, "Siskel's Flicks Picks," *Chicago Tribune*, Apr 27, 1984

negatively, with critic Lou Cedrone saying, "[...] when the identity of the murderer is revealed, you may want to write the producers a nasty letter."[256] While this film exemplified the flexibility of gender, it also instilled with it a negative connotation to gender variance. *Sleepaway Camp*'s transphobic narrative implied that those who do not align their gender identity with their physical biology were, in many ways, monstrous. It was not exactly revealed as to why Angela does kill, though, the statement, "she's a boy," is revelatory enough; in the sociocultural milieu of the 1980s, the body took precedence over defining gender. Angela, as a proxy-Final Girl, had her 'finality' immediately removed as it's revealed that she had a penis. I'd presume that the horror illustrated in this film comes more from the reveal of Angela's genitalia over the reveal of her status as the camp killer. It's shocking to 1980s audiences that the body did not determine gender identity, resulting in, as Cedrone suggested, public outrage. Characteristics of any gender could be attributed to any *body*. Regardless of genitalia, Angela Baker was by all means a girl. She was a transgendered girl who witnessed the death of her sister and father and was forced to live with someone who enforced a feminine gender identity onto her. Sociopolitical issues that transgender people faced were not yet in the mainstream of progressive political policy or progressive Hollywood in the 1980s. However, as *Sleepaway Camp* demonstrated, gender's flexibility was still presented in popular media. Amidst the backdrop of Geraldine Ferraro's nomination, with papers emphasizing her toughness and with sexist remarks coming from Republican adversaries, Ferraro balanced on the line between masculinity and femininity; she was Ellen Ripley incarnate. And while her physicality was routinely complicated in the press like Angela Baker, binary

[256] Lou Cedrone, "Film Reviews," *The Sun*, Sep. 15, 1984.

gender and the visage of having both masculine and feminine qualities were impressed upon the Vice-Presidential nominee.

A Masculine Economy

Despite this surge in interest, and despite Ferraro's actual credibility as a Vice Presidential nominee, the Mondale/ Ferraro ticket fought an uphill battle against the charismatic Reagan/ Bush ticket. Newspaper columns were used by sexist men to give advice to the seasoned congresswoman; her Italian-American heritage was seen as a connection to the mafia; and, likely a significant factor in the continued downfall of the Democratic ticket, in early August 1984, John Zaccaro, Ferraro's husband, refused to release his income tax returns to the public.[257] As much as the 1984 Presidential Campaign was about women's visibility and growth in politics, it was also about the relationship between masculinity and the economy. Ferraro's early stance on the American economy was gendered, saying, "we are faced in this country with what is becoming known as the feminization of poverty."[258] At this time in the 1980s, women were more likely to be poor than their male coworkers, citing the extant wage gap. This, in her view, impacted other issues women specifically faced, like child and prenatal care. Ferraro made a gendered issue out of one that Republicans felt were divorced from it; that was, until August 1984. After receiving the Vice-Presidential nomination from Mondale, Ferraro had initially promised to release her and her husband's tax forms on

[257] Paul Light, "Some Advice for Geraldine Ferraro," *The Sun*, Jul 31, 1984
Richard Reeves, "A Curious Silence: The Stoning of Geraldine Ferraro," *The Sun*, Sep 23, 1984
David Shaw, "Ferraro's Silence on Her Finances Led to Scrutiny," *Los Angeles Times*, Dec 6, 1984
[258] Peter Behr, "Geraldine Ferraro's Perspective On Women and the Economy," *The Washington Post,* July 15, 1984

July 24th.[259] But in a statement reneging on that decision, her campaign was heavily criticized. What was John Zaccaro hiding in his real estate company? Had Ferraro and her husband paid their fair share of taxes? These questions stilted the Democratic candidates' abilities to discuss the 'real' issues they wanted to address. Coming to a head, on August 21st, Ferraro defended herself for 80 minutes in front of 38 TV cameras and more than 150 reporters, asserting her position that House rules were not previously violated in refusing to disclose her husband's financial statements.[260]

Regardless of any defense, of any newly released tax reports, reporters ran away with the story, trying to draw any connection from Ferraro to Zaccaro to the mafia. What it became was once again a sexist jab at Ferraro's position in politics; to critics, her nomination was a coverup to allow her husband to hide his ties with organized crime. She explained the sexist domination men had over women in regard to finances during her press conference:

> [...] any time I went to try to get a loan, or if I tried to sell my property, whatever I tried to do, it was always, well, you know, 'What interest does your husband have?' When I went out to get bank loans, they said to me, 'You must have your husband's signature' … By now between September and November, I knew that to have my husband's signature on a loan would be in violation of the law and said, 'He can't do it; he can't sign it. It will violate the law,' and they would say to me, 'you can't have a loan without his signature.'[261]

In this light, Ferraro was still somehow beholden to any action that her husband made. Even if she was running to become the 2nd most powerful person in the country, she was

[259] "Ferraro's Finances," *The Christuan Science Monitor,* Aug 15, 1984
[260] Rick Atkinson and Charles R. Babcock, "No Trust Violated, Candidate Declares," *The Washington Post,* Aug. 22, 1984
[261] Atkinson and Babcock, "No Trust Violated."

also still someone's wife. To the GOP, Zaccaro hid something that helped Ferraro succeed; her success was because of his supposed shady deals.

1980s Republicans fought this claim of sexism, however, stating that economic and financial issues were 'genderless,' and allowing for criticism of Ferraro without fear of backlash from women and Democratic supporters.[262] Their assertion fell flat in consideration on multiple fronts; the economy in 1980 was heavily gendered. GOP Representatives actively opposed equal pay scales for men and women, and in lieu of Ferraro's financial controversy, proposed to establish an Amendment that required all members of presidential tickets to disclose their tax returns, despite many themselves having not disclosed their own.[263] But on a cultural front, the American economy became an issue of gender due to Reagan's Communications' Director, David Gergen, and his influence in handling Reagan's image following his recovery from his attempted assassination. Economic recovery was tied with the President's masculine physical body with the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981. So, on both the economic and cultural fronts, it was a man's economy. With opponents running free with Ferraro's financial controversy, the strength of her image as a woman was still put into question as a viable leader.

"Come to Nicki"[264] - Seductive Femininity

[262] Howell Raines, "G.O.P. Seizes 'Genderless Issue' of Tax Returns to Attack Ferraro," *The New York Times,* Aug. 14, 1984
[263] Bob Drogin, "GOP Platform Takes Jab at Ferraro's Finances," *Los Angeles Times,* Aug 17, 1984 David Shribman and Brooks Jackson, "All the Information is Promised: Ferraro Finances Plague Democrats," *The Wall Street Journal*, Aug 14, 1984.
[264] *Videodrome*, directed by David Cronenberg (Universal, 1983).

The women and men of horror films released during the 1984 election cycle followed similar patterns of gendered subordination and criticism. In David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983), we see women broadcasted on television in sadomasochistic forms, abducted, tortured, and eventually murdered. Body horror and slashers remained represented in theaters, so, at face value, horror once again focused on instilling fear within women. But further analysis illuminated an understanding of the strength of femininity; from the high-ranking positions in media production and distribution women held, these films revealed the considerable power and influence women had and also demonstrated how gender could be utilized to undermine the power of men and the masculine body.

Ferraro, in the public eye during her Vice-Presidential candidacy, put her gender and womanhood on the front page. Discord amongst her communications staff of image-makers set a precedent for the Democratic ticket's ability to control the media narrative around their campaign; it was a difficult one to spin.[265] But where there was discord in one camp, the other, on the side of Reagan, dominated the campaign image. Largely in part due to David Gergen's precedent, the next deputy in command of the Reagan White House Communications office, Michael Deaver, was considered an organizational master in image-making. Choosing where to place the President and deciding what he said came second nature; "Every moment of every appearance was scheduled, every word was scripted, every place where Reagan was expected to stand was chalked with toe marks. The President was always prepared for a performance, and this had the inevitable effect of preserving him from confrontation and the genuine interplay of opinion, question, and

[265] Jane Perlez, "Press Secretary of Ferraro Campaign Leaves Post," *The New York Times,* Aug. 22, 1984.

argument that forms the basis of decision."[266] Campaign politics, in which campaigns 'sold' themselves to voters, were as performative as Deaver made it to be.

What further solidified the sale of the Republican image was the role of Merrie Spaeth, the newly appointed Director of the Office of Media Relations for the 1984 campaign. A former child actress, special assistant to the director of the FBI, and independent television producer, Spaeth, looking beyond creating the image, looked into ways to mass distribute the image that the Communications office created.[267] Media strategy was her role in the machineof image-making, utilizing new technology and streamlining the information pathway from the White House to news outlets. Utilizing satellite technology in the distribution of media, Spaeth worked out a deal with the Chamber of Commerce across the street; they had just set up their own satellite. With this technology, interviews could be recorded asynchronously and then simultaneously presented as if they were done at a certain time for a certain news outlet across the country.[268] With this, Spaeth's control over media timeslots optimized the ability for the Republican team to dominate television screens. She made sure that the Reagan image was shown everywhere. In her failed goal to develop a television studio in the White House, she also illuminated hypocritical thinking of the conservative camp; officers were against the idea for fears of accusations of managing the media, to which Spaeth shot back, "I never understood why they were so terrified, because that's what we tried to do every day."[269] Image-making had not yet been outwardly accepted by those in the

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[266] Maltese, *Spin Control,* 199.
[267] "Merrie Spaeth Is Married to Tex Lazar," *New York Times,* May 18th, 1984
Jane Perlez, "F.B.I. Shares Its Turf With White House Fellow: Background in Television," *New York Times,* Nov. 26, 1981
[268] Maltese, *Spin Control,* 200.
[269] Maltese, *Spin Control,* 203.

government as an official form of media production. Far from benign, Deaver and Spaeth's abilities to control, manage, and direct the image of the President was an insidious act; Washington and Hollywood came together once more. While the White House Office of Communications staff stood at the sidelines, far from the spotlight, Reagan was their actor, and all he needed to do was deliver their lines for a convincing performance.

While Merrie Spaeth's role was impactful, her impact was never fully publicly realized. Was it possible to say that the general population of the country knew how Spaeth orchestrated the media? Despite her and Michael Deaver's efforts to develop and distribute the image of Reagan, the incumbent leaders got credit for the win. In addition to disrupting the strength of the masculine male, horror film, revealed the influential and seductive power women had when they were specifically in control of the distribution of media. What is likely Cronenberg's most famous work, *Videodrome* (1983) was at the apex of the body horror film; in combining media and social theory with both imagined and hallucinatory violent spectacles of sadomasochism, sex, and violence, gender was a central cog in this working machine of media.[270]

In *Videodrome,* Max Renn acted as the President of CIVIC-TV, specializing specifically in sadomasochistic television programming. "We have to give people something they can't get anywhere else," he says, implying, for the public, that the consumption of violent and sexual content was profitable, and above all else, a form of cathartic, necessary entertainment.[271] His business changed, however, when he was introduced to a mysterious broadcast called Videodrome. Created by Professor Brian

[270] *Videodrome.*
[271] Ibid.

O'Blivion, Videodrome depicted scenes of very realistic torture and sexual violence. However, initially used as a means to replace reality with television, the Videodrome project had been overtaken by renegade workers who intended to use its mind-control capabilities to kill off people who have become overexposed to violent media. Renn, initially recruited to the renegades, became 're-programmed' by O'Blivion's daughter, Bianca, killing those who wished to use Videodrome for evil. Renn eventually, killed himself in the process, saying, "long live the new flesh."[272] Flesh is crucial to *Videodrome*; women and femininity were seductive entities to lure people to the program, but once in the program, those under its control became one with media. Videodrome required physical mediation between humanity and technology.

But in terms of power, while Renn and those involved with the renegade usage of the Videodrome were men, femininity ruled as the seductive power behind the project. Bianca O'Blivion acted as the recruitment head of resistance. When we are first introduced to her, Bianca worked in a homeless shelter, initially providing the homeless people a mediated method of catharsis, the original desire of her father. But at the climactic moment where Renn was sent to execute Bianca, she's able to break Videodrome's hold on Renn, the only one in the film to be able to do so. In return, she re-programmed him to kill off the renegade opposition, successfully utilizing this manipulative project to redeem her father's goals. Renn, despite being the main character, was just a vessel for her to act upon.

More influential, however, was psychology radio host Nicki Brand, played by rockstar Debbie Harry. Nicki works for the "Emotional Rescue Show," toying with a

[272] Ibid.

distressed caller and saying in an alluring voice, “You want help. You need help. You’re going insane. I can hear you disintegrating.”[273] For her, ‘rescue’ demanded total degradation and subordination. Additionally, while she told Renn that she believed that there was an oversaturation of violent media, she herself participated in sadomasochistic sex. Debbie Harry said of her character,

> I think that a lot of psychologists and psychiatrists want to know about all the stuff on a personal level. They want to feel it and do it. There are people in the field who do that. She was one of them. She tried everything - every emotional, physical situation - that she could.[274]

While Nicki ultimately disappeared in Pittsburgh due to her intrigue in appearing on the Videodrome feed, Renn would continuously have hallucinations of Nicki. Manipulating his own violent tendencies, Nicki had been tied up in his mind and encouraged him to whip her, resulting in the death of an enemy of the Videodrome renegades. At the end of the film, Nicki was ultimately the one to encourage Renn to kill himself to become part of the new flesh, using the seductive language inherited from her radio show; “I’m here to guide you, Max. [...] You have to go all the way now. Total transformation. [...] To become the new flesh you have to kill the old flesh. Don’t be afraid. Don’t be afraid to let your body die. Just come to me, Max. Come to Nicki.”[275] Her status as an object of desire was one source of her power.

I can’t be too certain of Merrie Spaeth’s ideas of power in controlling the White House’s relationship with news outlets, but there’s something to be said about how women are portrayed in mediated positions of power. The power of Spaeth wasn’t readily

[273] Ibid.
[274] Lisa Robinson, “Deborah Harry,” *Starlog Magazine,* May 1983, 8
[275] *Videodrome.*

recognizable with her own network creation, but, as we saw behind the booths and TV screens in *Videodrome*, women like Bianca O'Blivion and Nicki Brand were masters of manipulation. Horror simply interpreted that manipulation as seduction, which inherently became a part of politics.

New Flesh and the Same Morning

But what images did Michael Deaver and Merrie Spaeth deliver to the public when spreading support for the Republican ticket? How was Reagan's draw so much more effective in creating the landslide victory over Mondale and Ferraro? On the campaign trail, Ferraro was likable, humorous, and always related policy in terms of what was best for her family. In a way, her dealings on the campaign trail led reporters to believe that Ferraro's behavior mimicked that of the incumbent President.[276] In terms of gender, not only did this enforce a sort of masculinization on Ferraro's end, but how did Reagan, the President known for his created masculine presence, end up adopting 'feminine' traits? While the comparison made in this chapter discusses Ferraro, by terms of Kristeva and this delineation of boundary, Reagan must also be called into question.

The advertisements for the Mondale/ Ferraro ticket, evoked the anxieties of horror film. In one advertisement entitled, "House," eerie music played while the camera was set on a house bathed in darkness, with lights shining through the windows – it looked like *Halloween*.[277] Contrasted with images of the bright White House, the narrator threatened that Ronald Reagan would put American citizens into debt $18,000, framing it as a fate

[276] Lea Donosky, "Ferraro calling her own shots on campaign," *Chicago Tribune*, Oct 11, 1984.
[277] "House," Mondale/Ferraro Committee, Inc., 1984
www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1984/house

worse than the death at the hands of Michael Myers. Another ad entitled, "Orbiting," began with a shot from outer space, Earth precariously placed in the middle as the narrator claimed that this would be the site of new killer weapons.[278] Like the horror-sci-fi films before it, the extra terrestrial threat loomed over all of us. For the Mondale/ Ferarro campaign, fear, scaring voters of their potential futures seemed to be the avenue forward.

Placed in contrast with the Reagan campaign, Hal Riney's baritone voice played over a placid shot of a boat in a harbor, saying, "It's morning again in America."[279] In mid-May of 1984, the ad "Prouder, Stronger, Better," resounded on TV sets across the country.[280] Placid music played over the visuals of happy citizens, happy after a long day's work, happy and content to see the sunrise. Evoking the success of Reagan's economy, tackling increases of employment, homeownership, and a lower inflation, the advertisement punctuates, "Why would we ever want to return where we were less than four short years ago?"[281] This popular ad was but one example of Reagan's change to a more emotional campaign, though, with the knowledge of Michael Deaver's and Merrie Spaeth's influences on his campaign image, it's hard to say that this was the result of a changed mindset of the incumbent president.

Regardless the impact the image-makers had on this transition of focus, the success of this ad came from the decentralization of an aggressive, masculine image.

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[278] "Orbiting," Mondale/Ferraro Committee, Inc., 1984, www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1984/orbiting
[279] "Prouder, Stronger, Better," Reagan-Bush '84, 1984, www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1984/prouder-stronger-better
[280] "Reagan TV Ads Will Start Monday - 'It's Morning Again, in America," *Los Angeles Times*, May 19, 1984 https://www.aaaa.org/timeline-event/morning-america-dawn-first-political-ads/?cn-reloaded=1
[281] "Prouder, Stronger, Better."

With the imagery of classic Americana, farms, neighborhoods, and heterosexual marriages, the conservative platform led more emotionally than before. And this was noted by voters and reporters alike. Following the Republican victory, headlines in the *New York Times* praised "Reagan's Emotional Campaign," giving praise for its reverence to America.[282] Voter Richard Chute noted a swell of enthusiasm and patriotism for the country, while Eileen McDonald, who had voted for Carter in 1980, voted for the Republican ticket in 1984, citing that she felt his personality had been readily contained.[283] What these responses noted was a shift in identity and ideology. From a public perspective, Reagan had changed, and in that change had also changed the country for the better. "It's Morning Again" does not show strength. It did not need to convince anyone that the country needed to be improved. The ad was an overall appeal to satisfaction, that nothing, under Reagan, was going wrong. The President became both tough but emotional, straying away, but not too far, from his masculine presentation. In terms of *Videodrome*, Reagan, in some regard, through the influence of his Communications Office, attained the 'new flesh.'

As Bianca O'Blivion and Nicki Brand said to Renn in *Videodrome,* "Long live the new flesh," a sort of mantra for the Videodrome program.[284] Our anti-hero escaped a binary existence by becoming both real and imagined, but also escaped binary constrictions in the real hallucinations he experienced before his death. When a vaginal opening appeared on Renn's stomach, it acted as a sort of bridge between the real and the imagined. The gun he placed inside the gash becomes a part of his hand during his

[282] Philip H. Dougherty, "Advertising: Reagan's Emotional Campaign," *New York Times,* Nov 8, 1984.
[283] Jonathan Kaufman, "Why Reagan? Because he made them feel good," *Boston Globe,* Nov 8, 1984.
[284] *Videodrome.*

murder spree. When the renegade users of Videodrome recruited him, they placed a pulsing cassette inside that formed the basis for his domination. The vaginal opening allowed for his subordination to the layers of media that Videodrome produced, and within this subordination and control, Renn was no longer a voyeur of sadomasochistic acts done onto women, he himself was now a part of that process. From a gender and body-horror analysis, 'new flesh' was indicative of the change in penetrative act enacted on Renn. No longer limited by his masculine body, his flesh was now one without definition. To call it a feminine body as a result of insertion did a disservice to the attempt to disrupt binary thinking of gender. For Cronenberg, media held the ability to bounce between boundaries. This analysis of these Kristevan boundaries illustrated the power that media wielded. to delineate the bounds of real versus imagined and masculine versus feminine. Reagan's new flesh differed from Ferraro's new flesh because, on the basis of image, he was still a man.

After being asked his thoughts on horror film during the release of *Videodrome*, Cronenberg responded,

> A lot of people think of film, in general, as an escape, an escape to entertainment. But I think of horror films as art, as films of confrontation. I think of them as films that make you confront aspects of your own life that are difficult to face. In that way, horror's just like any other serious genre.[285]

The power that the media had was not lost on Cronenberg. With Vice Presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro and the controversies surrounding her run, media created sexist vitriol and criticism for a qualified and capable Vice President. Media, under the

[285] "Videodrome: Production Notes," Universal News – Press Department, Dec. 15, 1982.

White House Communications Office of Michael Deaver and Merrie Spaeth, was seen to be easily modifiable to appeal to a mass voter base. And even from the impact David Gergen had on Reagan's recovery, media had the power to ascribe gender. Cronenberg touched on this notion of artificiality in the aforementioned quote; did it really matter if something was true or not? Reagan might not be a feminine leader, but if Merrie Spaeth can project an emotional quality onto the President that was easily consumable by the public, to them, was it not any more real? His advertisements were comfortable, stable, and normative. With this analysis, it's important to also consider the image-makers around Presidential leaders. They showed the public what they wanted to see. They enhanced his presidentiality. Reagan's 'new flesh' was one that embodied masculine and feminine traits as a result of mediation. When selling the product of a Presidential campaign, the ability to ascribe qualities and characteristics through the mediated manipulation of his image was crucial to victory.

C4 - Reagan and AIDS

A Dreaded Disease

> The bitter truth was that AIDS did not just happen to America—it was allowed to happen by an array of institutions, all of which failed to perform their appropriate tasks to safeguard the public health. This failure of the system leaves a legacy of unnecessary suffering that will haunt the Western world for decades to come.[286]

On June 5th, 1981, Dr. Michael Gottlieb posted an article to the Center for Disease Control's *MMWR Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* entitled, "Pneumocystis pneumonia – Los Angeles," in which he outlined his findings of a rare case of pneumonia found in 5 young, homosexual men.[287] A month later, the *New York Times* escalated the panic, publishing an article entitled, "Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals," where otherwise healthy homosexual men were diagnosed with Kaposi's Sarcoma (KS), a rare form of skin cancer, soon to be known as 'the gay cancer.'[288] At this point, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention raised an alarm, establishing a small committee of scientists to investigate this outbreak of KS. Among the confusion, New York Gay Rights activists Larry Kramer and Paul Popham founded the Gay Men's Health Crisis during a dinner party, hoping to raise funds for research on the increasing cases of cancer in homosexual men.[289] These outbreaks garnered attention because of its bizarre complexity and targeting of a specific underrepresented group. Before being officially named by the CDC as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), the *New York Times* called the syndrome Gay-Related Immune Deficiency (GRID),

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[286] Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (New York City: St. Martin's Griffin, 2007).
Original edition published in 1987
[287] "*Pneumocystis* Pneumonia --- Los Angeles," *CDC Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 30, no. 21, Jun. 5, 1981. https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/june_5.htm
[288] Lawrence K. Altman, "Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals," *New York Times*, July 4, 1981
[289] Shilts, *And the Band Played On*, 119.

associating the pain, suffering, and morbidity of this affliction with an already marginalized gay community, despite new findings from the National Cancer Institute that AIDS was present in heterosexual men and women.[290]

Although at a skewed, homophobic perspective, it's clear from these passages that there were people who mobilized to find the root of this epidemic and sought a cure for the homosexual men afflicted, but the government response left much to be desired. As a branch of the Department of Health and Human Services, while the CDC was part of the federal government, those in the White House tasked with maintaining the image of Ronald Reagan had nothing immediate to say of the epidemic. Reagan himself was silent. In understanding the religious and body-forward undertones of the Reagan Administration, how did AIDS, a disease that literally destroyed a body's immune system, evade any presidential address? This chapter is a case study that closely examines how political masculinity was central to the policy decisions of the Reagan Administration.

What followed from the prioritization of binary masculinity was this obfuscation of the perils that non-binary people experienced during the HIV/ AIDS pandemic. The programs and policies outlined in the previous section served as a means in which the public politics of the conservative party expressed the loyalty of their target audience: rigidly binary Americans. Amidst budget balancing and proposing extravagantly expensive Star War programs, the federal government was both unwilling and unable to provide medical assistance to the increasing number of homosexual men and intravenous drug users dying of AIDS-related diseases. For the Reagan Administration, maintaining

[290] Lawrence K. Altman, "New Homosexual Disorder Worries Health Officials," *New York Times,* May 11, 1982.

the economy, gatekeeping the spread of global communism, and instilling moral, religious values lay at the core of their body politics, and bodies that lay outside of that target were expendable and vilified. To say they did nothing was incorrect; inactivity was intentional.

AIDS had become a dreaded disease, not only because it wreaked havoc upon one's body, but also because it struck an immense fear and anxiety among the general population. In his conception of the term, gerontologist and Lutheran clergyman Kenneth Doka insisted that dreaded diseases were as social as they are biological.[291] From the first articles released by the CDC and the New York Times, there was no clarity on how AIDS was transmitted - all the public knew was that this disease largely affected male homosexuals. Stigma soon followed. At one point, news columnists from the *New York Times* wanted to call it WOGS, or the Wrath of God Syndrome.[292] For those outside the gay community, this was brought upon by gay men's own actions. Before he became Reagan's Press Secretary in 1985, Pat Buchanan said of those who had AIDS, "The sexual revolution has begun to devour its children. And among the revolutionary vanguard, the gay rights activists, the mortality rate is highest and climbing … The poor homosexuals - they have declared war on nature and now nature is exacting an awful retribution."[293] Even Larry Speakes, the Press Secretary that succeeded Jim Brady, had negatively addressed the AIDS epidemic in the White House Briefing Room in 1982. After being asked about a CDC report stating that AIDS had reached over 600 cases,

[291] Kenneth J. Doka, *AIDS, Fear and Society: Challenging the Dreaded Disease* (Taylor & Francis, 1997), xi.
[292] Altman, "New Homosexual Disorder…"
[293] Shilts, *And the Band Played On,* 311.

Speakes responded in a mocking manner, saying, "What's AIDS? [...] I don't have it. Do you?"[294]

"They're us"[295] - Zombies and Society

The zombie was emblematic of the first wave of the American AIDS epidemic, acting as a physical and boundary-breaking contagion that affected the physical and social lives of a given population. The dread of the survivors set in as they realized that they, amongst their now undead friends, family, and randomized group of compatriots, were the only ones uninfected, now vying to survive and keep their own humanity. Although a mocking nod, Speakes' retort, "Do you?" suggested a cultural worry of contagion. But what did it mean to be undead and what were the connotations that came with contagion? Hollywood was very familiar with the undead. The champion of the zombie, George Romero, continued his own franchise in 1985 with *Day of the Dead.* No stranger to politics he stated, "when I'm making horror film, I can slip those little messages in without anyone really noticing until they're safely out of the theater!"[296] What did Romero's zombies have to do with American society in 1985?

After the events of Romero's previous films, humanity had failed; the entire world was subject to the zombie apocalypse in *Day of the Dead*.[297] There were no more civilians, no semblance of humanity. The extant zombie resistance in the US was militaristic, with soldiers and researchers in various camps, fighting underground to stay

[294] Jose Antonio Vargas, "Gays Recall a Silent Great Communicator," *Washington Post*, Jun 13, 2004
[295] Jane Leavy, "Grave New World: Filmmaker George Romero Hits 'Dead' Center With His Zombies," *The Washington Post*, Jun. 30, 1985.
[296] Patrick Goldstein, "George Romero: Cinema With a Touch of Evil," *Los Angeles Times*, Jul 31, 1988
[297] *Day of the Dead,* directed by George Romero (United Film Distribution Co., 1985).

alive as supplies ran short. Dr. Sarah Bowman, an archetypal masculine-feminine woman, acted as the voice of reason for the group, intending to conduct enough research to discover a cure for the zombie virus. However, her power was challenged and soundly squashed by the militaristic Captain Rhodes, electing to limit the resources given to the researchers in favor of the armed forces. But what was most crucial in understanding this movie in relation to the fears projected by infectious zombies was the role of Bub, a trained zombie through the work of mad researcher, Dr. "Frankenstein" Logan. Dr. Logan's research was dedicated to training zombies to become more civilized. Bub was his prime student, stating to Rhodes, "*They are us*. They are the extensions of us. They are the same animal, simply functioning less perfectly."[298] The zombie, acting on Pavlovian instinct and rewards, began to cross this border between undead and human, much to the disgust of Dr. Bowman and Rhodes. Bub could play music, repeat words, and could even remember his military training by firing a gun. Being a zombie is disgusting, but having a zombie act like a civilized human evoked terror in those who are 'alive.' When Rhodes' Private, Steele, who was notoriously aggressive towards zombies, was bitten amidst a swarm of zombies in the underground chambers, instead of succumbing to the zombie virus, he shot himself in the head before any transformation could take place. Another Private, the increasingly erratic and nervous Miguel, was bitten in the arm but was saved when Dr. Bowman amputated and cauterized the wound. Since no one was certain that the infection had actually been stopped, Miguel also existed in this non-binary state, and like Steel, elected to kill himself by surrendering to the zombies. It's this middle ground that evoked notions of the abject. For Private Steel and

[298] *Day of the Dead.*

Miguel, one was either dead or undead; crossing that border was not an option for them. For Bub, who existed on the border, the fact that he restored even a bit of his humanity was more disgusting than his own physicality. The non-binary retribution came as he used his humanity to kill the militaristic Rhodes by gunfire. What's scarier than a zombie that knows how to use a gun?

> Stephen King said of Romero:
>
> To [him] there is something really funny in the horror that we don't see … It's the same impulse as stepping on a banana peel. It's never funny when it happens to you. That's where horror starts.[299]

In looking at AIDS as a dreaded disease, the denigration of homosexual men that existed outside binary-masculinity was reflected here. Finding out that anyone could be a zombie was akin to finding out that anyone could get AIDS. The polarity of the language of science - infected versus uninfected, healthy versus sick - created the conditions in which social ideology could affect how the polar 'opposites' were treated. But when something disrupted that polarity, like a "humanized zombie," then the entire binary system and the meaning within that system broke down. What did it, then, mean to have AIDS? What came with the affliction was a disparagement of homosexuality. Its specificity to male homosexuals and the lack of direction from the medical community on how it was transmitted stigmatized AIDS to the point where, from Susan Sontag, AIDS became a metaphor for homosexuality, each compounding their negative connotations.[300] But if homosexuality was equated with AIDS, then what did it ideologically mean for someone during the Reagan Era to be a homosexual? Evangelical morality and its gendered,

[299] Leavy, "Grave New World…"
[300] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York City: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977).

paternalistic ideology cannot be ignored. For bigoted people with political power in the Reagan Administration like Pat Buchanan or Larry Speakes, their own commentary on the AIDS epidemic became a means in which they could continue to push fundamentally religious conservatism into the political sphere as a polemic against femininity and homosexuality in men. And not limited to those in office, bigotry came from neighbors and peers, as well. As Dr. "Frankenstein" stated in *Day of the Dead*:

> Civil behavior is what distinguishes us from the lower forms. It's what enables us to communicate, to go about things in an orderly fashion without attacking each other like beasts in the wild. Civility must be rewarded, captain. If it isn't rewarded, there's no use for it. There's just no use for it at all.[301]

The stigma that people in non-binary positions faced was rooted in the oppression of non-binary ideology. Despite being the most capable and most level-headed of the resistance group, Dr. Bowman retained no power among the group due to her lack of physical power; her masculine-femininity in itself acted as a non-binary marker. Begging for Freudian analysis, Captain Rhodes had three guns on his body at all times, his Privates were sexual and abusive, and they're the only ones who were shown a brutal death at the decaying hands of hundreds of zombies. The survivors were the ones who fell outside of white binary masculinity. But for the zombies, "They're us," Romero stated.

The American Medical Association (AMA) released a news statement on May 6th, 1983, titled, "Evidence Suggests Household Contact May Transmit AIDS."[302] Media outside of the AMA took this headline, partly authored by rising National Institute of Health (NIH) star, Dr. Anthony Fauci and ran. The information released by the AMA,

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[301] *Day of the Dead.*
[302] American Medical Association, "Evidence Suggests Household Contact May Transmit AIDS," May 6, 1983

however, was incorrect; the newborn infants surveyed in the research study had contracted AIDS in the womb, something that had already been widely understood by the medical community studying AIDS. Communication fell apart. Fauci had not been given the whole report before the press release, the press department of the AMA had run with a sensationalist article, and wider media misinterpreted the hypothetical nature of scientific language.[303] This was even after the discovery of the human immunodeficiency virus. The damage, however, was already done. The public at large began to worry that AIDS had evolved beyond its stereotypical recipients: homosexual men, intravenous drug users, and hemophiliacs. Boundaries were seemingly being crossed, and populations that had no previous reason to fear AIDS were finally seeing it as a dreaded disease. But it wasn't solely that AIDS had become a 'straight' disease; the fear stemmed from the potential for heterosexual people, people who upheld the Reagan masculine image and conservative morality, to become afflicted with 'gay cancer.' Fear stemmed not just from death, but from the negative connotations that came with AIDS.

This miscommunication in presenting this information was emblematic of the larger issues faced by the Reagan Administration's wider medical community. Doctors and researchers in the CDC, AMA, National Cancer Institute (NCI), and the National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) like Dr. Fauci, Dr. Michael Gottleib, and Dr. Robert Gallo, the 'Dr. Bowmans' of the real-world worked relentlessly to save lives at the onset of the epidemic. Reagan, however, appointed individuals like the 1983 CDC Director, Dr. William Foege, Assistant Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS), Dr. Edward Brandt, and the HHS Secretary, Margaret Heckler, who

[303] Shilts, *And the Band Played On*, 300.

found themselves in the uncomfortable position of serving both public needs and conservative ideology.

Funding for AIDS research from a federal level was the most contentious point of conflict. Starting in her role as the HHS Secretary in March 1983, Margaret Heckler appeared to start from scratch with the government's response to AIDS; she claimed she had not heard anything of the epidemic despite going through the entire confirmation process. From that point, she had assured the assistant HHS Secretary, Dr. Brandt, that this was to be her utmost priority, and yet, she never had a single conversation with President Reagan regarding the matter. Heckler played both the role of AIDS sympathizer and Reagan conservative. On one hand, in conference with CDC researchers, she would visit AIDS clinics, filled with young gay men and kids with hemophilia suffering from the disease. On the other hand, she was a staunch supporter of reducing government spending, in favor of cultivating the expertise already present at the CDC and NIH rather than procuring additional funding sources.[304] According to Heckler, the total amount of money spent on AIDS research during Reagan's entire presidential run amounted to $5.7 billion, meager in comparison to the $1.5 trillion spent by the military in Reagan's first term alone.[305] A request for $10 million or $20 million by CDC researchers was denied. Spending money and saving lives were compatible ideas upon first glance, but from the knowledge gained about New Right conservative ideology and culture, prioritizing the economic body, Reagan's strength, was tantamount. Heckler stated:

[304] "Interview: Heckler," Frontline: The Age of AIDS, PBS, Jan 11, 2006, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/aids/interviews/heckler.html
[305] "Interview: Heckler"

> I think that really, we could not have gained anything more by increasing the cash expenditures. We were in the right direction. We were placing the emphasis on those who could provide the answers. In a peculiar case, this was not a problem that money could solve; it was a problem that the scientists could solve, and so one had to balance the various segments of the AIDS dilemma.[306]

By spending money on an alleged homosexual disease, any additional allocation of funds to organizations like the CDC and the NIH was seen as supporting of bodies that were not deemed as binary-masculine; "Acknowledging the gay lobby was tantamount to embracing homosexuality."[307] So despite sentiment towards those who were withering away from AIDS, Heckler truly believed that the federal government under Reagan was doing the most it possibly could to prevent the spread of the disease. This is not complacency and inactivity, Heckler accepted queer death as the right thing to do.

However, Heckler's statement stood in contrast to CDC researcher Don Francis's account of CDC conditions; the immediate research personnel were capable, but the working conditions and resources were much less so. At the onset of establishing proper laboratories to research AIDS in 1981, Francis and other researchers had to steal equipment from other labs.[308] They had to punch holes in the walls of the CDC to reach carbon dioxide tanks.[309] Budget wise, Francis and other AIDS researchers were victims of conservative fiscal spending. They couldn't even afford basic textbooks. When Francis pressured the current CDC Director, Dr. William Foege, his memo was intercepted by a Freedom of Information Act request and subsequently denied.[310] For an epidemic like

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[306] Ibid.
[307] Doka, *AIDS, Fear and Society,* 64.
[308] "Interview: Don Francis," Frontline: The Age of AIDS, PBS, Dec 2, 2004, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/aids/interviews/francis.html
[309] Shilts, *And the Band Played On,* 288.
[310] Ibid, 289.

AIDS, Francis would say, getting an early control over the disease was crucial, but because of the limitations and unwillingness of bureaucratic officials to increase the HHS budget and with compliant leadership like Margaret Heckler, AIDS was allowed to run rampant, resulting in millions of more global deaths.[311] Researchers like Dr. Francis needed funding, but officials were so blinded by the shiny strength of Reagan's Reaganomics that they failed to see where the literal holes were in the CDC's AIDS research. Ever the critic of the Reagan administration, Francis stated:

> [It was] public health malpractice that not only did they limit the funds that would be necessary to accomplish it, but they inhibited the programs, reviewed the programs' publicity and the programs' messages, and were reviewing posters from CDC in the White House. It was just every statement that came out, instead of being a statement of protecting the public's health, became statements to protect the politicians in Washington rather than the public's health. It was tragic, dangerous and set a precedent that is still reverberating around the world. …[312]

So, what kind of image did the Reagan administration project during this public health malpractice? It bears repeating: spending money on the treatment of the American AIDS epidemic meant acknowledging the presence of non-masculine, non-binary bodies; sending aid meant, in a way, accepting those bodies as they were. Biologically, AIDS destroyed bodies that fell against the normative ideology of Reagan conservatism. Queer men died emaciated, and the response by the HHS and the Budget Office was to assume that those who led the research in developing cures and vaccines for AIDS had it under control. Aligning with Doka's dreaded disease definition, the sociocultural impact of the AIDS epidemic had serious ramifications that affected and delayed treatment. LGBTQ+

[311] "Interview: Don Francis"
[312] Ibid

community leaders often took the mantle and vied for their own lives, seeing as the government would not support their wellbeing. The lack of assistance was a signal that indicated their exclusion from the goals of a conservative administration. White House Press Secretaries like Pat Buchanan and Larry Speakes poked fun at queer people dying of AIDS. Apathetic HHS personnel like Margaret Heckler allowed queer people to die. And the President had not yet addressed AIDS. Put best;

> Evidence of the rigid border taken to delimit 'safe,' where normal people are on one side and 'polluted,' deviant people on the other, can be found in press attitudes to the reporting of the disease, especially in its early days. [...] the press saw AIDS as a way to reinforce the borderline which it had customarily drawn before the advent of the illness.[313]

Deliberate inaction was a means the Reagan administration used to define themselves as different from those they did not consider to be tough, masculine men. Chaos amidst the gay community was met with apathy. But with the implementation of this border, this instilling of queer versus binary masculine bodies, the border itself acted as an instrument of fear; why were conservatives so hellbent on designating the AIDS crises as an 'us versus them' issue? As revealed in the short panic brought upon the AMA's article, conservative bodies feared that the dreaded disease was capable of crossing gendered borders.

[313] Kenneth MacKinnon, *The Politics of Popular Representation: Reagan, Thatcher, AIDS, And the Movies* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992), 162.

Insect Politics

> Insects don't have politics. They're very brutal. No compassion. No compromise. We can't trust the insect. But I'd like to become the first … first insect politician. I'd like to, but I'm afraid…[314]

The Reagan Administration's upholding of masculine leadership through fiscal saving meant stunting the progress of HIV/ AIDS research and leaving gay men to suffer and die of the affliction; it was a brutal policy, devoid of empathy and hidden beneath binary bureaucracy. In attaching the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981 to Reagan's recovering body, in increasing military spending by 50% to $1.5 trillion within his first term, and in choosing to actively remain actionless as the AIDS epidemic swept through the LBGT communities in the United States, the focal point of the administration's politics lay with upholding a tough, masculine exterior, and eschewing anything that fell outside of the binary spectrum. This was Insect Politics at its finest. Derived from David Cronenberg's 1986 body horror film, *The Fly*, the application of Insect Politics refers specifically to the Reagan Administration's body-centric, uncompromising approach to masculine politics. With Insect Politics, bodies are not neutral spaces, they become battlegrounds on which policy and ideology is forced upon. For Reagan, his body was his image, a signifier of gendered positionality, and for Cronenberg, with his expertise and desire to reimagine and experiment with the limits of the human body, the body, in particular the masculine body, defined masculine ideology; the body was primary.[315] *The Fly* demonstrated that, at all costs, Insect Politics was an ideology to avoid.

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[314] *The Fly.*
[315] David Edelstein, "David Cronenberg: Lord of 'The Fly,'" *Village Voice*, Aug 19, 1986

Seth Brundle, portrayed by Jeff Goldblum, was an awkward and sheltered scientist opposed to binaries. He hated traveling, or rather, the process of getting from Point A to Point B made him physically ill (the classic Kristevan response to abjection). To remedy this, he invented a teleportation system, essentially eliminating travel. Veronica, a savvy and ambitious journalist played by Goldblum's then girlfriend, Geena Davis, was immediately set on publishing this seminal creation. The single caveat was that the 'telepods' were not yet calibrated to teleport living things. The progressive nature of invention, however, was not the focus of the film. A review in the *Village Voice* summed up Cronenberg's film: "There is no comforting hope in *The Fly*."[316] Veronica's ex-boyfriend, Stathis, and Brundle competed in a bitter love triangle. Brundle himself fell deeper and deeper into mania, and in a drunken stupor beset by his own jealousy, the scientist successfully managed to teleport himself through the telepods, but in the process, his biology was mixed with that of a housefly. What resulted was a further decline of his sanity; the half-human, half-fly Brundlefly ebbed between their new biology, slowly breaking off human limbs and teeth in exchange for insectoid mandibles and abilities. Brundlefly was torn between their two identities. Fly biology allows for superhuman strength, and in their view, would make for a humorous children's tv show host. But overwhelmingly, the departure from human biology pushed Brundlefly to force Veronica, now pregnant with his hybrid offspring, to merge with him via the telepods to rescue his humanity. In an ensuing fight between Veronica, Brundlefly, and Stathis, the Brundlefly was forcibly merged with the electronic remains of a destroyed telepod, now

[316] Andre Sarris, "The Fly: Winged Victory," *The Village Voice,* Aug 19, 1986

becoming the Brundle-Thing. Cronenberg's and writer Chuck Pogue's script illustrate the scene best:

> The Brundle-Thing comes after him, dragging parts of its lower body along the floor, pieces of black insect flesh fused with electronic circuitry dropping off it as it comes, a hideous, raging, MORTALLY STRICKEN monstrosity. Its claw-hands, which now stick out of its body at crazy, asymmetrical angles, reach out for Stathis. Stathis twists away but falls crashing to the floor. [...] The Brundle-Thing's CLAW-FINGERS TREMBLE as it reaches out for Stathis. Is it trying to attack Stathis or is it reaching out for some kind, any kind of human contact? There is no way for us to know.[317]

But what was more telling to note, is that what was actually shown on-screen differed from Cronenberg's and Pogue's script. The Brundle-Thing still struggled to exist upon exiting the telepod, but instead of reaching out to Stathis, it crawled towards the shotgun-armed and distraught Veronica. Reaching out with its claw-fingers, it pulled the shotgun towards its head, begging to be put out of its misery. The humanity within the Brundle-Thing was overrun by its new biological ambiguity, and no longer wanted to exist. Hopeless, indeed.

In *The Fly*, Insect Politics existed in the bodies and within the love triangle between Brundle, Veronica, and Stathis. Above all, this was a film about romance; John Getz, who played Stathis, reported that Cronenberg, in describing the love triangle, expressed that *The Fly* was actually a romantic comedy.[318] Behind the perversity of the statement lay the truth that the brutality behind Insect Politics depended on social relationships. Brundle's transformation began as an act of jealousy. Stathis and Veronica were disgusted at the sight of the physical changes of the Brundlefly, largely affecting the

[317] *The Fly.*
[318] *Fear of the Flesh - Making of the Fly,* directed by David Prior (2005).

directions of affection within the love triangle. But what Insect Politics did for Brundle, despite his fear of becoming the first insect politician, was that it initially gave him what he lacked when he first met Veronica: masculinity. Veronica immediately noted his awkward and bizarre quirks. At the first opportunity of intimacy with her, Brundle was snapped back to his former, unassertive self after rolling over a sharp circuit board that happened to be laying in his bed. Immediately after going through the telepods, and unknowingly merging with fly biology, however, the romantic couple were able to consummate their attraction. From this, Brundle gained quick reflexes, agility, confidence, and strength, breaking a man's forearm in an arm-wrestling match, and then proceeding to have sex with that same man's girlfriend. A tirade to Veronica illustrated his own adherence to his newfound masculinity:

> You're afraid to be destroyed and reconsidered, aren't you? You might think you were the one to teach me about the flesh, but you only know society's straight line about the flesh, you can't penetrate beyond society's sick, gray fear of the flesh![319]

This, of course, all happened before the fly physiology overtook the masculine human body. The mention of flesh evoked Cronenberg's *Videodrome,* inviting viewers to embrace the 'new flesh.' It neared an embrace of non-binary gender identification, discussing the gray areas of flesh that society cannot comprehend. But, in this instance, Brundle's evocation of the new flesh was a case of dramatic irony - he believed his new flesh was a result of enhanced masculinity due to technology, when in reality, this masculinity, the masculinity of a fly, was inhuman itself. Cronenberg's philosophy on

[319] *The Fly.*

masculinity, then, was one that sees the more volatile, toxic, and physical masculinity as something that was inhuman, and, by the end, something that was physically grotesque.

Additionally, in bearing Brundlefly's child, Veronica's body also became a site of Insect Politics. In a way, her pregnancy was a mirror of the telepod's creation of the Brundlefly; biology was mixed to create new progeny. This was another show of body horror. In a fantasy sequence, Veronica, about to give birth, was accompanied by Stathis as they rushed to a hospital. The obstetrician (tellingly played in a cameo by Cronenberg himself), initially believing that Veronica was having a miscarriage and asked Veronica to push out the child inside her. What was birthed, however, brought abject horror to those in the room; Veronica gave birth to a giant maggot, wriggling and covered in blood. But what was most politically progressive following the horrific nightmare was Veronica's assertion of her reproductive rights. Vehemently requesting to abort Brundle's half-human, half-fly child was in itself a resistance to Insect Politics; no one could tell her what she could do with her own body. It was a triumph of women over masculine control.

Thus, in the context of 1986 amidst the Reagan Administration's second term and well into the continuation of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, what was *The Fly*'s cultural contribution? In more general terms, the physical peril that Brundlefly faced at the deterioration of his body and identity was not unlike the reemergence of Sam Raimi's and George Romero's zombie movies. Brundlefly was shunned by those in their immediate social circle, and the disease itself fell in between a binary of human vs non-human. However, as stated earlier, *The Fly* contained no element of hope. There was no zombie that regained his humanity after becoming undead. It was a product of brutal Insect Politics. Cronenberg's and his team's musings illuminated the tragedy of this film.

Cronenberg stated that the production of *The Fly* was, in part, a reflection of his experience watching his father die from cancer.[320] Geena Davis mentioned that Cronenberg encouraged her to substitute cancer for turning into a fly and to think of what would happen when your loved one turned into something else and you saw them deteriorate in front of you.[321] It's an emotionally driven thought experiment, not only illustrating the closeness Cronenberg had to the film, but also the proximity in which horror could serve as medium of emotional catharsis. Contextualized in the light of the HIV/ AIDS pandemic, the message became one of empathy; Veronica, despite her disgust at the transformation of Brundle, couldn't cope with mercy killing her former partner. But mere substitution of the condition of turning into a fly with the affliction of HIV/AIDS required more nuanced investigation, especially as it pertained to the non-interventionist policy of the Reagan Administration.

In generating ideas to revamp the 1958 iteration of *The Fly*, producer Stuart Cornfeld and writer Chuck Pogue both agreed that a less binary metamorphosis needed to occur to make the 1986 iteration of *The Fly* more successful.[322] Brundle should not just become a fly, rather, conflict should stem from the non-binary positionality of his biological hybridity. So, what did the fly physiology represent? If the transformation into a monstrous chimera was only brought because of the grotesqueness and inhumanity of masculinity, according to Cronenberg, what really was the true affliction in the 1980s? To accept that the masculine traits adopted by Brundle after merging fly and human biologies came from the non-human fly meant to accept that masculinity was

[320] Edelstein, "David Cronenberg…"
[321] *Fear of the Flesh*
[322] *Fear of the Flesh*

Cronenberg's dreaded disease, the genesis of Insect Politics – Brundle wasn't masculine, but the fly was. Insect Politics reflected the Reagan Administration's body politics. Upholding masculinity, specifically physical, bodily masculinity as the primary mode of leadership was an uncompassionate political style. But what Cronenberg and his team could additionally do in the fantasy of body horror was divorce masculine physiology from masculine ideology and provide a sharper critique of the gendered society. *The Fly* was a narrative of someone attaining more masculinity, becoming consumed by it, and then perishing in its ideology, not its physiology. Once the fly physiology consumes Brundle's masculine physiology, his masculine ideology could not function without a physical form. In this instance, this physical hybridity should not be seen as a critique of non-binary identity. Brundle liked his non-binary, insect/ human body. His changed behavior, however, similar to Arnie Cummingham in *Christine*, was what led to his demise. *The Fly* critiqued binary toxic masculinity as an ideology that destroyed every body.

As Cronenberg and Pogue wrote in the final conflict between Brundlefly, Veronica, and Stathis as her abortion was stopped, Brundlefly begged for his humanity, saying,

> Why did you want to kill Brundle? The baby will be all that's left of the real Brundle. Please don't kill me. Please don't kill me.[323]

It was ambiguous whether or not Brundlefly is referring to his own death or his progeny's death, but it is clear that the 'real Brundle' no longer inhabited Brundlefly; his biology was left with Veronica's baby. While the body of Ronald Reagan will always exist as a

[323] *The Fly.*

masculine body, Cronenberg's expertise in transforming the body in horror allowed for a deeper analysis of physical versus ideological masculinity. HIV/ AIDS was a disease that was constructed as one that existed outside of physical binary masculinity. If Brundlefly/ Brundle-Thing was a victim of ideological masculinity, devoid of a masculine body, then HIV/ AIDS was not the premise of *The Fly*. Cronenberg instead framed ideological masculinity as a plague, the genesis of Insect Politics. Insect Politics then can be defined as hyper-masculine leadership that is unfeeling, unempathetic, and exclusive; those that don't belong, those that don't uphold a specific air of masculinity, for all anyone in the Reagan Administration could care, can die. Unlike the zombie, this affliction was not based in conditions of public health, but rather based in one's own pursuit to eliminate the non-binary; Brundle's own invention of the telepods was created to eliminate the liminal space between Points A and B. The survivability of the Reagan Administration's own efforts to prioritize a leadership style based in binary masculinity was wholly dependent on being able to affect change on the physical body. As with the brutal policy to let people afflicted with HIV/ AIDS die, people like Reagan's Health and Human Services Secretary, Margaret Heckler, upheld masculinity as dominant and were willing to cover these deaths with silence.

Although he claimed his films were apolitical, David Cronenberg exists within a political system, and unfortunately, like the rest of us, was subject to its rule.[324] However, his work with body horror provided an insightful lens into his implicit political interactions. Film was revealing and cathartic, as Cronenberg posited, "the catharsis does not purge; *it makes clear*.[325] The attraction to *The Fly*, earning over $37 million at the

[324] Breskin, *Inner Views.*
[325] Breskin, *Inner Views.*

Box Office, might have made clear to viewers the ills of masculinity, the power of women's reproductive rights, and, ultimately, potential issues that lay with a binary formulation of gender.[326]

The Wrong, 'Wrong' Body as a Text[327]

Although masculinity lay at the visual forefront of the Reagan Administration, academics have discussed gender fluidity even before Reagan's election in 1979. During the 1980s pivotal works of gender history emerged. In 1986, gender historian Joan W. Scott published "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," positing that strict boundaries of gender only reinforced gendered power differences between men and women, in turn, affecting politics. Scott also suggested that simply defying this binary, questioning the supposed binary difference between genders, disrupted its power.[328] Transgender people were often at the center of this debate - in 1980, the American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) officially designated Transsexualism a psychiatric disorder, standardizing a diagnosis as the feeling that one was in the wrong body.[329] Note that the feeling of 'wrongness' comes first. But Stone argued that even this rhetoric limited the body to a binary. What was the 'right' body then? People expressed their own ideas through the bodies of others. Ronald Reagan's White House Office of Communications used his body to pass economic legislation. David Cronenberg used the body of Seth Brundle to complicate and make masculinity

[326] "North America (US and Canada) Domestic Movie Chart for 1986," The Numbers, https://www.the-numbers.com/market/1986/top-grossing-movies
[327] Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back," 162.
[328] Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5, 1986: https://doi.org/10.2307/1864376
[329] Stone, "The Empire Strikes Back," 160.

problematic. Stone saw the body as a non-binary text and revealed that other theorists felt the same.

But while the dissolution of the gender binary seemed to emerge strongly from female and non-binary academics during the mid-1980s, as Scott recalled during her first presentation of "Gender," at Princeton University in 1985, she was met with scowls and silence, silence being the more harmful response to a historian with a revolutionary idea.[330] As revolutionary as gender is by today's standards, advocating for the elimination of a male-female binary, the source of political power for gender, was not an idea to toy with during the tumultuous Reagan Era. The country felt the effects of the apex of political masculinity in Ronald Reagan and his economic and social policies. On the other hand, people who often fell out of this masculine binary were dying of AIDS, swept aside by an unwilling, brutal style of conservative insect politics. Women politicians like Geraldine Ferraro who deviated from femininity (i.e., expressed any semblance of masculinity) were rejected and rationalized back to their gender role. This was a country awash in gender binaries; Reagan's masculine image assured that nothing was wrong on the surface. Despite the writings of Scott, Haraway, and Stone, and even the horror films of Carpenter, Cronenberg, and many others, critiquing and reexamining binary systems seemed nothing more than a signal lost in the noise. The texts both gender scholars and horror filmmakers had written on non-binary, transgender, or mutilated bodies seemed to pale in comparison to the texts inscribed on Reagan's Presidential figure. If bodies were texts, what kind of body could demystify the masculine president?

[330] Joan W. Scott, "Unanswered Questions," *The American Historical Review* 113, no. 5, 2008, 142

The Idol as Outsider[331]

"Rock Hudson Has AIDS; Diagnosis Made Over Year Ago"[332] On July 26th, 1985, headlines boomed, "Rock Hudson Being Treated For AIDS."[333] While the former Hollywood leading man was initially thought and reported to have cancer, headlines immediately switched tone as the revelation came to light. "Spokeswoman admits Rock Hudson has AIDS."[334] As news spread, reporters held nothing back as they pictured his glory days: Hudson was 6 ft. 4 in., he was dark and handsome, he was the "last of the traditional square-jawed, romantic leading men."[335] But they were also not shy in describing his current physical state. In a television show launch with Doris Day, reporters noted that Rock Hudson looked emaciated and disconnected from the camera, shocking viewers of his deteriorated state.[336] "Rock Hudson, Victim of AIDS."[337] Headlines read like the announcement of a dirty secret. Of course, it actually was. Contracting a deadly disease like HIV/ AIDS was comorbid with negative connotations. Questions turned to Hudson. How did he get it? Was Hudson himself a homosexual? How would people make the diagnosis cohere with his masculine identity? The American Medical Association's communication gaffe years prior saying that it was probable that household contact could spread the disease had already begotten anxieties about the

[331] Christopher Schmerming, "Rock Hudson: The Idol as Outsider," *The Washington Post,* July 13, 1986
[332] Judith Michaelson, "Rock Hudson Has AIDS; Diagnosis Made Over Year Ago," *Los Angeles Times*, Jul 26, 1985.
[333] Carla Hall, and Sandy Rovner, "Rock Hudson Being Treated For AIDS," *The Washington Post,* Jul 26, 1985.
[334] Associated Press, "Spokeswoman admits Rock Hudson has AIDS," *The Sun,* Jul 26, 1985.
[335] Times Wire Services, "Rock Hudson Has Cancer, AIDS Feared," *Los Angeles Times,* Jul 23, 1985 Associated Press, "Spokeswoman"
[336] Times Wire Services, "Rock Hudson Has Had AIDS for Year - Friend," *Los Angeles Times,*
[337] "News Briefs: Rock Hudson, Victim of AIDS," *Atlanta Daily World,* Jul 28, 1985.

dissolution of medical boundaries.[338] Hudson's own diagnosis enabled that dissolution; people could either come to terms with his homosexuality or accept that the 'gay disease' could affect more than just homosexual men. More importantly, how would Hudson's diagnosis change the larger political understanding of binary gender, sexuality, and masculinity?

Rock Hudson led a double life until his diagnosis became public. Announcing that he had AIDS consequently brought him out of the closet, whether he wanted to come out or not. His Hollywood persona was not unlike Ronald Reagan's. Hudson was a leading man, charming, masculine, and good-looking. In likely his most notable role, *Giant* (1956), he played Bick Benedict, the patriarch of the Reata cattle ranch.[339] He wooed Elizabeth Taylor, abstained in fighting a drunk James Dean, and progressively stood up against racism at his own expense. As an advertising executive in *Lover Come Back* (1961) alongside Doris Day, he climbed the corporate ladder with his signature charm, and even wed a rival executive.[340] Heterosexual seduction seemed to be a staple in his Hollywood career. Privately, however, his promiscuity was more adventurous; he was insatiable. He engaged in homosexual polyamorous relationships, threesomes, and often invited tens of young men in arranged 'beauties parties.'[341] Hudson's homosexuality was not a secret in Hollywood, but beyond its sunny walls his masculine charm masked the truth. Fellow actress Roberta Haynes stated, "There were so many people in that sort of predicament in those days. And it wasn't just actors. There were writers, producers,

[338] American Medical Association, "Evidence Suggests Household Contact May Transmit AIDS," May 6, 1983
[339] *Giant,* directed by George Stevens (1956).
[340] *Lover Come Back,* directed by Delbert Mann (Universal: 1961)
[341] Carla Hall, "Encounters With a Man of Mystery: Sara Davidson's Struggle to Unravel the Tangled Tale of Rock Hudson," *The Washington Post,* Jul 23, 1986.

directors. They were all married. All in the closet. And nobody really cared. It was just the way things were."[342] Regardless of their fame and popularity, being gay meant being subjected to ridicule and abuse. Deceit was the natural condition of Hollywood's cultural work. While sexuality and gender expression do not necessarily correlate, amidst the strictly dominant binary gender norms of the 1960s, a man hiding his homosexuality meant that he had to act masculine; Hudson's portrayal of a Confederate general alongside the preeminent Hollywood cowboy, John Wayne, in *The Undefeated* (1969), was just one of the roles obscuring his identity.[343] Trouble, of course, meant that tabloids bent on exposing closeted homosexual men like Hudson could potentially cross the carefully crafted border between identities.[344] So in terms of acting along a gender binary, regardless of his own performed masculinity, Hudson still had to exaggerate and perform masculinity to obscure any sense of femininity that could lead to homophobia. Reagan, in an adjacent boat, performed masculinity as both an actor and a politician not to hide femininity, but to exalt masculinity as the dominant form of gender expression. Both leading men adhered to binary gender, but Hudson was the one who had the most to lose if his non-binary place on the gender spectrum was exposed.

But Reagan and Hudson were not just two sides of the same coin. Rather, they were actual friends during their time in Hollywood. In 1964, alongside conservative actors John Wayne, Irene Dunne, and Raymond Massey, the duo campaigned for Barry Goldwater's presidential campaign.[345] Hudson would often attend state dinners at the

[342] Mark Griffin, *All That Heaven Allows: A Biography of Rock Hudson* (Harper, 2018), 91.
[343] *The Undefeated*, directed by Andrew V. McLaglen (20th Century Fox, 1969).
[344] Hall, "Encounters…"
[345] "Rock Hudson: Trivia," IMDb, https://m.imdb.com/name/nm0001369/trivia

White House with Nancy Reagan.[346] So when his AIDS diagnosis was discovered, and before his statement was released to the press, in addition to costars like Elizabeth Taylor and Doris Day, the Reagans explicitly reached out to Hudson to express their condolences.[347] The timing of this statement, however, was ironic. When news of the diagnosis broke, Ronald Reagan still had not publicly spoken about HIV/ AIDS. In the prior year, 5,596 people had already died of the disease.[348] As seen with HHS Secretary, Margaret Heckler, this was pretty much the Reagan Administration's plan. Adhering to the proposed budget and maintaining a masculine economic image were more important than financially assisting the scientists in the Center for Disease Control and the National Institute for Health to develop treatments and, eventually, a cure for AIDS. But here was a dear friend, hospitalized, pallid, and close to death at the whim of a disease that had been ravaging the world for nearly half a decade. Surely the Reagan Administration had to finally act.

Rock Hudson's collapse in Paris, on July 21, 1985, was at first attributed to a previous heart surgery.[349] Upon discovering that Hudson had contracted AIDS, the medical team around him scrambled. There were only 2 hospitals in Paris that could treat him - the American-led hospital was only able to treat Americans as outpatients, and the Percy Military Hospital would not treat Hudson since he was not French.[350] Publicist

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[346] Griffin, *All That Heaven Allows*, 91
[347] Ibid, 388.
[348] "HIV/ AIDS Timeline," New York City AIDS Memorial, https://www.nycaidsmemorial.org/timeline
[349] Chris Geidner, "Nancy Reagan Turned Down Rock Hudson's Plea For Help Nine Weeks Before He Died," *Buzzfeed News*, Feb. 2, 2015, https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/chrisgeidner/nancy-reagan-turned-down-rock-hudsons-plea-for-help-seven-we

[350] Geidner, "Nancy Reagan Turned …"

Dale Olson sought direct assistance from the White House, sending a telegram to Deputy Press Secretary, Mark Weinberg that stated,

> Commanding general of Percy Hospital has turned down Rock Hudson as a patient because he is not French. Doctor Dormant in Paris believes a request from the White House or a high American official would change his mind. Can you help by having someone call the commanding general's office at the Percy Hospital at the above number. Please advise what can be done.[351]

Weinberg went to the First Lady since he knew that she and Hudson were friends. And yet, despite this desperate plea from a friend, Weinberg and Nancy Reagan both declined to honor the request. In an interview with *BuzzFeed News* in 2015, Weinberg stated, "The Reagans were very conscious of not making exceptions for people just because they were friends of theirs or celebrities or things of that kind. That wasn't - they weren't about that. They were about treating everybody the same."[352] The policy in the Reagan Administration was consistent: inaction. 'Treating everybody the same' for AIDS patients meant that they felt their actions were justified; there was no need to allocate more of the budget to HIV/ AIDS research and there was no need to intervene in helping a dying friend. While the assertion that the White House could not provide special favors had merit, Treatment Action Group founder, Peter Staley, asserted that the Reagan Administration often helped other friends with favors, citing their assistance to a fundraising campaign led by conservative comedian, and the Reagans' friend, Bob Hope.[353] The only difference, Staley asserted, was Hudson's homosexuality. 'Treating everybody the same,' in this context, shed new light. While it cannot be directly assumed

[351] Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, "Telegram to White House," Jul. 24, 1985. Document courtesy of *Buzzfeed News*.
[352] Geidner, "Nancy Reagan Turned …"
[353] Ibid.

that the Reagan Administration denied sending aid to a dying Hudson due to his homosexuality, the consistent pattern remained that Reagan, who still had not publicly acknowledged the AIDS epidemic, maintained a policy of deliberate inaction, even when given the opportunity to help a close friend. 'Treating everybody the same,' maintained a masculine image in refusing to even acknowledge AIDS, even when you know the person who is dying because of it. Despite only communicating with Hudson via a private phone call, Weinberg instructed Bill Martin, the Special Assistant to the President, to retain a copy of the Administration's rationale to withhold assistance from Hudson, "just in case it resurface[d]."[354] The potential of private optics, specifically private masculine posturing, to turn public was kept in the closet.

But the Reagans' private condolences were just one element of Rock Hudson's AIDS diagnosis. In 1985, Hudson was the most widely known person to be diagnosed with the disease, and, as a result changed the perspective on who could actually be affected. Headlines prompted, "Rock Hudson's Battle with AIDS Raises Public's Awareness of Deadly Disease."[355] Hollywood's image-makers overtook Washington's (though, one could argue they did not even show up). With the amount of news coverage from Hudson's stories, not only did LGBTQ+ community centers see a drastic increase in calls, both homosexuals and heterosexuals sought their services and advice regarding HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.[356] With the absence of presidential assistance, grassroots campaigns and LGBTQ+ communities across the country, who were already leading the charge in AIDS awareness, became even more pivotal institutions for change.

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[354] Ibid.
[355] Carol McGraw and Jay Sharbutt, "Rock Hudson's Battle With AIDS Raises Public's Awareness of Deadly Disease," *Los Angeles Times,* Jul 27, 1985.
[356] McGraw and Sharbutt, "Rock Hudson's Battle…"

Elizabeth Taylor galvanized her AIDS advocacy following her friend's diagnosis, working with him to set up the Rock Hudson Foundation to assist in AIDS research and treatment and to hold benefits like the AIDS Project Los Angeles to more publicly spread awareness through Hollywood's networks, raising nearly $1 million dollars.[357] But it was a bittersweet revelation with AIDS activist Lenny Giteck saying, "We are … saddened that [Hudson's] celebrityhood seems to have made a difference. On the other hand, this may be what it takes to bring increased funding to AIDS research."[358] Hudson died several months later on October 2nd. Articles mourned the giant in all his complexity:

> And yet from available reports, whatever disparities there were between Hudson and his screen image, Rock Hudson was still, in many ways, the person we say in the movies and television shows. That is: A big man. A gracious man. An affable, unassuming, and attractive man. A real man. Real men do things that take guts to do. It took guts from Rock Hudson to make known the fact that he suffered from what society considers an abhorrent disease.[359]

The appeal to manhood and masculinity functioned differently than Reagan masculinity. In deciding to essentially remove himself from a system of binary masculinity by accepting the social ramifications that came with contracting AIDS, especially as a gay man, Hudson affirmed Joan Scott's thesis; complicating his Hollywood leading man image by coming out during the 1980s took some power away from the Reagan Administration, momentarily framing LGBTQ+ communities as the experts of AIDS treatment, prevention, and research.

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[357] Marylouise Oates, "Rock Hudson Lends Name to AIDS Drive," *Los Angeles Times,* Aug 6, 1985. Ted Thackeray Jr., "Rock Hudson Dies at 59 After Fighting AIDS," *Los Angeles Times,* Oct 3, 1985.
[358] Rover Hall, "Rock Hudson Being Treated for AIDS: Rock Hudson a Victim of AIDS," Washington Post, July 26, 1985.
[359] Tom Shales, "Mark of a Giant: Rock Hudson: A Dream Creation who Filled the Wide Screen," *The Washington Post,* Oct 3, 1985.

"A Waste of Good Suffering"[360]

At the end of 1986, 24,500 people had died of AIDS in the United States.[361] People suffered from the effects of weakened immune systems and deteriorating bodies rendered helpless by an inactive, unresponsive conservative government. The Reagan Administration's biopolitics eschewed homosexuality and non-binary gender expression, simply letting those afflicted bodies die instead of providing funding to ensure their survival; to a degree it was institutional torture. To horror writer and director Clive Barker, in his 1996 novel, *Sacrament*, it seemed almost like genocide. The lead character, Will Rabjohns, seemed to act almost as a self-insert; where did Barker, himself a gay man, stand in the relationship between filmmaker and as a member of the LGBTQ+ community? In the text, a gay wildlife photographer who chronicled endangered animals also wrestled with the mass deaths brought on by the AIDS epidemic in his queer San Francisco community.[362] But in his films, how could he provide a voice to the tens of thousands of people being neglected? 9 years prior to the release of *Sacrament*, still well within the apex of the AIDS epidemic in 1987, Barker released the pivotal body horror film, *Hellraiser* (1987). Purely sadomasochistic in nature, sex was central to the plot.

Despite not yet 'out' as a gay man in 1987, his sexual identity was still deeply important to how he directed films and how he thought about the society and politics around him. In the 1980s, homosexual sex was one of many ways AIDS was believed to be transmitted, adding to the dread associated with the disease as well as to

[360] *Hellraiser*, directed by Clive Barker (New World, 1987).
[361] "HIV/ AIDS Timeline"
[362] Clive Barker, *Sacrament* (HarperTorch, 1996).

homosexuality itself, especially in its perceived complication of any gender binary. Barker's *Hellraiser* was a way to challenge the Reagan Administration's torture and discrimination of queer, sexual bodies, positing that instead, even if non-binary, non-gender conforming people or extra-terrestrial beings were covered in blood or pulled apart by chains or adorned with a crown of needles, there was still some semblance of beauty, dignity, and pleasure amidst the horror. For Barker, the deterioration of non-masculine bodies deserved the same respect as masculine bodies.

> Horror fiction should always be about something. Not merely gross, not just a killer in a hockey mask stalking a teenager. Good horror must have metaphysics, death, obsession, the fear of insanity and loneliness. It should be about unhappy minds trapped in bodies of aging, tired flesh. You can't just deal with killer slugs or giant crabs, you have to deal with people and their tormented souls.[363]

Queer communities during the AIDS epidemic were just that: anxious minds in deteriorating flesh. But there was room in art and cinema for catharsis, emotional release. *Hellraiser* started immediately with the question, "What is your pleasure, Mr. Cotton?"[364] This is followed by Mr. Cotton being torn apart by chains, summoned by a peculiar puzzle box he purchased.[365] All that remained were fragmented pieces of flesh, just barely making out a face. Pleasure and violence were interconnected.[366] From here, the plot unfolded further. Sex was still central, albeit on an extreme sadomasochistic level. Larry and his second wife Julia existed in a loveless marriage; Larry being square and plain while Julia longed for sexual pleasure, which she found in Larry's brother, Frank, who was revealed as the man torn apart in the first scene. With Larry accidentally

[363] John Stanley, "The New King of Horror," *San Francisco Chronicle,* Sep 20, 1987
[364] *Hellraiser*.
[365] Ibid.
[366] Kim Newman, "Hellraiser: From horror fiction to horror movies," *Sight and Sound,* Fall 1987

dripping blood in the attic of their new home, Frank was revived but as a sadistic, skinless version of himself. In order to regain his body, Julia began to seduce other men only to use them as sacrifices: blood led to vitality. Larry's daughter, Kirsty, however, witnessed this scheme, stealing the puzzle box and summoning extra-dimensional creatures known as Cenobites. Far from human, and even far from expressing traditional gender norms, the Cenobites were representative of sadomasochistic behaviors. While they're dressed in shiny leather and their flesh was adorned with piercings and needles, they carried an ethereal air about them, as they said, "Demons to some. Angels to others."[367] These aliens were effectively non-binary. But above all, what they truly sought was pure, carnal pleasure; the body in *Hellraiser* was the purest sensory organ. It's a central tenet to Barker, a central marker of gay men. In his view, gay men, and other non-binary people, due to their position amidst a gender binary were naturally more imaginative; not conforming to a binary system primed them for non-binary thinking. So, in turn, he stated, "Gay men always have had extraordinary sexual imagination and they've always been able to find extraordinary possibilities, but the flesh has its limits."[368] Within the film, these limits of flesh were breakable. Pleasure in *Hellraiser* was brought to its utmost extreme, edging the border of pleasure and pain.

Placed in the context of the AIDS epidemic, while there was no overt homosexuality in *Hellraiser*, Barker's film embraced the blurred edges between sexuality and gender, preferring to stew in messy, unclear categories as opposed to telling a singular moral tale.[369] Here, Barker expressed a nuanced critique. He drew upon Joan

[367] Newman, "Hellraiser."
[368] Ibid.
[369] Christopher Landon, "The many lives of Clive," *The Advocate*, Jan 18, 2000, 106.

Scott and the power that came with positioning oneself outside of binary systems. Nearly everything in *Hellraiser,* the characters, the cenobites, the setting, existed in a gray, non-binary area. Julia was stuck between lovers and then was murdered by one. For most of the film, Frank existed in a half-human state, feeding on others to regain his skin. And Kirsty, with the puzzle box, attempted to discard it in a fire, only to have the merchant who sold it to Frank in the beginning of the film retrieve it and begin the cycle anew. *Hellraiser* did not have a clear lesson learned; there's hardly a sense of good-ness. But what remained was carnal pleasure: Julia got to act on her infidelity, Frank consumed the bodies of others to revive his own, the Cenobites inhabited Kirsty's mind, attempting to seduce her to take her back to their extra-terrestrial realm filled with unimaginable pleasures. But Barker also understood that hedonism was cyclical; "the pleasurable road turns into a cul-de-sac. Then we have to turn around and look elsewhere"[370] Pleasure, in all of its physical, violent, and sexual forms was not a one-time venture, it's something that's continuously sought out.

In the case of Rock Hudson, his own promiscuity during the AIDS epidemic must be called into question. On November 13th, 1985, just over one month after Hudson's death, *The Washington Post* reported, "Hudson Estate Sued: Alleged Former Lover Says Actor Hid AIDS."[371] The lover in question was music archivist Marc Christian, who had found out about Hudson's diagnosis from a television newscast; the actor continued to have sex with Christian despite knowing he had AIDS. What resulted was a lengthy and arduous court battle, lasting after Reagan's term ended in 1989 when the Los Angeles

[370] Brandon Judell, "Hell's Angel," *10 Percent,* Mar/ Apr 1997.
[371] Myra MacPherson, "Hudson Estate Sued: Alleged Former Lover Says Actor Hid AIDS," *The Washington Post,* November 13, 1985.

jury awarded Christian $21.75 million in compensatory damages.[372] Surprisingly enough, the decision was controversial among many different groups, including gay AIDS activists and clinicians. "The fact that there is no evidence that Mr. Christian is going to get AIDS makes it even more remarkable. The anxiety alone and the stigma were enough. AIDS had become almost too powerful an image, and this is an indication of that," said AIDS discrimination attorney Ken Labowitz – journalist Carla Hall called it 'AIDS Anxiety.'[373] The sheer emotional distress from just the possibility to get AIDS, already in contention of its dispersion, was worth $21.75 million dollars.

Sexuality then, was a tie between *Hellraiser* and AIDS. When someone was afflicted by AIDS, the connotation that often comes with it was both physical and sexual; the stereotype of an AIDS victim was a gay man who engaged in homosexual intercourse. But amidst the moral politics of the Reagan Administration, the act of homosexual intercourse, an act of carnal pleasure, was denigrated and ridiculed because the act did not fall within a binary system of gender. In contrast, Barker's *Hellraiser*, embracing ambiguity, saw carnal pleasure as normal. But what was missing from this analysis was the sheer amount of violence that AIDS inflicted on its victims. Their bodies were too weak to stave off disease; their source of carnal pleasure was no more. Barker stated his experience living through the apex of the AIDS epidemic:

> I didn't expect to see people die. I didn't expect to lose people who were younger than me. I didn't expect to lose people that I'd made love to. I didn't ever expect that to be my experience, at least not until I was 80. And that's true for all gay men, isn't it?[374]

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[372] Hall, Carla, "AIDS Anxiety: The Message in the Hudson Verdict," *The Washington Post*, February 20, 1989.
[373] Hall, "AIDS Anxiety."
[374] *Hellraiser*.

As he claimed, the AIDS epidemic was nearly a universal experience for gay men. They watched people they knew die around them, and for half a decade, it was unofficial policy to just let them die. Rock Hudson died from deliberate inaction. For Barker, *Hellraiser* was a film that admonishes the puritanical binary conservatism of the Reagan Administration. Excessive violence marked by excessive carnal pleasure in a hedonistic loop seemed to mirror the experience of a gay man living through the AIDS epidemic. In making the characters unreadable as binaries, it allowed for the imposition of identity from the viewer. Through a psychoanalytic Kristevan lens, the gay man was both subject and object, both pleasured and tortured, both the pleasurer and the torturer. Hudson's controversial relationship with Marc Christian illustrated this notion.

> We're attracted *and* repulsed, but our culture doesn't allow us to say, 'I like these guys, they are part of me.' We define our humanity because we are *not* monsters - and that's a lie, a complete lie.[375]

Like Cronenberg and Carpenter before him, ambiguity was used as a device in horror to punctuate the end of a film with an ellipsis rather than a period. In order to reaffirm one's own non-binary queer identity, people could engage in homosexual intercourse. But amidst disease, homosexual intercourse carried with it the burden of AIDS and the potentiality of being the infector or the infected. While the morality behind Reagan's inaction stemmed from wanting to uphold a masculine image through a strong economy, it also served as a means to justify withholding treatment towards people with AIDS, specifically discriminating against gay men. For the Reagan Administration, binary masculinity was the goal, economic prosperity was the guise. But Reaganite morality did not work for Barker.

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[375] Ibid.

> The conservative lobby is constantly complaining that gay people are promiscuous that they don't think about the structures of society, we don't concern ourselves with living, you know, lives that resemble theirs if you like. I have no interest in resembling a straight person. I never want to get up in the morning and look in the mirror and say: "fuck, I'm straight. Oh dear I'm straight."[376]

The cenobites were representative of a pure non-binary carnal pleasure. They modified their bodies not in any gendered relation, but in their own effective queer imagination. Frank sought to be human again. He wore the skin of his murdered brother in an attempt to seduce his niece and escape being recaptured by the cenobites. But his adherence to binary masculinity got him caught and killed, torn to shreds. His last words were, "Jesus wept," evoking his humanity even if obscured by his new scars and monstrous behavior.[377] If we follow Kristeva, we have to accept his declaration of humanity. Among the gay men dying of AIDS there could be monsters; Hudson actively slept with other men knowing his diagnosis. Conservative politicians had broken bodies, fearful of affliction. Reagan and his administration's failure to treat gay men during the AIDS epidemic was a projection of fear; their masculinity was still vulnerable, and Rock Hudson's death only exacerbated that anxiety. Unlike Barker, they did not embrace a non-binary identity:

> I want as many people [as possible] to know that these imaginings come from a gay man who's happy to be gay.[378]

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[376] Bill Maher, *Politically Incorrect w/ Bill Maher,* Jul, 9, 1997. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pw4yo7wlp94
[377] *Hellraiser.*
[378] Ibid, 73

The grotesque, animalistic, cathartic blood splatters from non-binary Demon/ Angels and binary people came from a man who was comfortable in his own skin. Comfort that situated itself in ambiguity.

Little Action

Rock Hudson's AIDS case prompted a slow start from the Reagan Administration to address the AIDS crisis. In September 1985, two months after Hudson's announcement and the boom in grassroots AIDS advocacy, President Reagan finally publicly addressed the AIDS Crisis. Contrary to fact, the president asserted that "he had been supporting research into AIDS for the last four years and that the effort was a 'top priority' for the Administration.[379] Supporting research, in this instance, meant providing the bare minimum for the scientists at the CDC and the NIH. This account runs counter to the testimony of the Reagan Administration's Surgeon General, C. Everett Koop. Since his appointment in 1982, Koop stated that he was prevented from addressing the nation on the HIV/ AIDS epidemic. No clear reason was given to him, and as he believes, "[they] were no doubt political."[380] At the outset, it seemed as if the Reagan Administration would only adhere to a minimalist approach to handling the AIDS crisis. However, Hudson's condition and the uproar surrounding it seemed to hit some nerve with the President. His physician, Brig. Gen. John Hutton, stated that before learning that Rock Hudson had AIDS, President Reagan had assumed that the disease was like measles, and

[379] Philip Boffey, "*Reagan Defends Financing for AIDS*" *The New York Times*, Sep 18, 1985.
[380] "C. Everett Koop: The C. Everett Koop Papers," NIH: National Library of Medicine – Profiles in Science, https://profiles.nlm.nih.gov/spotlight/qq/feature/aids

that it would simply just go away.[381] Of course, the assertion was incorrect, but what resulted from the individual lesson and a series of meetings with his Cabinet was the first breakthrough in allocating funding for AIDS research; the Reagan Administration itself requested that Congress allocate $190 Million towards projects, $70 Million over the proposed budget.[382] Unfortunately, the first major step forward for the Reagan Administration fell on the same day of Rock Hudson's death, October 2nd. While it is unclear if Hudson's demise had a genuine impact on the hastening of fund allocation, his own case spurred a burst of public interest in the AIDS tragedy.

Surgeon General Koop became the leading figure in the Reagan Administration to disseminate information about AIDS to the public. Willing to work with a diverse set of activist groups and foundations like the National Hemophilia Foundation, the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays, and Christian fundamentalists, Koop outwardly differed from the more static conservative staffers. This is not to say that Koop was entirely bipartisan, he was a staunch supporter of anti-abortion and of Reagan himself, but to him, the language of science was entirely inclusive. "My position on AIDS was dictated by scientific integrity and Christian compassion … My whole career has been dedicated to prolonging lives, especially the lives of people who were weak and powerless, the disenfranchised who needed an advocate: newborns who needed surgery, handicapped children, unborn children, people with AIDS."[383] Unlike Margaret Heckler, Koop did not chain himself to Reaganite economic masculinity; he did not adhere to a

[381] Associated Press, "Actor's Illness Helped Reagan to Grasp AIDS, Doctor Says," *New York Times,* Sep 2 1989.
[382] "A Timeline of HIV and AIDS," HIV.gov, https://www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics/overview/history/hiv-and-aids-timeline/
[383] "C. Everett Koop"

spending limit. In addressing Congress on February 6th, 1986, Reagan instructed Koop to create a report on AIDS to administer to the public. From this, Koop researched and developed, with the help of the aforementioned groups, the *Surgeon General's Report on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.*[384] 22 million copies of this 36-page pamphlet were distributed to the public nearly a year later on October 22, 1986, discussing at large what AIDS was, how people could contract it, and ways of protecting oneself. Liberal critics were surprised by the directness of his language, going against conservative thought and advocating for contraception and sex education as early as the 3rd grade.[385] Coupled with the year-old death of Rock Hudson, Koop's Report galvanized liberal activists. As Randy Shilts put it,

> Koop's impact was due to archetypal juxtaposition. It took a square-jawed, heterosexually perceived actor like Rock Hudson to make AIDS something people could talk about. It took an ultra-conservative fundamentalist who looked like an Old Testament prophet to credibly call for all of America to take the epidemic seriously at last.[386]

Not unlike the non-binary positions that people like Rock Hudson and Merrie Spaeth played, Koop, as described by Shilts, was a politically surprising hero in the story of AIDS education; unlike HHS Secretary Margaret Heckler, he was not entirely indebted to conservative Reaganism.

Liberal activists would continue to be surprised by the competency of Koop's AIDS advocacy, but the Presidential administration's own outreach and legislation left much to be desired. In addressing the American Foundation for AIDS Research (amfAR)

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[384] Koop, C. Everett, "Surgeon General's report on acquired immune deficiency syndrome," *Public Health Rep* 102, no. 1, Jan 1987. Courtesy of the National Library of Medicine. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1477712/
[385] "C. Everett Koop"
[386] Shilts, *And the Band Played On,* 588.

on May 31st, 1987, amnesia had figuratively taken over, with Reagan saying, "As dangerous and deadly as AIDS is, many of the fears surrounding it are unfounded. These fears are based on ignorance," and, "I don't want Americans to think AIDS simply affects only certain groups. AIDS affects all of us."[387] He received boos from the audience after suggesting routine AIDS testing, mandatory testing for immigrants, and prenuptial testing, and, in contrast with the statement above, failed to address or introduce any kind of legislation that protected AIDS victims against discrimination. What did come out of the speech was the establishment of a Presidential Commission on HIV, meant to lead the charge on providing best practices for the research, prevention, and treatment of HIV/ AIDS. While it was successful in articulating the scientific language of AIDS to the layperson, and it even challenged the Reagan Administration's budget allocation as a roadblock to progress, the President's Commission on AIDS stopped short of actually bringing President Reagan in on the organizational planning of information dissemination.[388] In the first place, author and original member of the AIDS Commission, Kristine M. Gebbie, clearly stated that there was no strong push to pass the Americans with Disabilities Act to ensure that people who had AIDS were protected from discrimination. The rationale was a familiar one; it would cost too much. The second failure was that the Commission did not effectively look at intravenous drug abuse as a chronic medical condition. Without any new recommendations, heavy policing and drug-abstinence campaigns were set to increase. Thus, while creating the President's Commission on AIDS on the surface level was a novel and potentially effective idea,

[387] Landon Parvin, "President Reagan's amfAR Speech," Frontline- The Age of AIDS, PBS, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/aids/docs/amfar.html
[388] Kristine M. Gebbie, "The President's Commission on AIDS: What Did it Do?" *Different Views,* 1989

Reagan's own inability to participate, the inflexibility of the budget, and the increase of policing against drugs had more negative ramifications for the country.

Lastly, one of the Reagan Administration's final and more directly insidious legislative approaches towards the dissemination of AIDS information was the Helms AIDS Amendment, a direct response to the advocacy done by the LGBTQ+ organization, Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC), in part led by activist Larry Kramer. In their community approach to spreading AIDS awareness, GMHC developed humorous information pamphlets, complete with genitals, naked bodies, and homosexual relationships.[389] These were relatively innocuous and were often known to be helpful resources. On October 1987, Senator Jesse Helms showed President Reagan one of the erotic informational pamphlets. Disgusted by the content, Reagan saw it as evidence that AIDS advocacy was attached to advancing the homosexual agenda. Helms attached a small amendment to a large spending bill that stated that the federal government would not pay for any AIDS-related educational materials that would, "promote or encourage, directly or indirectly, homosexual sexual activities."[390] This, of course, led to issues for the GMHC. The Department of Health and Human Services often funded state and local health departments, so the same conservative government who had put in the minimum effort to research and treat AIDS, was now in charge of a large output of materials to educate people about the disease. Logistically, it made little sense. A substantial portion of people with AIDS were homosexual. Circumventing mentions of homosexual

[389] Peter Lewis Allen, *The Wages of Sin: Sex and Disease, Past and Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
Text found through the following website: https://supreme.findlaw.com/legal-commentary/the-birth-of-the-helms-amendment.html
[390] Allen, *The Wages of Sin.*

intercourse on an educational pamphlet for a disease largely contracted by people who engage in homosexual intercourse would lead to a potentially vast amount of confusion and misinformation. This was a case where economic masculinity was a guise for blatant discrimination against people outside of the gender binary; centering a patriarchal masculinity was still the goal, it was just less obscured. From the hypocrisy of wanting to control the spread of AIDS educational material 7 years after it was first reported in the country, to the blatant bigotry expounded by Senator Jesse Helms, this amendment was nothing more than a means to discriminate against a group of people. The Reagan Administration's seemingly sudden shift to openly discuss AIDS after Rock Hudson's death was largely another front, another image conjured by Ronald Reagan and his image-makers.

Conclusion

All Out of Bubblegum

During the 1988 Election, Ronald Reagan's eventual departure from the White House would leave a man-sized hole in its wake. How would Washington deal with this absence? For eight long years, Reagan and the White House Office of Communications had painted a muscled portrait of the presidency, one that was tied with the 'stronger' American economy, one that quashed the first woman vice-presidential candidate in an election, one that survived a bullet to the chest. At the end of his presidency, Reagan attained a 63% approval rating, compared with Jimmy Carter's final approval rating of 34%.[391] What kind of man would be able to take over this esteemed, yet constructed role? When Reagan's Vice President, George H. W. Bush announced his candidacy in 1987, concerns about his capability was immediately put into question, saying that, "Bush suffers from a potentially crippling handicap – a perception that he isn't strong enough or tough enough for the challenges of the Oval Office. That he is, in a single mean word, a wimp."[392] This 'wimp-factor' chased Bush during the race. Despite being taller than Reagan, people always seemed surprised at his height: "'We thought you were a little short guy,' they tell me. I hear it over and over and over again," Bush lamented.[393] Seen as a yes-man for Reagan, to the public, in regard to his campaign, it was never clear exactly what his platform was, essentially repeating the former president's promises of

[391] "Ronald Reagan Public Approval," The American Presidency Project, University of California, Santa Barbara, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/data/ronald-reagan-public-approval
[392] Margaret Garrard Warner, "Bush Battles the 'Wimp Factor,'" *Newsweek*, Oct. 19, 1987.
[393] Warner, "Bush Battles…"

economic prosperity during the 1980 and 1984 elections.[394] He was a politician, just not one with a clear sense of self, and certainly not one with a masculine presence.

And this caution didn't end with Bush, the Election of 1988 was rife with confusion and missteps from the candidates. A large sore spot remained with Bush's selection for Vice-President, the bumbling Dan Quayle. Quayle was a novice Senator from Indiana who had a reputation for utilizing his privilege – his biggest blunder being that his family name had spared him service on the frontlines by getting him a spot in the National Guard during the Vietnam War.[395] The senator's youth was seen as the biggest selling point, but in the eyes of Reagan advisor, David Demarest, "Quayle was just hyperactive and he was hugging the President and it just didn't look very Presidential."[396] So, in this case, they way the Bush team handled Quayle was to keep him out of the spotlight, "act as if Mr. Quayle did not exist."[397] Bumper stickers only showed Bush on the ticket, call centers answered as the Bush Headquarters, and largely, people thought he was just hiding.

His opposition was seemingly no better. Democratic Presidential Candidate, Michael Dukakis, 1 month away from Voting Day had a photo op with him riding an M-1 tank, helmet and all, in an attempt to look tough and masculine.[398] But what resulted was more ammunition for the Bush campaign, taking the goofy image and zooming in on it during an attack ad, listing all of the military programs that Dukakis had supposedly been

[394] Gerald M. Boyd, "A Victor Free to Set His Own Course," *New York Times*, Nov 9, 1988
[395] B. Drummond Ayres Jr., "A Partner Seasoned by the Campaign," *New York Times*, Nov 9, 1998
[396] David F. Demarest, Jr. "George H. W. Bush Oral History Project Transcript: Interview with David F. Demarest, Jr." By Russell Rile and Paul Martin. *Miller Center: University of Virginia*, Jan. 28, 2010.
[397] Richard L. Berke, "Quayle Rose As Phantom Of Campaign," *New York Times*, Nov 7, 1988
[398] Chris Black, "Tank gives Dukakis no protection in Bush's latest commercial attack," *Boston Globe*, Oct 19, 1988

against.[399] The 'Tank Man' seemed to only be a masquerade of masculinity. But the most damning part of the Dukakis campaign came in the 3rd Debate between him and Bush on the very first question. Bernard Shaw of CNN asked Dukakis, "Governor, if Kitty Dukakis were raped and Murdered, would you favor an irrevocable death penalty for the killer?"[400] His response was cold and robotic, not reacting emotionally to the awful question posed to him, "like a guy from outer space, who walks and talks like us but doesn't feel the same things we feel."[401] From that, Demarest had recalled saying, "We just won. Not just the debate. We won. This is over."[402]

But while posturing masculinity was a central goal of the candidates, race, a topic not discussed at length in this project, had become an insurmountable issue, especially to Black candidate, Rev. Jesse Jackson. Hailed as a "Populist Crusader,"[403] Jackson understood his positionality as it related to his with opponents and white constituencies, but his ultimate goal was to unify the country along a common ground, saying,

> Something is happening in our country that [saddens] my heart. It is frightening over racial aggression against blacks, overt anti-Semitic acts, class rejection of the poor, and exploitation of women workers.[404]

The economy was central in his platform, calling for a fight against economic violence that affected groups outside of wealthy, white men. Dedicated to Civil Rights, he seemed

[399] "Tank Ride," Bush-Quayle '88, 1988, www.livingroomcandidate.org/commercials/1988/tank-ride
[400] "October 13, 1988 Debate Transcript," The Commission of Presidential Debates, https://www.debates.org/voter-education/debate-transcripts/october-13-1988-debate-transcript/
[401] Sidney Blumenthal, "Willie Horton & The Making of an Election Issue," *The Washington Post*, Oct 28, 1988
[402] Demarest, Jr., "Oral History Transcript"
[403] Gerald F. Seir and Joe Davidson, "Populist Crusader: Jesse Jackson Receives Wider Base of Support As Primaries Heat Up," *Wall Street Journal*, Mar 1, 1988
[404] John Dilin, "Jesse Jackson wades in," *The Christian Science Monitor*, Oct 14, 1988

to propose a new divide to desegregate: "Two decades ago, people were divided along racial battle grounds. Today they are coming together along economic battle grounds."[405]

But through an intersectional lens, Jackson's Black masculinity was not solely the cause of his downfall, but rather, it was Blackness itself that was used as a tool by the Bush campaign to assert White racial supremacy, a White racial masculinity. An attack ad was raised on Michael Dukakis' 'light' stance on crime, featuring a man named Willie Horton.[406] A furlough program under Dukakis' tenure allowed Horton a 'weekend pass,' one of which he would, "stab a man and repeatedly rape his girlfriend."[407] Dukakis' campaign manager responded, saying, "When George Bush made Willie Horton part of his campaign team, the issue he was raising wasn't just crime – it was racial fear."[408] Being tough on crime became a staple of the Bush campaign, not just taking away the strength of Dukakis, but also denigrating the Black body not only as one that needed to be feared, but also one that could only be contained by the Bush/ Quayle ticket. To demonize Horton meant to demonize Blackness, with Bush's own campaign manager, Lee Atwater saying, "The more people who know who Willie Horton is, the better off we'll be."[409] Due to the shows of masculinity and a lack of femininity within the 1988 Election, the Republican ticket needed to create another monster to denigrate to prove the strength of white masculinity, sparse as it was within Bush and Dukakis. Without a 'proper' body to channel their masculine ideals into, Washington could hardly cope with Reagan's departure.

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[405] Seir and Davidson, "Populist Crusader…"
[406] To note, per David Demarest, the ad was actually produced by a PAC of the Bush Campaign, not the campaign itself. However, public sentiment associated the ad itself as Bush's doing.
[407] "Willie Horton 1988 Attack Ad," The National Security PAC, 1988, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Io9KMSSEZ0Y
[408] Susan Estrich, "The Hidden Politics of Race," *The Washington Post*, Apr 23, 1989
[409] Blumenthal, "Willie Horton & The Making …"

Released on November 4th, 1988, John Carpenter's *They Live* marked the end of the Reagan Administration.[410] Carpenter's message in his horror film was not veiled, actively criticizing Reagan and the Republican party. The *Boston Globe* headlined before the film's release, "John Carpenter adds politics to his latest horror film."[411] Far from true, politics had always been a part of Carpenter's repertoire, but in his own terms. In this case, he just added the ire attained from his frustrations with Reaganite America and Hollywood. At his newly independent, non-Hollywood studio, Alive Films, Carpenter could truly express how he felt on the silver screen, and, this time, it was direct, unveiled hatred. "Both Republicans and the Hollywood studios are controlled by these aliens," Carpenter said.[412] In a separate interview he stated, "This seems like fascism to me, the rise of the fundamentalist right and the kind of mind control they're putting out, the kind of presidency Reagan has had. I sort of never picked up on it on a soundstage, where you're really insulated from the rest of the world."[413] Hollywood and Washington were not islands in his mind.

They Live starred newly retired pro-wrestler, Rowdy Roddy Piper as John Nada, a vagabond who stumbled upon a world-wide conspiracy of extraterrestrial capitalist takeover, something only he could stop. But why choose a pro-wrestler? Carpenter answered: "One of the things I wanted was to cast a hero who traditionally stands for the right wing, and wrestling, you have to admit, is a little bit right wing."[414] With the

[410] Lewis Beale, "Carpenter bucks the establishment with latest venture," *Chicago Tribune*, Nov 3, 1988
[411] Henry Sheehan, "John Carpenter adds politics to his latest horror film," *Boston Globe*, Oct 30, 1988
[412] Sheehan, "John Carpenter adds politics..."
[413] Beale, "Carpenter bucks."
[414] Matthew Flamm, "Yuppie Bodysnatcher," *New York Post*, Nov 2, 1988

upswing of fundamentalist conservatism and Reagan's own body politics of the 1980s, pro-wrestling embodied masculinity to an extreme. 6ft tall, 300 lb. muscular men oiled and tanned (at least in the 80s), lifted each other up with raw strength, put each other in chokeholds until one submitted (or passed out), and, in the case of Piper, showed their masculine dominance by pinning other men. Wrestling showed the apex of physical masculinity.

Upon first being handed the script, producer Larry Franco noted that about halfway in the screenplay five pages were left blank with only the inscription: "They fight."[415] Carpenter wanted this fight scene to stand out, and on screen, it did, lasting about six minutes. Frank, played by Carpenter-regular, Keith David, confronted Nada about his recent string of violence against seemingly normal people, and the bespectacled Piper only wanted one thing for his friend - to put the glasses on to see what he saw – aliens disguised as humans. ("I'm tellin' you, you dumb son of a bitch – try 'em on!"[416]). As the script stated, a fight ensued. Filmed over 3 days in a Los Angeles alley without stuntmen, Piper and Keith David stated that this was the most fun they'd ever had shooting a scene, regardless if they got punched in the face.[417] On screen, it was a wrestling match come to life - sidewalk slams on a literal sidewalk, chokeholds, bodyslams, use of outside materials (in this instance a glass bottle and a wood plank), even the cheap groin shot made an appearance. The bout ended with the former wrestler forcing the all-revealing sunglasses onto his friend. Both men were bloodied, beaten, and

[415] "John Carpenter's They Live: Keith David Remembers World's Longest Fight Scene," SYFY Wire, Nov. 6, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_7GNwTKgw0
[416] *They Live*, directed by John Carpenter, (Universal, 1988).
[417] Ariel Teal Toombs and Colt Baird Toombs, *Rowdy: The Roddy Piper Story* (Vintage Canada, 2020), 252.

finally saw the subliminal messages in plain sight. Billboards and magazines now read, "OBEY," "CONSUME," NO THOUGHT," "WATCH TV."[418] And yet, the 6-minute fight scene stumped critics, unsure if it was simply too long or just a failed comedic moment.[419] The stakes in The Fight weren't necessarily high - they're friends, neither of them were going to die. But the tension remained in why Nada was so fervent to keep fighting Frank. There was a reason why Carpenter made them fight for 6 minutes. Nada believed that knowing this information was so crucial to his friend's survival that he was willing to knock him out with a wooden plank and place the glasses on his unconscious, bloody, body if that was needed. After the fight, they shared a hotel room together, with Piper saying, "Ain't love grand?"[420] And it's fair to say that love was central to Nada's character.

Nada beats the daylights out of Frank with love.[421] Examining pro-wrestling, Carpenter admitted that the profession had in its own way, a conservative leaning. The reliance on physical domination to prove one's superior masculinity fell in line with the Reagan Administration's own usage of the president's body. No pro wrestler in the 80s won a championship without domination and humiliation as masculine tactics. The impetus for Piper's own masculine dominance over Frank was out of genuine worry - knowing that for his friend's survival the truth was more important than a broken nose. As opposed to violence in other horror films, drawing blood in *They Live* was not meant to scare, nor was it meant to show the true fragility of masculinity. Carpenter wanted Nada to break Frank's nose because he wanted the audience to know how much he loved

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[418] Ibid
[419] Janet Maslin, "A Pair of Sunglasses Reveals a World of Evil," *The New York Times*, Nov 4, 1988.
[420] *They Live*
[421] Ibid.

his friend - he loved him enough to break the cycle of violent, masculine, domination in place of violent, masculine, love. Carpenter's anti-Reagan film puts a different kind of masculinity in perspective, one that fights for community, one that fights for the oppressed, and one that's willing to knock out their best friend's teeth to save their life. For Carpenter, he had found a man-sized answer for the man-sized hole that Reagan had left for the 1988 Election candidates. To him, masculinity wasn't always oppressive.

To close this project means to end with this crisis of masculinity. Hollywood once again preyed on the unconscious insecurities of Washingtonian leadership, and during the time of Reagan's departure, this meant that what it meant to be a man, what it meant to be a successful leader was up in the air without a clear answer. In fact, in terms of intellectual thought, I don't believe that it's any surprise that Warren Farrell's infamous text, *The Myth of Male Power*, known as a foundational text of the Men's Rights Movement, was written in 1993.[422] As femininity was seen to have strength in Hollywood horror, masculinity needed a way to justify its own existence.

Starting with Sandy Stone's "The Empire Strikes Back," was meant to preface a narrative that was founded on the body as a text, something that could be inscribed with political and cultural meaning. Between the presidencies of Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan, issues of gender (that should be divorced from the body) were routinely attached to physicality as a marker of meaning or denigration. Femininity here, was weak – Carter's lack of masculinity led him to be considered the first woman president, while Reagan's assassination recovery labeled him as tough, as masculine, as a proper leader.

[422] Warren Farrell, *The Myth of Male Power* (Simon and Schuster, 1993).

But as we saw throughout Reagan's term, other ideologies were just as malleable on skin. The Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981, passed during his assassination recovery, was tied to his body thanks to the thinking of White House Office of Communications Director, David Gergen. Geraldine Ferraro's own masculinity was questioned because of her husband's shady business practices, leading to a sense of economic incapability from the Vice-Presidential Candidate. White House media consultants like Merrie Spaeth directed a new kind of political outreach, disseminating images of the masculine Reagan throughout different news organizations. And from this kind of politics, the one that saw bodies as places to store meaning and politics, the case study of the AIDS epidemic shined light on the Insect Politics of the Reagan Administration - queer bodies, ones that went against a conservative ideology based in upholding White binary masculinity, were left to die through a policy of inaction. 1980s Washington had strict lines of what masculinity meant, and this trend would pervade nearly every aspect of Reagan's political doings.

In Hollywood, however, the lines were not so clear, and the directors and writers and actors of horror films released during this time knew that their films went against the conservative norms of 1980s federal politics. Through another reading of bodies, through the blood, bones, sinew, and destruction, viewers saw Final Girls like Laurie Strode and Ellen Ripley assert their masculine-womanhood against similarly coded non-binary monsters. Men in *Videodrome*, *The Thing*, and *The Fly* destroyed their bodies to retain their binary masculinity. And, with wrestler Roddy Piper, sometimes beating the shit out of your friend meant upholding a positive masculinity, one where muscles were made with love. Now, the question remained if viewers actually retained the messages encoded

in films by the many people involved in those projects. But what also remained was the intentionality of the filmmakers themselves. Much like popular thinkers of the time like Sandy Stone, Susan Sontag, and Julia Kristeva, directors like David Cronenberg, John Carpenter, and Clive Barker all understood the non-binary politics they were participating in with their films, upholding femininity and other marginalized identities as powerful, resilient, and above all, crucial. They did so in their own terms. There was no sense of abandoning masculinity, just that masculinity alone was not sustainable without the cooperation and support of gender identities that existed beyond it.

Hollywood's and Washington's commentaries surrounding gender in the 1980s are further highlighted through Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject.[423]

> It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a killer … Abjection is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you …[424]

Boundaries in politics, in Washington, were seen as firm, but what Kristevan psychoanalysis did was shine a bright light on the thin border that separated binary ideologies, revealing the ideologies themselves as mutable – the reaction and rejection to this dissolution of boundary, the falling of binary systems was abjection, uncomfortable, raw, and horrifying. To those in power, the boundary upheld their positionality questioning the viability of that boundary sent them to madness. After all, the Reagan

[423] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*
[424] Ibid, 4.

administration did nothing to help the LGBTQ+ community during the early years of the AIDS crisis – they instead upheld the boundary that kept white masculinity in power.

But to an extent, Hollywood itself broke boundaries everyday – film was an avenue to explore deep seated issues within American society, after all. It is worth repeating Siegfried Kracauer's dictum: films go *mad* and reveal societal contradictions meant to be obscured.[425] The ideas proliferated between script, screen, actor, and audience passed through many boundaries, both explicitly and subconsciously encouraging viewers to look beneath the surface of things, to look beyond images. Both Washington and Hollywood examined political issues of gender, masculinity, femininity, and bodies. However, Washington and Hollywood examined these ideas in their own terms, making it crucial and productive to look at and compare the discourses and images written on the bodies of people that inhabited these two spheres. What sharks scoured beneath the surface? What friends were aliens? What media impaired us? What leaders practiced Insect Politics? And what did muscled men hide underneath their skin? The Manly Monsters in Washington, who systemically upheld masculinity's power through image-making structures, failed to answer these questions, doomed to fear the horrors that existed beyond their binary identities. The actual monsters of Hollywood, monsters created by those who thrived within boundaries, survived.

[425] Kracauer, *Mass Ornament*, 303.

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