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**Experimenting with Torture: Abu Ghraib Through the Lens of
Paul Scheuring's *The Experiment***

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*To my mother and sister,
Who made me the woman I am today.*

*Para a minha mãe e irmã,
Que fizeram de mim a mulher que sou hoje.*

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Abstract

In the turmoil of the Iraq War, the Abu Ghraib scandal leaked through in the form of photographs depicting scenes of detainees being tortured and humiliated by members of the U.S. Military Police which were entrusted to guard them.

The thesis aims to reflect on the way these photographs, have influenced representations of terror, torture and violence, in western visual culture, in the context of the “War on Terror”. The film *The Experiment* (2010) will be analyzed as a case in point. Common motifs between film and photographs will be juxtaposed: patterns of power and control, dehumanization of the “other”, anxieties towards surveillance and the idea of retaliation in kind will be examined and analyzed.

In order to better highlight the influence of the Abu Ghraib scandal and the “War on Terror” on the film *The Experiment*, a comparison will also be made with the original 2001 German version, *Das Experiment*. This comparison aims to highlight the contrast between the two cinematic points of view, before and after the circulation of the infamous photographs, thus helping to understand the influence of these images in the 2010 film.

Further examples of art/media works representing terror, torture and violence after the “War on Terror” will also be presented, as a way to offer a wider background to the analysis. Works by Fernando Botero (paintings), Martha Rosler (collage), Regina José Galindo (performance), Luke Moran (film) and Jonathan Hobin (photograph) will be examined. The inter-medial nature of the thesis will hopefully allow us to understand the effects of the “War on Terror”, and the Abu Ghraib photographs in specific, in new representations of terror, torture and violence emerging in western visual culture.

Keywords: Torture; violence; terror; intermedia; dehumanization; representation; visual culture.

Resumo

Na desordem da Guerra no Iraque, o escândalo de Abu Ghraib veio à tona sob a forma de fotografias. Estas ilustravam cenas de detidos a ser torturados e humilhados por membros da Polícia Militar dos Estados Unidos que estavam encarregues de os supervisionar.

A tese ambiciona reflectir acerca da forma como estas fotografias influenciaram representações de terror, tortura e violência na cultura visual ocidental, no contexto da “War on Terror”. O filme *The Experiment* (2010) será analisado como caso de estudo. Temas comuns entre filme e fotografias serão justapostos: padrões de poder e controlo, desumanização do “outro”, ansiedades relativamente à vigilância e a ideia de retaliação será examinada e analisada.

De forma a dar ênfase à influência do escândalo de Abu Ghraib e a “War on Terror” no filme *The Experiment*, será também feita uma comparação com a versão original alemã de 2001, *Das Experiment*. Esta comparação visa sublinhar o contraste entre dois pontos de vista cinematográficos, antes e depois da circulação das infames fotografias, ajudando assim a entender a influência destas imagens no filme de 2010.

Outros exemplos de trabalhos artísticos que representam terror, tortura e violência depois da “War on Terror” serão também apresentados, de forma a oferecer um contexto mais aprofundado à análise. As obras de Fernando Botero (pinturas), Martha Rosler (colagens), Regina José Galindo (performance), Luke Moran (filme) e Jonathan Hobin (fotografia) serão examinadas. A natureza intermedial da tese poderá permitir-nos perceber os efeitos da “War on Terror”, e, especificamente, das fotografias de Abu Ghraib, em novas representações de terror, tortura e violência emergentes na cultura visual ocidental.

Palavras-chave: Tortura; violência; terror; intermedia; desumanização; representação; cultura visual.

1. Introduction

In 2004 the world came to know the horrors that took place at Abu Ghraib, the Iraqi prison formerly used by Saddam Hussein's regime, through various photographs taken by some members of the American Military Police stationed there during the Iraq War. These photos shocked and appalled people everywhere, including U.S. citizens, who believed this type of behavior (torture, humiliation, abuse) was neither performed nor permitted amongst U.S. troops. Most of the photographs display soldiers, men and women, cheerily posing next to Iraqi detainees shown in degrading positions, sometimes bleeding, sometimes hooded.¹

This thesis aims to understand how the Abu Ghraib photographs changed the way western subjects think about the representation of terror, torture and violence by focusing on the 2010 movie *The Experiment*², in light of the context in which it was produced – i.e. the “War on Terror”. To achieve this, a contextualization of the historical elements that lead up to the controversial pictures will be firstly presented, culminating in an intermedial analysis to the issue of representation (namely, the self-representation of the guards in the Abu Ghraib photographs and the representation of characters “performing” the role of guards in the movie).

The 1987 “Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment” signed by the U.S. defines torture as “any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession”³, and states that “[n]o exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of

¹ A selection of photographs can be found at: “Torture Scandal, The Images that Shamed America”. Accessed December 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/gall/0,8542,1211872,00.html>

² *The Experiment*. DVD. Directed by Paul Scheuring. Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures, 2010.

³ Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Accessed December 2013. www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CAT.aspx.

torture”⁴. Hundreds of prisoners held by the U.S. troops were not given the status of war prisoners, in accordance to the Geneva Convention⁵, they were held indefinitely without the right to an attorney or a trial, for they were “unlawful combatants”, as was explained by the past Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld: “They will be handled not as prisoners of war, because they are not, but as unlawful combatants, and [...] technically, unlawful combatants do not have any rights under the Geneva Convention”⁶. By using the term “unlawful combatants” the U.S. government somewhat excused their behavior towards Iraqi prisoners, portraying them as a brand new stripe of enemy.

The White House reinforced its representation of Al-Qaeda as a terrorist military group by stating its disrespect for conventional warfare and thus portraying their members or supporters as “a modern equivalent of [...] *outlaw*, someone who was not only themselves operating outside the law, i.e. a criminal, but who could be treated outside any legal

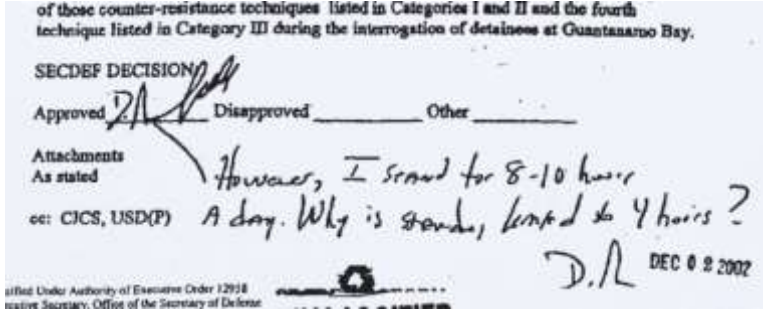


Image 1. Detail from a formerly classified memo issued by the Department of Defense (02.12.2002). Source: Public Domain.

framework”⁷. From this point, a character of exception could then be applied to the War in Iraq and the use of torture could be legitimized. This resulted in loosening the limitations of

interrogation. As proof of this experimentation with the boundaries of interrogation there is a formerly classified memo from the Department of Defense approving harsher interrogation

⁴ Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.
⁵ The Fourth Geneva Convention was signed in 1949 by the United States of America. A set of international laws state that it is forbidden to torture, make attempts towards personal dignity, humiliate and degrade detainees. ‘In international law, and even under the Fourth Geneva Convention which exempts some detainees from the rights of prisoner of war, there is an injunction to treat such people ‘with humanity’, thus constituting an implicit, and unqualified, prohibition of the right of states, or other to torture.’ –Fred Halliday, *Shocked and Awed* – A Dictionary of the War on Terror, Berkeley, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2010, 87.
⁶ *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*. DVD. Directed by Rory Kennedy. New York: Home Box Office Home Video (HBO), 2007.
⁷ Halliday, op.cit., 89

methods. At the end of the document, in Rumsfeld's own handwriting, we can read: "However, I stand for 8-10 hour a day. Why is standing limited to 4 hours? D.R."⁸.

This document reveals the involvement and knowledge about the harsh methods of interrogation from those higher in the chain of command. Hoping to enforce significant changes in Abu Ghraib prison, Rumsfeld decided to bring someone from the Guantánamo Bay detention camp, the infamous American detainment and interrogation facility located within Guantánamo Bay Naval Base, Cuba⁹. This controversial facility was established in the wake of 9/11 by the Bush Administration in 2002 to hold detainees captured in Afghanistan and later Iraq¹⁰.

The person in charge of the operations in Guantánamo Bay was Major General Geoffrey Miller¹¹, recognized for his techniques of obtaining information from detainees. So in 2003, a year before the scandal, Rumsfeld sent General Miller to Abu Ghraib as the facility was not producing the same outcomes as Guantánamo Bay. Brigadier General Janis Karpinski was Chief of the Military Police and in charge of the operations in Abu Ghraib at the time¹². In an interview, she stated that when General Miller arrived at Abu Ghraib he said that the prisoners were being treated too kindly, and if the soldiers wanted to get information from prisoners their methods needed to change, they would have to treat detainees "like dogs"¹³. On this trip General Miller left information on how to proceed in a way to ensure the soldiers in Abu Ghraib achieved the desired results. Karpinski claimed that General Miller planned to (in his own words) "Gitmoize"¹⁴ Abu Ghraib¹⁵.

⁸ The National Security Archive. "The Interrogation Documents: Debating U.S. Policy and Methods". Accessed December 2013. <http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB127/>.

⁹ *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*. Directed by Rory Kennedy, 2007.

¹⁰ CNN. Guantanamo Bay Naval Station Fast Facts. Accessed December 2013. <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/09/09/world/guantanamo-bay-naval-station-fast-facts/>.

¹¹ Washington Post. "General Who Ran Guantanamo Bay Retires". Accessed December 2013. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/31/AR2006073101183.html>.

¹² CNN.com/US. "Abu Ghraib head finds vindication in newly released memos". Accessed December 2013. <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/US/04/22/us.torture.karpinski/>.

¹³ *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*. Directed by Rory Kennedy, 2007.

¹⁴ After the military abbreviation of the Guantánamo naval base: GITMO.

¹⁵ *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*. Directed by Rory Kennedy, 2007.

A memo was then issued by Lieutenant Ricardo Sanchez for the use of extreme techniques. Among the methods approved are “Emotional hate: Playing on the genuine hatred or desire for revenge a security internee has for an individual group” and “Fear up harsh: Significantly increasing the fear level in a security internee”¹⁶. These methods are clearly meant to degrade the detainees, emotionally and physically. During his visit to Abu Ghraib, General Miller changed the role of the Military Police in the detention camp. Before, they were only assigned as prison guards (even if this was not part of their military training), from then on, they were asked to “prepare” the detainees for interrogation, or, as Private Lynndie England put it: “to soften them up”¹⁷. This would make the interrogation process more “effective”. J. M. Coetzee explains the logic of the torturer when, commenting on the issue of torture, he writes in his novel, *Diary of a Bad Year*: “If an animal is going to have its throat cut, does it really matter that it has its leg tendons cut too?”¹⁸. This “preparation” consisted in (amongst other things) the removal of clothing, stress positions, hooding, sexual humiliation, sensory disorientation and phobias (e.g. fear of dogs)¹⁹.

The detainees were also submitted to a special kind of intimidation. It came to be known that during interrogations female members of the Military Intelligence would taunt the detainees, flashing their body and underwear, sometimes sitting on their laps and forcing the interrogated to touch them. These women would also claim they were menstruating and would smear fake menstrual blood on the detainee’s faces preventing them from praying as a means to resist the strain of the interrogation. This procedure would render them unclean, according to the soldiers’ understanding of Muslim religion. The Military Police would then cut off the

¹⁶ American Civil Liberties Union. “October Sanchez Memo”. Accessed December 2013. <https://www.aclu.org/national-security/october-sanchez-memo>.

¹⁷ *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*. Directed by Rory Kennedy, 2007.

¹⁸ J. M Coetzee. *Diary of a Bad Year*. (London: Vintage, 2008), 65.

¹⁹ The Washington Post. “The Policy of Abuse”. Accessed December 2013. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A30039-2004May15.html>.

water supply to their cells so they were unable to clean themselves²⁰. There is even a term to designate the female members of the Military Intelligence who engaged in this kind of practice (both in Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib), “torture chicks”²¹. It was in this stressful context that the photographs taken by the Military Police were divulged and the actions taking place at Abu Ghraib became known to the wider world.

This chapter will provide an analysis of some of those photographs and how they will inform the film *The Experiment*. It will also examine how violence and torture are explored intermedially after “9/11” and the “War on Terror” and how western subjects represent their “others” in times of conflict.

Shortly after being assigned the night shift at Tier 1 A the soldiers began taking photographs of each other with the detainees they were supposed to guard. Allegedly these photographs were meant to be shown to other detainees as a way to make them fear the same fate and disclose any information they might have²². However, the reality of what we *see* in them does not translate into an objective method to obtain confessions. These photos show U.S. Military Police members standing next to tortured bodies of Iraqi men, not in “military poses”, but as if they were on vacation, smiling, giving the viewer the “thumbs up”. The photos here discussed imply a voyeuristic interest in the scenes they portrait and offer, as part of the same fascination, a vision of the extreme violence that conjured them.

In *Regarding the Pain of Others* Susan Sontag wrote that “words alter, words add, words subtract”²³, on the other hand, photographs capture moments, supposedly pristine and unalterable. And they will not ever go away. In *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, referring to the falling towers, Žižek adds that “[i]t is not that reality entered our image: the image entered

²⁰ Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect* (New York: Random House, 2007), 426.

²¹ The New York Times. “Torture Chicks Gone Wild”. Accessed December 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/30/opinion/30dowd.html?_r=0.

²² *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*. Directed by Rory Kennedy, 2007.

²³ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*. (New York: Picador/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), I.

and shattered our reality”²⁴. For Žižek “[...] the real in its extreme violence [is] the price to be paid for peeling off the deceptive layers of reality”²⁵, commenting on how the terrorists were able to strike the very symbol of capitalism and turn it against itself. We can revisit this idea when considering the ill-reputed photographs of Abu Ghraib, for they also successfully peel off “deceptive layers of reality”, by deconstructing the pristine image of the brave and honorable American soldier.

As Susan Sontag has shown, the Abu Ghraib images are not very dissimilar from the photos of the lynching of black people which persisted in the United States until the 1930’s²⁶. In many of these early photographs we can see lynching, alongside a crowd either pleased or indifferent. Sontag states: “the lynching photographs were souvenirs of a collective action whose participants felt perfectly justified in what they had done. So are the pictures from Abu Ghraib”.

This type of violence is clear in Abu Ghraib photographs where the detainees are hooded and made fun of with cheery poses from the soldiers. Reinforcing the humiliation is not only the fact that the prisoners were photographed (in itself an abuse of authority by the soldiers), but also that they appeared in shameful positions and often naked. The removal of clothes and the hooding effectively deprived them of individuality, and the photographs portraying the use of dogs demonstrate the physical pain (it is documented that some detainees were in fact bitten) and the extreme fear they were exposed to.

One of the more reproduced images within the large group of Abu Ghraib photographs is the picture of a detainee standing on a box, hooded, and dressed in a big piece of cloth, with wires attached to his hands. This detainee (25-year-old Abdou Hussain Saad Faleh later found not guilty of the charges against him) was nicknamed “Gilligan” by Corporal Graner because

²⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*. (London: Verso, 2002), 16.

²⁵ Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, 5.

²⁶ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*. (New York: Picador/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 72. A selection of these photographs can also be found at: Without Sanctuary. “Photographs and Postcards of Lynching in America”. Accessed December 2013. <http://withoutsanctuary.org/main.html>.

he kept identifying himself with different names. The prisoner was told that if he fell of the box he would be electrocuted, and even though Specialist Sabrina Harman claimed that there was no electricity running through those wires, the threat of electrocution was enough to cause dread. Adding to the effort of having to stand still on top of a box with his arms open, the hood effectively caused sensory disorientation. It is also important to observe that in the uncropped version of the photo we find the figure of Sergeant Ivan Frederick with his camera, which testifies to the soldiers' indifference towards these procedures in Abu Ghraib. Another infamous photograph is the one where Private Lynndie England holds a leash linked to a naked detainee. This photo, evoking images associated with the sadomasochistic "dominatrix", shocked for its posture of supremacy embodied by the "woman soldier" over the detainee, who



Image 2. Uncropped photograph of Private Lynndie England holding a “leash” linked to an Iraqi detainee as Specialist Megan Ambuhl observes at Abu Ghraib. Source: Public Domain.

is visibly humiliated, degraded and leashed as a “dog”, following General Miller’s guidelines on the treatment of detainees. As Roland Barthes explained in his work *Camera Lucida*, in front of the cameras we become others than ourselves. Barthes writes:

“[i]n front of the lens, I am at the

same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, [...]”²⁷. By drawing on Barthes we can read Private England’s behavior in this photo as a projection of what she thinks she is and a projection of what she wants her peers to think she is. Indeed, as Susana Araújo writes, referring to the Abu Ghraib photographs, “[t]he eye of the camera seems to give social coherence to acts of both sadism and humiliation, at the

²⁷ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage, 2000), 13.

same time that it discloses uncomfortable social projections which could not be narrated otherwise”²⁸. Usually this photo is seen cropped, where the only visible people are Private England and the detainee, but in an uncropped version of the image, interestingly enough, we see Specialist Megan Ambuhl leaning against the wall, with her hands on her pockets, observing the scene. She may be taken as an example of all the members of the Military Police who watched dispassionately the severe mistreatment of detainees without intervening.

Another highly reproduced photograph is the one where two Military Police members (Corporal Graner and Specialist Harman) stand behind a group of naked and hooded detainees stacked into what came to be referred to as a “pyramid”. On “top” of the pyramid (from the photo’s perspective) stands a proud and smiling Corporal Graner, with arms crossed and giving the camera the “thumbs up”. Significantly, however, the image of another soldier, Specialist Harman almost goes unnoticed in this photo, and nearly seems to be part of the pile of bodies, unintentionally disclosing an unexpected identification with the humiliated prisoners themselves. It can be argued that this photo may disclose how the soldiers were also, to a great extent, employed as pawns by their superiors and, perhaps, unconsciously shared with the detainees an inescapable sense of powerlessness.

In another similar pyramid photograph we see Private England and Corporal Graner, both smiling and giving the thumbs up, standing behind a group of naked detainees whose bodies are seen from behind (through an angle which is even more degrading to the prisoners). We also can see some writing in one of the detainee’s leg, it reads “I am a



Image 3. Writing on a detainee's body. Source: Public Domain.

rapeist [sic]”, (the misspelling of the word ‘rapist’, here, also reveals the specific background of the US soldiers sent to Iraq). Such a photo shows that the soldiers not only deprived the

²⁸ Susana Araújo, “Propagating Images and Transatlantic Anxieties: McEwan in New York and Abu Ghraib. Amaryll Chanady, George Handley and Patrick Imbert (eds.), *America's Worlds and The World's Americas*, Legas/Ottawa: University of Ottawa (2006): 197.

detainees of their identity, but that they also imposed a new identity to them by literally “labeling” them.

Lastly, two highly polemic photographs are also worth mentioning: the two photos where Corporal Graner and Specialist Harman appear smiling and giving the “thumbs up” next to a dead body. In an interview presented in the documentary *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* (2007), Harman explained her smile and posture by saying that it was “just the natural thing to do when you’re in front of a camera”. The dead man was Manadel al-Jamadi, a suspect of bombing a Red Cross facility in Baghdad. Thanks to these photos his was the only death at Abu Ghraib to be ruled as homicide, since they were trying to convince the uninformed that he had died from a heart attack; the photos were used as evidence of violent aggression²⁹. Even though Specialist Harman and Corporal Graner were charged for the photos, those who committed the murder (the Military Intelligence during interrogation) were never brought to justice. Also, it came to be known that Al-Jamadi was nicknamed by some at Abu Ghraib “The Iceman” and “Mr. Frosty”, for after his death the Military Intelligence placed him in a bathroom for several hours and covered him with ice bags. Others called him “Bernie”, hinting at the movie *Weekend at Bernie’s* in which a dead body is treated as if still alive. We are again brought to the importance of identification, of labeling yourself and the “other”. Opting to nickname Al-Jamadi the Military Police managed to dehumanize the lifeless body, reducing it to a comfortable private joke as a way to avoid facing their actions as torture and murder.

2010 saw the release of a film, entitled *The Experiment*, directed by Paul Scheuring (known best for the 2005 hit series *Prison Break*) and starring Adrian Brody and Forest Whitaker. Despite having an A-list cast and an action-packed plot, the film was deemed unfit for theater release and was a direct-to-DVD production³⁰. Could it be that the portrayal of

²⁹ *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*. Directed by Rory Kennedy, 2007.

³⁰ *The Experiment*. Directed by Paul Scheuring, 2010.

violence directed to the “other” was a painful reminder of episodes like the scandal of the Abu Ghraib photographs?

Although this movie is not a direct representation of the events that took place at Abu Ghraib and despite its overly dramatized storyline created to suit Hollywood market, it can help us perceive the underlining influence of the Abu Ghraib photographs had on the silver screen. The movie tells the story of Travis, a free spirit in need of money, and Barris, a mild-mannered man living under the control of his mother, as they both take in a social/psychological experiment which takes place in a secluded “prison”. Within this experiment, a group of men must perform the role of “guards” while the remaining participants must perform the role of “prisoners”.

The Experiment (a remake of the 2001 German *Das Experiment*³¹) is based on a psychology experience conducted in 1971, in Northern California’s Stanford University by Professor Philip Zimbardo. His goal was to answer the question: “[w]hat happens when you put good people in an evil place?”, “[c]ould the institution come to control your behavior, or did your attitude, values and morality allow you to rise above a negative environment?”³². The basement at Stanford University was turned into a makeshift prison. Drawn by the payment of 15 dollars a day, many students applied to take part in this experiment. After some tests, a select group was later divided in two subgroups and each man was randomly assigned the role of guard or prisoner, having received explanation on the nature of the experiment.

This experience turned out to be more enlightening than what was first expected but, ultimately got out of control. As for as one student stated: “[...] once you put on that uniform you become a guard”³³. The immersion in the character allowed them to truly identify with the role they were playing, the uniform; the rough language; the rules, all of these aspects helped

³¹ *Das Experiment*. DVD. Directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel. Berlin/New York: Senator Film (Germany)/ The Samuel Goldwyn Company (U.S.), 2001.

³² *Stanford Prison Experiment*. Visual Material. Directed by Kim Duke. London: BBC Productions, 2002.

³³ *Stanford Prison Experiment*. Directed by Kim Duke, 2002.

the students to actually convert into guards. It is also worth noticing that the experiment was both observed by Zimbardo and his team of researchers, from behind a one-way window, as well as recorded by hidden cameras³⁴. In the hidden camera footage we can find eerie resemblances to the imagery surrounding the Abu Ghraib scandal including, for example, the images of the hooded man.



Image 4. “Guards” and “prisoners” at Stanford University (1971). Source: Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect* (New York: Random House, 2007), 131.

The “guards” were told they had to maintain the order, but could not use physical violence³⁵. As soon as the slightest form of insurgence was felt by the “guards” they were not shy to retaliate, engaging in degrading processes, humiliating the “prisoners” by doing things like putting bags on their heads. As the documentary *Stanford Prison Experiment* displays, Hellmann (one of the “guards”), took particular

enjoyment in his role, he was even nicknamed “John Wayne” for his macho attitude and strong persona. In Zimbardo’s book, *The Lucifer Effect*, the scholar gives his own recollection and considerations about one “guard” in particular:

John Wayne was the nickname for the guard who was the meanest and toughest of them all; [...] Of course I was eager to see who he was and he was doing that attracted so much attention. [...] I was absolutely stunned to see that their John Wayne was the ‘really nice guy’ with whom I had chatted earlier. Only now, he was transformed into someone else. He not only moved differently, but he talked differently – With a Southern accent³⁶.

In an interview, Hellmann, the student who embodied this character, said that he made a conscientious decision to act like that, for in his mind that was what was expected of him. He

³⁴ Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect*, 131.

³⁵ *Stanford Prison Experiment*. Directed by Kim Duke, 2002.

³⁶ Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect*, 169.

would take the lead role in the majority of the humiliations, owning the night shift, and was never contradicted by the other “guards”. On the contrary he was supported by them. “John Wayne” and the rest of the “guards” wore sun glasses which had been given to them by Zimbardo’s research team. The glasses were meant to help the process of dissociating and distancing the “guards” from the “prisoners”, effectively blocking eye contact, thus providing the “guards” a tougher exterior as well as a wall to hide behind.

Zimbardo’s final assessment of this experiment, that came to be known as the Stanford Prison experiment was that “the evil place won over the good people”³⁷ and that “such situational forces as those described [t]here did not directly prod the guards into doing bad things, it was the situational forces [...] that created freedom from the usual social and moral constraints on abusive actions”³⁸. Zimbardo’s observation that role-playing gave the test subjects the freedom to behave as they saw fitting to the situation certainly applies to the soldiers at Abu Ghraib Prison.

Understanding that the main inspiration for *The Experiment* was the Stanford Prison experiment, we can venture into the analysis of how the violence represented in the film echoes the violence represented in the Abu Ghraib photographs. The similarities between the film and the actual experiment are conveyed early in the film, when a group of the characters in the movie are assigned to be “guards”, clearly lacking the knowledge or training to perform such task, much like the Military Police in charge of Tier 1 A in Abu Ghraib. This idea is reinforced early in the movie when the character Dr. Archuleta (the principal researcher) tells the participants that they will only be accepted in the experiment if they have never been incarcerated before.

³⁷ *Stanford Prison Experiment*. Directed by Kim Duke, 2002.

³⁸ Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect*, 352

The character that most clearly resembles Hellmann's "John Wayne" is Barris, a character who is the instigator and leader amongst the "guards". A God-fearing man, in his own home he was psychologically abused by his mother, it is suggested that such a relationship emasculated him and made him feel impotent. Hence, the experiment allowed him to gain the power and control that his sick and elderly mother never permitted him to have at home. In the "prison" he lives the fantasy of being in charge for once. This character further resembles "John Wayne" in terms of specific traits, since Hellmann, who had been tested prior to the experiment by Zimbardo, had surprisingly achieved the lowest score in terms of "Masculinity" in the *The Comrey Personality Scales*³⁹ report. This report states that a subject with high masculinity score: "does not cry easily, [and is] not interested in love stories"⁴⁰ which did not apply to Hellmann. Through Travis we experience the plot from a different perspective, than that provided by Barris. From the beginning, Travis offers resistance to the type of violence that increasingly grows throughout the film. During the tests of admittance Travis is guided to the inside of a tiny compartment where he is forced to watch a series of violent clips on a screen. We can observe that his head is wired, so the researchers are able to evaluate his responses to the clips⁴¹. From this incident the viewer has, since the beginning of the film, a sense that Travis is not a violent man, demonstrated by the fact that he displays signs of physical discomfort at the mere sight of images of violence.

Once the test subjects are assigned to the position of either "guard" or "prisoner" and dress up accordingly, they begin to settle into their roles. Much like the students at Stanford or the Military Police members at Abu Ghraib, these characters soon behave as if the uniform validated their actions. Barris begins to assume the lead of the group soon in the film. The

³⁹ *The Comrey Personality Scales* is an inventory composed of several multiple choice items designed to evaluate the personality of the subject tested.

⁴⁰ Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect*, 199.

⁴¹ This scene is highly evocative of a scene from *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), where the protagonist is submitted to something called "Ludovico" Technique, a fictional experimental aversion therapy for rehabilitating violent perpetrators. Travis reacts with repugnance, clearly affected by the suffering and evil presented to him, echoing the reaction of Alex, the exuberant main character of *A Clockwork Orange*. See *A Clockwork Orange*. DVD Directed by Stanley Kubrick. California: Columbia-Warner Distributors, 1971.

“guards” cannot use physical violence against the “prisoners” so he comes up with the idea of acting like students do in fraternity houses⁴² when he says: “they [the fraternity brothers] couldn’t hurt us, but they could do something much worse, they could humiliate us. That’s what we have to do”⁴³.

Another scene which deserves attention is the episode when the “guards” decide to shave Travis’s head as a way to create a cautionary tale and example for the other “prisoners”. This action is followed by Barris’s question “do we have a proper respect for authority now?”. When Travis replies back Barris kicks him to the ground and begins to urinate on him, demanding that the other “guards” join him, with the purpose of sending a message. This section is important in framing the way the test subjects’ behavior is represented, as the participants of the experiment begin to acquire animal-like traits and behaviors. Inside this dislocated environment Barris is clearly no longer the abused coward who lived with his mother, this persona strengthens him.

At all times Barris’s character reinforces the idea that these are not his rules, and that is not his will. He states, “I have been given a position. I didn’t ask for it”. Saying this, or better yet, *believing* this, Barris somehow unburdens himself of his responsibility in the deeds. The question of responsibility is thus presented as a thin line very difficult to discern, resembling the issues raised by the culpability of the members of the Military Police (and/or their superiors) in relation to the Abu Ghraib pictures. Barris goes on saying “in some ways it would have been easier if I was a prisoner, like you”, to which Travis responds by implying that Barris is oblivious to his own behavior. Barris concludes this dialogue by saying “they know

⁴² This type of discourse evokes the words of Rush Limbaugh, a conservative American radio talk show host and political commentator, on his *The Rush Limbaugh Show*, the highest-rated talk-radio program in the United States of America: This is no different than what happens at the Skull and Bones⁴² initiation and we’re going to ruin people’s lives over it and we’re going to hamper our military effort, and then we are going to really hammer them because they had a good time. You know, these people are being fired at every day. I’m talking about people having a good time, these people, you ever heard of emotional release? You ever heard of need to blow some steam off?” – “Limbaugh on torture of Iraqis: U.S. guards were “having a good time,” “blow[ing] some steam off”. <http://mediamatters.org/research/2004/05/05/limbaugh-on-torture-of-iraqis-us-guards-were-ha/131111> (Accessed December 2013).

⁴³ *The Experiment*. Directed by Paul Scheuring, 2010.

what they are doing”, referring to the researchers. These dialogues are not innocent: Barris clearly seems to represent a large portion of U.S. soldiers while at the same time he reminds us of the students who were part of the Stanford Prison experiment that either trusted or were coerced to rely on the higher chain of command.

The Experiment is not, by and large, the only film in which we can find examples of violence towards the “other”. The German dramatization of the social experiment *The Third Wave* called *Die Welle* (2008)⁴⁴, also features violence and terror arising from the insidious influence of a higher power. Praising the film, Ron Jones (the Professor responsible for *The Third Wave* in California back in the 60’s) said:

There was real bravery on the part of the Germans to do this. It wouldn't happen in the US. The film won't even show in the US. We're like ignorant children who don't want to see what's going on. We don't look at racism, or study it. The US has no sense of guilt. We don't think about Dresden or Hiroshima or Iraq⁴⁵.

Jones’s remark reminds us that *The Experiment* was not released in theaters, and its German counterpart, *Das Experiment*⁴⁶ was. This speaks directly to the different ways that each country deals with the representations of violence portrayed by these media.

When the Abu Ghraib photographs were first made public on the television show *60 Minutes*, following the accusation of Sergeant Joe Darby, the Bush administration was more worried about preventing the dissemination of the photos than with punishing the culprits. Only when it could not be muffled anymore, the government had to “grab the bull by the horns” and address the nation on this issue. Completely ignoring the fact that Corporal Graner received

⁴⁴ *Die Welle*. DVD. Directed by Dennis Gansel. Frankfurt: Constantin Film Verleih GmbH, 2008.

⁴⁵ The Guardian. “Like History in the First Person”. Accessed December 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2008/sep/16/schoolsworldwide.film>.

⁴⁶ *Das Experiment*. Directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2001.

many accolades⁴⁷ for his work at Abu Ghraib and was even encouraged to “continue to perform at this level”⁴⁸, the Bush administration swiftly stated that the actions that took place at Abu Ghraib had been the work of a few soldiers acting on their own, a few “rotten apples”, so to speak. It was labeled “non-authorized sadism” and “animal house on the night shift”⁴⁹.

The U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld accused the members of the Military Police portrayed on the photos for the events and considered them to have full responsibility for their actions. He stated that the actions of the soldiers were “unacceptable” and “un-American”⁵⁰ and that the Bush administration intended to take any and all actions necessary to find out what happened, making sure the appropriate steps were taken. However, the link between these two detention camps cannot be overlooked. How could the photos of torture in Abu Ghraib show similar procedures to the ones known to be used in Guantánamo Bay if there was no cooperation between the two? This question challenges the claim that torture, as depicted in the photos, was simply the work of a few deranged individuals. But even if it was, the real issue here is, as Sontag argues, that torture was “[...] systematic, authorized and condoned. “All acts are done by individuals. The issue is not whether a majority or a minority of Americans performs such acts but whether the nature of the policies prosecuted by this administration and the hierarchies deployed to carry them out makes such acts likely” (2004, I.). So, what are the photographs saying about these hierarchies? How did these members of the Military Police represent themselves as part of this hierarchy in these pictures?

As Foucault explained in *Microphysics of Power*⁵¹ a text later reread, revised and updated by Gilles Deleuze⁵², in an era where vigilance is used as an alternative to punishment, what the Abu Ghraib photographs show us is that in a context of war, surveillance is used by

⁴⁷ Marks of acknowledgement.

⁴⁸ *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*. Directed by Rory Kennedy, 2007.

⁴⁹ *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*. Directed by Rory Kennedy, 2007.

⁵⁰ U.S. Department of Defense. Accessed December 2013. <http://www.defense.gov/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=26524>.

⁵¹ Michael Foucault, *Microfísica do Poder* (Rio de Janeiro: Edições Graal Ltda, 1979).

⁵² See Deleuze’s Postscript on the Societies of Control. (*October*, vol. 59, 1992).

those in control as an efficient substitute to corporal punishment. The photographs were highly polemic and someone had to be blamed for it and penalized, and surely enough the fingers were promptly pointed at the Military Police in the photos, the faces on the evening news. The photographs embarrassed the army, so the army took revenge on the soldiers. This may suggest that it is all right to torture but it is not all right to take pictures of torture. Karpinski was the only high-ranking official to face significant penalties. General Miller, on the other hand, was promoted to Deputy Commanding General for detainee operations in Iraq, including Abu Ghraib. In 2006 he received the Distinguished Service Medal at the Pentagon's Hall of Heroes. This proves that, as Karpinski said in an interview: "There are no heroes in this story, only people with more or less control". Certainly in photographs, like the "dominatrix" picture, conveyed the fantasy, visually dramatized by the soldiers, of having complete control over the detainees. However, it can be argued that the soldiers were themselves, in fact, part of a larger overall hierarchy of power and degradation emblemized by Tier 1 A.

2. Representing violence and torture in Paul Scheuring's *The Experiment* (2010)

In this chapter I intend to establish a connection between *The Experiment*⁵³ and the photographs of Abu Ghraib, understanding that the “War on Terror” had a tremendous impact in contemporary art and culture, cinema included. The movie analyzed was molded by the “War on Terror” particularly by a series of pictures taken by United States soldiers at the Iraqi prison Abu Ghraib. The chapter will build on the representation of the movie’s characters, tropes, and the common topics between the film and infamous photographs.

The year of 2010 saw the release of a film entitled *The Experiment* starring acclaimed actors Adrian Brody and Forest Whitaker. The movie is a remake of the 2001 film *Das Experiment*⁵⁴, a German film directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel, who is best known for the praised 2004 film *Der Untergang (Downfall)*, which depicted the last days of Adolf Hitler. This past decade has witnessed the screening of many remakes, which indicates that history has a way of repeating itself, surfacing the need to tell the same stories. *Das Experiment*, in its turn, is a screen adaptation of Mario Giordano’s novel *Black Box* (1990)⁵⁵. The novel is based on a psychology experience conducted in 1971, in Northern California’s Stanford University by Professor Philip Zimbardo, who was President of the American Psychological Association in 2002⁵⁶ and is currently a relevant name in his academic field as well as a Professor *Emeritus* at Stanford University.

The Experiment was directed by Paul Scheuring, best known for the creation of the 2005 hit series *Prison Break*. Despite the appealing cast and status achieved by Scheuring, (his

⁵³ *The Experiment*. Directed by Paul Scheuring, 2010.

⁵⁴ *Das Experiment*. DVD. Directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel. Berlin/New York: Senator Film (Germany)/ The Samuel Goldwyn Company (U.S.), 2001.

⁵⁵ Giordano, a German writer, was also responsible for writing the screenplay.

⁵⁶ American Psychological Association. Accessed March 2014. <http://www.apa.org/about/governance/president/bio-philip-zimbardo.aspx>.

series won several awards and were nominated for two Golden Globes and an Emmy) the film did not get a chance at the box office and it was released as a direct-to-DVD production. Even though it contained a commercially attractive, action packed plot the film was somehow deemed unfit for theater release. The portrayal of violence directed to the “other” might have acted as a painful direct reminder of episodes like the scandal of the Abu Ghraib photographs. Moreover, it should be noted that back in 2001 Zimbardo was perturbed with the plot of *Das Experiment* and tried to stop its theatrical release in the U.S.A., claiming in an American Psychological Association digital article that “[i]t makes Stanford and me and psychology look bad. And I resent that, especially at a time when, as APA (American Psychological Association) president, I am trying to work with the media to advance more positive portrayals of psychology”⁵⁷. It is only normal to imagine that the 2010 film suffered similar pressures, for like its predecessor this movie also used the idea of a scientific experiment in order to comment on the horrors of prison life. The greatest difference between the two being the noticeable influence of the “War on Terror” and the Abu Ghraib photographs in the U.S. film⁵⁸. Images of Abu Ghraib, like other images deriving from the “War on Terror”, were certainly a tender subject to portray on screen and may have been difficult for a U.S. audience to view⁵⁹. Although the movie does not refer directly to the acts of torture and humiliation that took place at Abu Ghraib (and despite its overly dramatized storyline to suit the Hollywood market), the film can nonetheless help us to perceive the underlining influence that images as the ones taken by the U.S. soldiers in Iraq had in terms of the representation of violence and torture on the silver screen.

⁵⁷ American Psychological Association. “Film Criticized as Irresponsible”. Accessed March 2014. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/mar02/filmcritic.aspx>.

⁵⁸ This topic will be further analyzed in the next chapter.

⁵⁹ Then again, the movie might just also have encountered economic issues which prevented its release.



5



6

Images 5/ 6. *The Experiment* - Movie stills: “Prisoners” coerced by “guards” / A “guard” assaulted and bagged by other “guards”.

The movie tells the story of a behavioral experiment designed to push the limits of its participants. We are presented early in the movie with both main characters, Travis Hunt (Brody) and Michael Barris (Whitaker), the protagonist and the antagonist (respectively). Travis is a pacifist in need of money, and Barris is a mild-mannered man living under the abuse of his mother. Both participate in the same two-week experiment inside a secluded “prison” where a group of men must perform as “guards” while the remaining participants must perform as “prisoners”. The experiment abruptly ends after only six days for the participants engage in severe acts of violence. The film opens with several clips of aggressive fights for either dominance or survival, first displaying images of microscopic organisms, then animals, culminating with humans engaging in violent interactions. Further on in the movie, while undertaking a series of tests to be accepted in the experiment Travis is shown several clips which depict similar violence to that that we have just witnessed in the first minutes of the movie, this suggests that, much like Travis, the spectator too is being tested. Also this opening sets the theme for the whole movie, as if forcing the viewer from the outset to make the necessary associations regarding the animalistic behavior displayed in the Abu Ghraib photos and the images of both animals and humans driven to their limit for whatever reason. From

here on in, the film begins to pave the way towards the common ground of violence, humiliation and torture it shares indirectly with the infamous Abu Ghraib pictures.

As far as character development goes, Travis is portrayed as a pacifist, a calm and kind individual with strong beliefs. He goes by his first name, perhaps because being addressed by his surname, “Hunt”, would not match his persona. Character building effectively creates a level of empathy between Travis and the viewers,

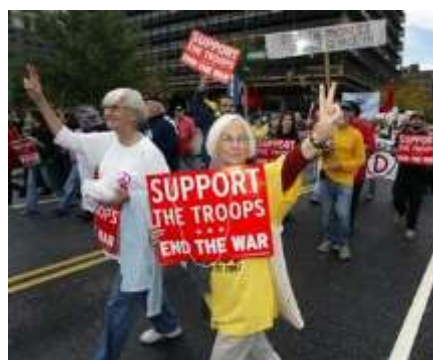


Image 7. *The Experiment* - Movie still: Travis at an anti-War rally holding a sign.

for example, the scene where Travis is laid off by the State might rekindle thoughts of the current economic crisis, thus strengthening the empathy that will serve its purpose later on in the movie. The anti-war rally he attends serves to establish the character’s beliefs as it allows for a love interest to occur, aiming to provide another layer to the protagonist as well as extra motivation for his upcoming endeavors. Other than that, it also provides an association to the anti-Iraq War protests, for Travis carries a sign with the U.S.A. flag, and the sign reads “Support Our Troops / Bring Them Home”, an appeal seen many times during “War on Terror” protests in general.



8



9

Images 8/ 9. “War on Terror” protest signs. Source: Public Domain.

Early in the movie there is a scene placed in a bar, where Travis and the girl he met at the rally discuss how “bad guys just keep changing their faces and we keep going to war”⁶⁰, agreeing on that, the seemingly kindred spirits soon make plans to go to India. In order to pay for the trip, Travis reluctantly takes a friend’s advice and looks in the paper for test subject advertisements, his gaze falls on one square entitled “SUBJECTS WANTED FOR BEHAVIORAL EXPERIMENT”, it reads, “TWO WEEKS. NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY, SAFE. \$1000/DAY”, followed by a phone number. This advert, with its gripping capital letters, stands out in the page, and it seems to mock the intense figure of Uncle Sam bearing the caption “I WANT YOU FOR U.S. ARMY”. Besides being compelling, it soothes the prospective test subject for it claims to be not dangerous, for a short period of time and it requires no previous experience of any kind and, on top of everything else, the monetary reward is attractive.

On the triage for the experiment Travis meets Michael Barris. Unlike Travis, who uses his first name, this character goes by his last name, Barris. Occluded, then, is the name “Michael”, which literally means “who is like God?” in Hebrew (Mikha-el)⁶¹, deriving from “St. Michael”, the archangel, protector and leader of the army of God against the forces of evil. Despite always being referred to by his surname, his first name certainly will suit his idea of himself later on, a leader defending a higher cause. On their very first meeting Barris says to Travis: “We are strangers in a strange land brother”, referencing Exodus 2:22⁶², thus defining himself from early on as a religious man, representing in this movie a multitude of soldiers to whom their religion works as a motivator. In a way this biblical quote is a forecast of what is about to unfold, the characters may know each other’s names at that moment, but that does not

⁶⁰ Unless otherwise specified all the following citations present in this chapter derive from: *The Experiment*. Directed by Paul Scheuring, 2010.

⁶¹ *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Accessed April 2014. http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=Michael&allowed_in_frame=0.

⁶² “And she bare him a son, and he called his name Gershom: for he said, I have been a stranger in a strange land”. See *The Official King James Bible Online*. Accessed March 2014. <http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org/Exodus-2-22/>.

make them any wiser when it comes to what the other is capable of, even if they refer to each other as “brother” or “bro” in a couple of occasions, the fact is they are not aware of each other’s capabilities, not even of their own. A man in a lab coat, only referred to, minutes before the end of the movie, as Dr. Archuleta, explains to the participants that they will participate in a “behavioral experiment” with the goal of “simulating the conditions of life inside a state penitentiary”. The detachment of, not only this character, but also of the entire research group allows us to focus only on the experiment itself, and since they do not make a sole physical appearance during the experiment the viewers might tend to think of the people that constitute the research group as a mysterious entity.

The research group can, thus, be associated with those higher up in the U.S. governmental chain of command, for the most part lurking in the shadows. Behind the mask of appealing and reassuring politicians, who struggle to assure their citizens that they are all perfectly safe and in an utterly secure environment while promoting and pursuing conflicts such as the War in Afghanistan and Iraq. In *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema*⁶³ Kevin J. Wetmore shines a light on the loss of government trust by the American people that 9/11 brought about, by reminding the reader that not only the World Trade Center was targeted, but also the Pentagon, the headquarters of the U.S. Department of Defense, and in his own words: “If our military could not even protect its own nerve center, what hope was there for the rest of the nation?”. In a way the film also reflects this mistrust, as the test subjects gradually realize that the very people who assured their safety and placed them in their current situation are unable, or unwilling to help them when they are threatened.

Before the tests to determine those fit for the experiment begin, Dr. Archuleta states that they will only accept participants that have never been arrested before. The film works to suggest that the researchers did not want the participants to have any knowledge or skill

⁶³ Kevin J. Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema* (New York/London: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012), 118.

acquired in a previous experiment in a real prison, arguably so that they could not possibly know how to deal with certain situations or recognize a certain behavior or pattern. Nix, a secondary character acts as a positive test control for the experiment, as he lied about never having been incarcerated before and is betrayed by his prison Aryan Brotherhood tattoos⁶⁴. Nix's character confirms, by the end of the movie, that it is quite possible to believe in the union of different people in order to fight a common enemy. The profile required by the researchers may remind us of the Military Police in Abu Ghraib's Tier 1A, for none of the soldiers had (or, arguably, were meant to have) special training in dealing with the detainees held for interrogation and much like the test subjects in *The Experiment* those soldiers were chosen for their lack of knowledge in the matter, thus making them the perfect scapegoat.

After asking the participants if they had been incarcerated in the past and getting no affirmative response, the time comes for interviews and tests. These segments are meant to inform the audience of the characters' personalities and facilitate even further the empathic connection between them and either one or more characters. Travis states in front of the interview camera to be non-violent and non-religious, as he affirms that "there is nothing grey here", meaning he is secure of his convictions, which future events will disprove, for he will be driven to violence and will turn to religion⁶⁵. On the other hand, Barris confesses to the interview camera that he is a devout, was a boy scout and a member of several church groups (which indicates that he has problems becoming part of a group for a long period of time). When asked "what about absolute right and wrong in the Universe?", Barris hesitantly responds that if he believes in God then he must belief in absolute right and wrong, adding "right?" at the very end of the statement, which demonstrates his need for constant external validation. This

⁶⁴ Nix displays two tattoos during the movie which are recognizably Aryan: The first, on his arm, is a three leaf clover with the initials A.B. (Aryan Brotherhood) and two Sig runes (insignia worn by the SS during the Third Reich) inside it, under the clover there is a banner with the number 88, which symbolizes "Heil Hitler" (the eight letter of the alphabet being "H"). The second, on his back, is an eagle atop swastika (symbol of the Nazi party).

⁶⁵ Travis appears caressing a large tattoo around his neck and on his chest of Hindu praying beads during troubled times and in the last minutes of the film he is holding Hindu praying beads while awaiting his girlfriend in India.

will be of major importance later on in the plot, when Barris relocates his blind trust from God to the research group. The use of a camera recording the statements of the participants, framed in a way we can only see the upper body of the speaker, calls to mind the confessional chambers in reality shows⁶⁶, adding that the “confessional” segments are not just confined to early in the movie, they are intercalated with the chronological occurrences throughout the film, mimicking the reality show format. This cinematic strategy pinpoints the movie within a very specific cultural trend and establishes a connection with the “documentary interviews”, which, related to the topic of a certain documentary are highly valorized and credited as being the truth. Therefore, Scheuring thus displays his wish that the confessions contained in these segments are perceived to be entirely honest. Although society has accepted the format of the “documentary” as a truthful format, there is no impediment that restrains a director from creating a false documentary, or even a “mockumentary”⁶⁷, and as Wetmore argues, “[...] the culture currently has embraced the documentary as entertainment instinct, which also makes pseudo-documentaries much easier to accept and believe.”⁶⁸. Through the “documentary interviews” the film captures the essence of a 2008 documentary by noted film director Errol Morris entitled *Standard Operating Procedure*⁶⁹ in which a group of people involved (both directly and indirectly) with the Abu Ghraib scandal sit individually in front of a “confessional style” camera and tell their stories of that period for the judgment of the viewer⁷⁰.

During the course of the tests, with the encouragement from a female researcher (one of the only two women who have a couple of lines and a few minutes of screen time) Travis steps inside a small compartment where he watches a series of mainly violent clips on a screen. Inside the chamber we can observe that Travis’ head is wired so the researchers are able to evaluate his response to the clips. This scene is highly evocative of a scene in an influential

⁶⁶ Also the use of a night-vision camera is used both in the film as in several reality TV shows.

⁶⁷ Documentary presented as a parody, either of a specific topic or the genre itself.

⁶⁸ Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema*, 78.

⁶⁹ *Standard Operating Procedure*. DVD. Directed by Errol Morris. Los Angeles: Sony Pictures Classics, 2008.

⁷⁰ It should be taken into consideration that the “confessional interview” has its roots in U.S. court TV shows.

1971 movie, *A Clockwork Orange*⁷¹ where the protagonist, Alex, is submitted to a rehabilitation procedure called Ludovico Technique, a fictional experimental aversion therapy for rehabilitating violent perpetrators, as was the case of Alex, described in the movie as “enterprising, aggressive, young, bold, vicious”⁷². In *The Experiment* the clips portraying violence are used to assess the subject’s sensitivity to the recorded images, not as a way to induce an aversion to violent behavior. The two viewings have opposite purposes: while for Alex the Ludovico Technique was about provoking his senses in a way that any sort of violence disrupted him in a strong fashion, making him renounce his previous behavior with his “droogs”, for Travis, the viewing of violent clips was a way to test him in order to understand if he was susceptible to the kind of horrors that were most likely predicted by the research group, the type of “ultra-violence” the “droogs” knew so well. With the current, and some may argue, excessive selected media coverage of war, violence and torture all over the world, the “ultra-violence”, now leaps out of the screens, magazines and newspapers turning the public into a version of Alex (or Travis), being fed a reality we do not wish to face. As was the case of the images of the burning and collapsing towers on 9/11 flooding every screen in the world, building up an immunity in the observer to violent images, to descriptions of pain and death. This reality appears then in the form of gruesome images pre-selected by the media as much as the images shown to Alex and Travis were pre-selected by the doctors and researchers. An example of this media selection is the case of the photographs of Abu Ghraib, as it is a fact that several more photographs exist besides the ones made popular and were deliberately never made public. In *Nightmare Movies: Horror on Screen Since the 1960’s* Kim Newman states, in a chapter entitled “Paranoia Paradise Or: Five Things to Worry About”, that one of the five things to be concerned about in fiction is The Conspiracy Society⁷³. He discusses the relevance

⁷¹ *A Clockwork Orange*. DVD. Directed by Stanley Kubrick. California: Columbia-Warner Distributors, 1971.

⁷² *A Clockwork Orange*. Directed by Stanley Kubrick. 1971.

⁷³ The other four things to worry about being: The Revolt of Nature, The Revolt of the Machine, Disaster Movies and The Apocalypse.

of conspiracy movies comprising sci-fi films like *A Clockwork Orange*, where “[...] the oppressive tendencies of contemporary governments are extrapolated into nightmare futures where an all-powerful State experiments with mind control, [...] or gladiatorial sports”⁷⁴. Newman then provides a connection to current fiction, where with “[t]he rise of surveillance technology, Internet databases and ‘the War on Terror’ along with an increased mistrust of government, business, law-enforcement and financial institutions has made for more complicated, far-reaching conspiracies – often aimed directly at the individual”⁷⁵. We can argue then, that *The Experiment* fits in this register, as the presence of the surveillance cameras replacing the omnipresent research group mirror the lack of trust in those who somehow rule us, as was mentioned above. Ultimately these “all-powerful” researchers manage to control the mind and the will of their test subjects, and it is likely that one identifies the “gladiatorial sports” Newman mentions, in *The Experiment*, for the “prisoners” are essentially a group of mammals trapped in a cage, instigated against each other while the observers who put them there safely watch from outside.

Regarding the role of the cameras in the film, one can verify that they mean different things to Travis and to Barris. To Travis they are at first an object of discomfort, he is not at ease with the idea of being observed day and night. As the guards (mainly Barris) break him down, he tries to hide his muffled cries from the ever watchful eye of the camera, and as the events begin to spiral out of control Travis resorts to the bold move of addressing the camera, or better yet, the people the camera represent, this action triggers a violent response from the overzealous Barris, and Travis is abruptly placed inside an empty boiler⁷⁶, where, to his amazement, he finds a night-vision camera, recording his hopeless and borderlining insane state. Realizing he is being filmed he addresses the camera again asking “Why? Why would

⁷⁴ Kim Newman, *Nightmare Movies: Horror on Screen Since the 1960's* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011), 108.

⁷⁵ Newman. *Nightmare Movies*. 118.

⁷⁶ The compartment derives from *Das Experiment's* inspiration, the novel *Black Box*.

you... Why don't you stop this? Why?", Travis offers death threats to the researchers right after that, and mumbles "you didn't think I would see? You didn't think I was smart enough?", this statement is never clarified and we remain unsure of what Travis intended by saying that, if anything at all, but the supposition can be made that either Travis was bluffing to provoke the researchers, or he was letting them know that he had realized that the true meaning of the experiment was to break the limits of the participants causing them to engage in violent behavior. After breaking free from the boiler Travis simply disregards the cameras for the remaining duration of the experiment. For Barris, the cameras, as well as the red light, play a much more vital role, as they deliver the ruling of the researchers, the red light will go on if the "guards" do not do their job properly, and the cameras, "God's eye", will be incessantly watching over the "guards", their prophets, in charge of the deliverance of their "message".

By the second day of the experiment Barris begins to act as a religious fundamentalist, substituting his worship of God with his newfound reverence for the researchers, reaching full intensity when he shaves his head, action to which can be attributed a religious significance, for it rekindles rituals of cleanliness associated with purification, a well-known practice of many religious groups, such as Buddhist monks, or even priests (even if most only shave their crown). Religious fundamentalism is a dread of many ages, for the wrath of deities has always struck great fear into humanity, so have those who speak in their name⁷⁷. Since art is, partly, a manifestation of societies' concerns, cinema (especially within the horror genre) has continued to include the topic of religious fundamentalism using it to provoke the desired sense of terror in the viewers. As part of this trope, Barris carries himself as a fundamentalist by making speeches about "their" rules (the researcher's), punishing the men who go against his interpretation of the rules. Barris feels justified with killing an innocent man in order to follow through with the rules, even if he (on some level) knows it to be artificial and temporary, still

⁷⁷ Movie characters such as Margaret White (from the 1976 film *Carrie*) and Mrs Carmody (from the 2007 film *The Mist*) show us that religious fundamentalism is a concern that crosses decades, resurfacing once more with great effect after the 9/11 attacks.

he professes words suited of a legitimate religious fundamentalist, such as “We are being watched twenty-four hours a day” or “the rules, they help us, they guide us [...] so that we can exist in this world” and “the red light is the only thing we have”. This type of discourse is consistent with religious speeches and throughout the movie Barris cements his beliefs, which were unstable at first.

Proof of Barris’ early insecurity towards his beliefs is the scene where upon awaiting the arrival of the bus that would take them to the location of the experiment, Barris confesses to Travis “I can’t help but think that this says something about us”, to which Travis replies “I think it says we need money”. This brief conversation reinforces the already present idea that Barris keeps looking for a higher purpose and envisages this experiment as a calling, even if he is unclear on what it is that he will encounter. This perspective is reminiscent of the commonly used argument during the Bush administration that it is God’s will that the U.S. soldiers eradicate their enemies. As the former President George W. Bush has said himself: “I am driven with a mission from God. God would tell me, ‘George go and fight these terrorists in Afghanistan’. And I did. And then God would tell me ‘George, go and end the tyranny in Iraq’. And I did.”⁷⁸, this type of discourse agrees with the U.S. persisting idea of “Manifest Destiny”, the belief that U.S. citizens have special virtues, and that they must replace “darkness with light and ignorance with civilization”⁷⁹. The same concept is highlighted in *The Experiment* through Barris’ views, opinions and attitudes.

As the subjects are driven to an undisclosed isolated location far away from their pickup spot they are calm and passive. When the group arrives they are stripped of their personal belongings, of their identities. After this, the movie is sectioned in days, the experiment does not last the predicted two weeks, and it is over by the sixth day. On the first day the test

⁷⁸ *The Guardian*. “George Bush: ‘God told me to end the tyranny in Iraq’”. Accessed May 2014. www.theguardian.com/world/2005/oct/07/iraq.usa.

⁷⁹ *U.S. History*. “Manifest Destiny”. Accessed May 2014. <http://www.ushistory.org/us/29.asp>.

subjects are divided into two smaller groups⁸⁰ and the main researcher, Dr. Archuleta, tells both groups that “[...] some of you will have no civil rights”, adding still, “your safety is our number one priority. If there is any violence, any at all, the experiment will be immediately terminated”. A small group is called out and the rest head into the facility, soon to discover that they are going to play the role of “prisoners”. To the “guards” Dr. Archuleta gives strict rules and directions which the newfound “guards” are expected to follow rigorously, about possible disorderly “prisoners”, the researcher adds, “those who break the rules must be punished commensurately”, and if the perpetrator/s is/are not punished within 30 minutes a red light will go on and the experiment will be over. Also, the participants should keep in mind that if one single subject decides to leave, the experiment would be terminated and none of them would be paid. The word “commensurately” is of extreme importance, for it suggests the possibility of control depending on the perspective of those assigned to deliver the punishment. But how could those men determine a proportionate penalty for a transgression when they have no training in the correctional industries and one of them does not even know what the word “commensurately” means? This situation echoes the already mentioned fact of the lack of training among the Military Police at Abu Ghraib, for they too were placed in a position where they had to decide on corporal punishment and stress positions when they had no preparation to do so. Not only that but the word “commensurately” also brings a much darker tone to the movie when compared to the words of Osama Bin Laden regarding the U.S. American Military in 1998: “We believe that the worst thieves in the world today and the worst terrorists are the Americans. Nothing could stop you except perhaps *retaliation in kind*⁸¹. We do not have to

⁸⁰ The actual number of each group is erratic, revealing a fault by the director. Even if the main researcher only called out six individuals out of a group of twenty-three seated men to be the “guards” at times there are shown eight individuals in “guard” uniform. The only fact regarding the number of men in each group is that the “prisoners” outnumber the “guards”.

⁸¹ My emphasis.

differentiate between military or civilian. As far as we are concern, they are all targets”⁸². It can be argued that the researchers allowed the “guards” to act like terrorists, punishing *in kind* as they do so see fit. Barris then being the ultimate carrier of that terrorist threat, responding in kind and punishing both “prisoners” and “guards”, not differentiating, as Bin Laden, between military or civilian, even if it is ultimately an unreal situation, brought about by an experiment.

On the first moments of the experiment the “prisoners” are only told by the “guards” that they will each be addressed by a number and that they should find their cells according to their numbers. The “guards” do not disclose what was said to them by the researcher, the rules, which to Barris are so much more than simple regulations, they are his commandments, meant to guide him in his quest. He has finally found a purpose, someone trusted him with a task and he is bound to excel at it no matter what. As for Travis, he is still calm and quietly assessing the environment. He shares a cell with a mysterious man named Nix and a meek graphic novelist aspirant named Benjy, who claims upon entering the cell: “I feel dangerous just wearing this outfit”. This “feeling” does not just apply to the “prisoners” but also to the “guards”, for wearing a certain outfit can either empower you or strip you of your identity and dignity. The same thing can be said about the Military Police at Abu Ghraib, where by wearing a uniform representing the U.S.A. the soldiers felt that their actions were validated and supported by the U.S. government.

In a scene when one of the “guards” gets hit unintentionally with a basketball by a “prisoner” the matter is discussed among the “guards”, always fearful that the red light would go on. The “guards” reflect about how to interpret the rules given to them. They remember that they were instructed to “respond in kind”, “small potatoes for small potatoes”. The trespasser (a senior “prisoner”) is then ordered to perform ten push-ups, order to which he reacts light-heartedly asking for “a little civility” since it was clearly an accident. Encountering this

⁸² National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*, 2004: 47.

resistance, the “guard” addressing the matter, Chase⁸³, is then compelled to escalate the punishment and commands every “prisoner” to execute the ten push-ups. This first confrontation, on the very first day causes the guards, especially Barris (who appears astonished), to realize the power they have over that group of people. Another disagreement takes place over the quality of the meals served at the canteen on the second day, which causes one the “prisoners” to feel the need to remind the “guards” that they are all part of an experiment. One even says to a “guard”: “Memo to Adolf: The uniform is not real! Ok baby?”. At this stage the “prisoners” do not comprehend the full implications of the uniforms, as is confirmed by the double insult of referring to a “guard” as Hitler and using an emasculating word such as “baby”, and if they do not understand that the uniform *is* real, then, as is proven by the subsequent food fight, they also do not understand the authenticity of the orders. Therefore, at this stage, both “guards” and “prisoners” are still engaging in childish games of defiance. The “guards” decide they must react to the insubordination, understanding that they too are being tested. This confusion between following orders and arrogant demonstrations of power is represented in this movie as an actual problem, the same situations could be observed at Abu Ghraib, where the lines are still quite blurred after all this time about the nature of the soldiers’ involvement in the torture and dehumanization of Iraqi detainees.

While deliberating about what kind of retribution was in order, Barris, remembering his past as a fraternity pledger⁸⁴, comes up with the solution for the “no-violence allowed” predicament. He tells his fellow “guards” about how the brothers humiliated the pledgers, so he suggests a similar method, comparing their situation to a fraternity. This episode may echo the polemic statement of conservative American radio talk show host and political commentator Rush Limbaugh, when he dismissed the events at Abu Ghraib as “frat house” behavior advising

⁸³ The actor Cam Gigandet plays a very persuasive and homophobic “guard”. Best known for his part in *Twilight* (2008), a very popular franchise, Gigandet captures the attention of a younger audience while representing guards and soldiers with a personal agenda and hatred for the “other”.

⁸⁴ The fact that he only pledged reminds us of his inadequacy when it comes to integrate a group.

that the matter should not be taken all too seriously⁸⁵. The influence of what J. Hoberman calls “[...] dumb-ass frat humor, stupid pet tricks, and YouTube gross-outs.”⁸⁶ on the Abu Ghraib photographs is undeniable, cataloging them in the “[...] moral shithole of Bush-era American Culture”⁸⁷. Hoberman’s blunt commentary illustrates the reception of the images, a reflection of its era, despite that fact, it can be nonetheless dangerous to dismiss the behavior depicted in the images as innocent or unimportant, as Limbaugh guided the listeners of his popular radio show to do. Besides the atrocities committed in Tier 1A, the need to document them also triggered confusion and censure from the general public. The necessity of some soldiers to document their everyday life (including the violence) fits into the same culture that taught them that it is ok to humiliate another human being. As the 21st century saw the insurgence of not only reality TV shows like *Big Brother*, but also “[...] the amateur video document of 9/11 and the terrorist-made, internet-dispersed video of real torture and death, combine[d] into a major trope of post-9/11 horror: the pseudo-documentary/ ‘found footage’ horror film”⁸⁸, it is only natural that the soldiers, given the opportunity, would replicate something so much imbibed in their culture.

The Experiment also resonates with the Abu Ghraib soldier’s behavior when we arrive at the first real moment of dominance from Barris, “scaring” the prisoners as the fraternity brothers scared him long ago. Barris finds his leading role so exhilarating that he becomes sexually aroused from it. Regarding the issue of finding pleasure amongst violence we are reminded by Zimbardo in *The Lucifer Effect* that Private Lynndie England and Corporal

⁸⁵ Rush Limbaugh said on his *The Rush Limbaugh Show*, the highest-rated talk-radio program in the United States of America: “This is no different than what happens at the Skull and Bones [a well-known Yale society] initiation and we’re going to ruin people’s lives over it and we’re going to hamper our military effort, and then we are going to really hammer them because they had a good time. You know, these people are being fired at every day. I’m talking about people having a good time, these people, you ever heard of emotional release? You ever heard of need to blow some steam off?”. See *Media Matters For America*. “Limbaugh on torture of Iraqis: U.S. guards were ‘having a good time,’ ‘blow[ing] some steam off’”. Accessed December 2013. <http://mediamatters.org/research/2004/05/05/limbaugh-on-torture-of-iraqis-us-guards-were-ha/131111>.

⁸⁶ J. Hoberman, *Film After Film: Or, What Became of 21st Century Cinema?* (London/Brooklyn: Verso, 2012), 174.

⁸⁷ Hoberman, *Film After Film*, 175.

⁸⁸ Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema*, 59.

Charles Graner, who were a couple back when the photographs were taken, were often engaged in “torrid sexual escapades”⁸⁹ which were documented by them through various photographs and videos. It may actually come as a shock to many how they could indulge in sexual activities in such a place. We can, furthermore, revisit Freud to understand this behavior of taking pleasure in the pain of others. In a text entitled “A Child is Being Beaten” Freud argues the fantasy of someone being beaten “[...] is accompanied by a high degree of pleasure”⁹⁰, this is showcased when after the first shakedown Barris is sexually aroused after his commanding part. It can be argued that for Barris the possibility to fully commit himself to his fantasy of empowerment becomes an escape to his dull reality. By the third day Barris fully commits to his part as a prison guard and assumes the control of the facility.

Besides Travis and Barris there are other characters that provide additional layers of interpretation to *The Experiment*, most notably Benjy. This character brings to the film the shadow of those who either leapt or slipped to their death from the twin towers on 9/11 with his fictional “Flying Man”. After Benjy introduces to Travis the protagonist of his upcoming graphic novel (which he admits to be a fraud later on in the movie), the famous image captured on camera by Richard Drew of a man falling from the North Tower on September 11 comes to mind. The photograph became known as “The Falling Man”, after it was first featured in an article on *The New York Times*⁹¹, which caused many to speak out against its bluntness and horrid insight into a large scale tragedy. Benjy’s “Flying Man” arguably mirrors Drew’s “Falling Man”, imprinting on the drawing the desire to escape from a perilous situation by merely flying away from it. These escapist yearnings are inverted in Don DeLillo’s novel *Falling Man*⁹², where a performance artist denies his unsuspecting audience members an

⁸⁹ Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect*, 355.

⁹⁰ Sigmund Freud, “A Child is being beaten”. *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis and Other Works*. London: Hogarth Press. (1995): 185.

⁹¹ N.R. Kleinfield, “A Creeping Horror and Panicked Flight as Towers Burn, Then Slowly Fall”. *The New York Times*, September 12, 2001.

⁹² Don DeLillo, *Falling Man*. London: Picador, 2007.

escape from the tough reality of “The Falling Man” by periodically suspending himself with the aid of a harness from an elevated and visible structure and assuming “The Falling Man”’s iconic hangman position, know to represent in Tarot a “[...] state of purposeful, complete surrender, yielding his mind and body to the Universal flow”⁹³. Through his main character DeLillo informs the reader that “[h]e [the performance artist] brought it back, of course, those stark moments in the burning towers when people fell or were forced to jump”, and much like when Drew’s photograph shocked *The New York Times* readers, these performances were met with disapproval in DeLillo’s fictional New York, as the narrator proceeds saying that “[t]here were people shouting up at him, outraged at the spectacle, the puppetry of human desperation, a body’s last fleet breath and what it held”⁹⁴. As real and distressing as the artist in DeLillo’s novel is striving to make the “Falling Man”, is as fantastic and lovable as Benjy is hoping to make his “Flying Man”. Benjy’s unachieved creation is an ordinary man, he does not even have a first name, he is simply named after his remarkable ability to fly. This metafictional character thus mimics “The Falling Man”’s anonymity, for the man falling in Drew’s picture was never identified due to the poor resolution of the series of images of the distant fall. A 2006 documentary entitled *9/11: The Falling Man*⁹⁵ accompanies the search for this man’s identity to its unsuccessful conclusion, so he remains named after the fall in which he plunged to his death. Like the man in Drew’s photograph, in the poorly constructed drawing of the “Flying Man” Benjy was working on, we can see that there are no identifiable features to this character,

⁹³ *Tarot Teachings*. Accessed August 2014. <http://www.tarotteachings.com/hanged-man-tarot-card-meanings.html>.

⁹⁴ DeLillo. *Falling Man*. 33.

⁹⁵ *9/11: The Falling Man*. TV Documentary. Directed by Singer, Henry. London: Channel 4 Television Corporation, 2006.

his clothes are composed of plain pants, sneakers and a shirt sporting a large “F”, even though it is never mentioned that this character is a superhero, so the “F” might ambiguously stand for either *Flying* or *Falling*, since its purpose is never explained. Nonetheless, it can be safely inferred that Benjy’s creation is not a superhero, for he never uses the definite article “the” before “Flying Man” when talking about the character, in fact, he uses the indefinite article “a” when presenting his drawing to Travis, saying



“it’s a flying man”, furthermore distancing it from a superhero.

Image 10. *The Experiment* - Movie still: Benjy drawing "Flying Man".

Weakened by his diabetic condition and in dire need of insulin Benjy admits to Travis that “Flying Man” is a fraud when the latter asks him why he is putting himself to insulin deprivation when he could request to be removed from the experiment. What Travis had failed to understand so far is that Benjy is in a way like Barris, he leads a sad life, having to fabricate a career, and possibly a relationship to feel accomplished. In his mind he *is* the “Flying Man”, as is evidenced in the food fight scene where, roused by the stimulating retaliation towards the increasingly arrogant “guards”, Benjy screams standing on top of a table: “Feel the wrath of Flying Man!”, much to the amusement of his fellow “prisoners”. On the experiment’s final day, Benjy truly displays his wrath, punching Barris on the nape, causing the already irate man to riposte, fatally striking Benjy’s head with his baton. Benjy acted to aid Travis who was being choked, thus standing up for not only himself but also his friend, ultimately it is his courage, empathy and humanity that provide a hero (and martyr) to *The Experiment*. Before this episode, when asked by Nix what does the “Flying Man” do besides flying, a slightly irritated Benjy points out that society has become jaded when the thought of a regular man flying is not

enough to incite wonder. Nix's question reflects the general audience's perspective, for in a society where its fiction is saturated with fantastic visions of mighty creatures, both noble and malevolent, and filled with the most spectacular scenarios of beauty, destruction and fantasy, a simple man flying around seemingly purposeless does not impress anyone. This comment contemplates the idea of the extent that the people in the U.S.A. were impressed by the images displayed by the Abu Ghraib photographs when they can easily get access to plenty of entertainment containing graphic violence or torture even when they have no desire to do so, the news and the media in general making it almost impossible to escape certain images, as was the case of the World Trade Center images on 9/11, replayed time and time again. The difference of the Abu Ghraib photographs being that this time it was U.S. men and women, soldiers, who were perpetrating the torture and documenting the horror, reversing the matters from the shocking images of Al-Qaeda terrorists holding hostages. The "tortured becoming the torturer" trope is also featured in *The Experiment*, and it will be elaborated further on in this chapter.

Locked in his cell, Travis converses with former inmate Nix about the purpose of the experiment, asking in an almost rhetorical fashion: "What do you think they want from us? Why would you run a prison experiment?". To what Nix knowingly replies: "Throw some animals in a cage and you get to find out which one of us are going to be the lions and which ones are gonna get gut", Travis then states: "I like to think that we are slightly higher on the evolutionary chain than monkeys", Nix calmly dismisses this by saying "It don't matter how evolved you think we are, you lock up any animal long enough and the strong is going to eat the weak, it's just the way it is". Travis' allusion to a chain reinforces the presence of the representation of a chain of command, emphasizing its closeness to the events that took place at Abu Ghraib. Back in their quarters the guards begin discussing the extent of their actions and should they be escalating things even further. When praised by his peers for his "performance"

Barris reminds them that “it was just a show” and guarantees that the “prisoners” pose no threat to them for the researchers would not allow anything to happen to them, reinforcing his quasi-religious beliefs of protection of a higher power. This blind sense of trust also surrounded the Military Police, they placed their trust in their superiors, who ultimately betrayed them when the media circled those involved for answers and accountability, most notably, the then Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld claiming that the photographs, and by extension the torture, was nothing but the work of a few “rotten apples”. In the same fashion that the soldiers treated the detainees, the “guards” at the false prison decided that the only way to cease the galloping restlessness of the “prisoners” is to humiliate and scare them. To this effect the now drunken “guards” shave Travis’ head in order to humiliate him, removing something that was part of his identity, as a warning for the others while Barris claims possession of the facility heading the group and highlights their (“guards” and researchers) power over the prisoners, asking Travis “do we have a proper respect for authority now?”. When the answer is less than satisfactory Barris kicks him and begins urinating on him, demanding that the others join him, with the purpose of sending a message. This behavior testifies for how gradually the test subjects are regressing in the evolutionary chain Travis was discussing before, resembling monkeys that communicate using their bodily wastes. After this episode, matters begin to spiral out of control with the test subjects becoming more and more animal-like in their behavior. The way that “guards” urinated on their “property” represents how something primal arose in them, innate and instinctive, marks that are also present in the Abu Ghraib photographs, for the soldiers are seen instigating the detainees’ primal fears, for instance, when threatening them with ferocious dogs.

After the attack on Travis, a completely changed Barris gloats when the other “guards” admire his actions, only one of them has the courage to speak up against him, even if when doing so he addresses Barris as “sir”. This military term is of great importance, for it

demonstrates to what extent Barris had built his “warden-like” character up. He is no longer the timid, abused “chickenshit” who lived with his mother. By the fourth day Barris shaves his head. He does so not only to purify himself (as mentioned above) but also to match his newly found aggressiveness, even if he claims that he did so because he is a reasonable man, this is only a hopeful projection of the image he wishes to portray, that of an aggressive man⁹⁶. When Barris says “I’ve been given a position, I didn’t ask for it”, he unburdens himself of his responsibility in the deeds, he goes on saying “in some ways it would have been easier if I was just a prisoner, like you”, to which Travis responds by implying that Barris is oblivious to his own behavior. Barris reaffirms his trust in the control of the people behind the camera saying “They know what they are doing”, when the situation with diabetic Benjy should have been sufficient to doubt the safety of the experiment. This blind belief showcases how the chain of command ends up not only being a scapegoat for the harm done, but also a catalyst for more damage, the illusion of being safely under someone’s wing and entrusted with the responsibility of carrying out orders.

Roused by Travis insubordination, Barris and the others dunk Travis’ head in the toilet until he says “I am a prisoner”. It is very relevant that Barris states “I need you to say it for me”, uttering those words would signify surrender to the “guards”, and ultimately, it could be inferred that Barris wishes for Travis to incarnate the role of a prisoner as much as he has incarnated the role of a guard. The episode evokes one of the pyramid photographs, where is clearly seen that on one of the detainees’ legs is written “I am a rapist [sic]”⁹⁷. There is a clear parallel here regarding the need to rewrite someone’s identity in order to feel empowered, as is portrayed either by the removing of clothes or by the shaving of the hair. When Travis finally caves in and mumbles “I am a prisoner” Barris rejoices and says “Yes, yes seventy-seven, that is exactly what you are”. Noteworthy is the use of the pronoun “what” instead of “who”,

⁹⁶ And the “skinhead” look is a path to display that one is willing and able to exert violence.

⁹⁷ See Image 3 in chapter 1.

objectifying Travis even beyond the use of the number seventy-seven to address him. The nicknaming of prisoners was in fact also a fairly common phenomenon in Abu Ghraib. In the Iraqi prison the detainees were recurrently addressed by names other than their unpronounceable ones, as some members of the Military Police admitted in documentaries like *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*⁹⁸ and *Standard Operating Procedure*. Nicknames such as “Gillian” and “Ice Man” were used derogatorily even if the detainees were oblivious to their meaning. The soldiers would share these “private jokes” amongst them, and would go as far as labeling the detainees with a sharpie, (as the “I am a rapist [sic]” writing on the body of an Iraqi man illustrates). In one of the film’s scene where Bosch, one of the “guards”, is attacked by his peers, handcuffed (with a bag placed on his head), a statement is made on the consequences of questioning the group’s reason, which is manifested in a very animal-like matter, attacking a weaker member, even if this member is a part of their own small group.

By the fifth day of the experiment, Barris and the “guards” seem to have tamed the prisoners. That is until Barris begins his quasi-religious speech on how he is an “equitable man”, much like the authoritarian father who must punish his child in the sake of good behavior even against his will. For Travis, the speech is the last offense that drives him to full rebellion, he removes his shirt, as a “throwing of the towel” kind of symbolic gesture, signaling that he is through with the experiment. He proceeds to climb the bars to speak directly to the camera, stating “open the gate, you in there”, this action is met with great exasperation by Barris, who promptly says to Travis, “nobody speaks to them”. Barris is desperately trying to look good in front of the camera, in front of the invisible eye who gave him his role. The same staged posing can be verified in the Abu Ghraib photographs, in all the cheery poses in front of the camera, the soldiers were building a persona in front of the camera.

⁹⁸ *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*. DVD. Directed by Rory Kennedy. New York: Home Box Office Home Video (HBO), 2007.



11



12

Images 11/ 12. Abu Ghraib Photographs. Source: Public Domain.

Travis is incarcerated in an old boiler pipe and Barris orders the other “guards” to isolate the “prisoners” so they cannot communicate, this is done in a violent fashion, which indicates the “guards” are more and more inclined to resort to violence, since they never saw the red light go on despite previous violent circumstances. The “guards” behavior mimics a child’s, stretching the limits to see just how far they can get without getting caught. Barris ends up reasoning that the red light did not go off because it was not the “guards” fault, it was the “prisoners” who started the conflicts, they only responded commensurately, even if this included the bludgeoning of Benjy. Barris rationalization of an otherwise alarming situation raises the question if it was not this that the researchers desired all along when they stressed the word “commensurately”?

As the film approaches its climax Barris consolidates his trust in the red light as symbolic of the ruling of a higher power saying “the red light is the only thing we have”. Ultimately, the light is his symbol of validation, an empowering symbol amidst the confusion, but also a sign to fear, because for the most part of the experiment no one (especially Barris) wanted the red light to go on, which would signify that the experiment would come to a premature end and the test subjects would not get paid. The film’s use of a red light evokes the color coded terrorism threat chart issued by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, using

colors to “indicate when one should be afraid”⁹⁹. In this code the color red signifies “SEVERE RISK OF TERRORIST ATTACKS”, the movie differs only in its application, for it is only



Image 13. Homeland Security Advisory System.

after the attacks (several of them) had taken place that the light in the film finally goes on, immediately stopping the men from proceeding with their brawl.

Many other films have dealt with the color red as a signifier of danger or threat. When, for instance, M. Night Shyamalan’s directed the 1998 classic *The Sixth Sense*, the color red was used to signal that a supernatural occurrence was about to unfold¹⁰⁰. The same director was responsible for a more direct movie when it comes to the ominous quality of the

color red: *The Village* (2004), which refers to red as “the bad color”, “the color we fear” and “the color that attracts Those We Don’t Speak Of”, to be avoided as it is the color of the enemies lurking in the woods. Adrian Brody, the actor who played the protagonist of *The Experiment*, plays *The Village*’s simpleton Noah, revealed in the end as the one terrifying the villagers (even if some had a secret of their own), skinning animals and marking houses using the color red. The three movies mentioned (produced from 1998 to 2010) manage to use that color in order to keep those involved in a state of permanent fear, as is the case of the Department of Homeland security chart (image 13), even if there is not a real threat in sight (as is illustrated by *The Experiment* and *The Village*), and as Wetmore discusses in *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema* “[...] the manufacture of fear has now created genuine fears”¹⁰¹, which, one may conclude, happens still at the hand of manipulative governments.

⁹⁹ Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema*, 172.

¹⁰⁰ e.g. : A red tent built by Cole in which a ghost appears vomiting; a red balloon floating up to the roof of the house of one of Cole’s friend, where a ghost attacked him inside a storage space (while Cole was wearing a red sweater); the red doorknob in the house of Bruce Willis’ character; etc.

¹⁰¹ Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema*, 178.

In *The Experiment*, the red light goes hand in hand with the cameras, in fact, it is interesting to notice that even in the boiler where Travis is kept in isolation we find a camera, serving the purpose of solitary confinement, not only for the “guards” but also for the researchers, for one the bottom left corner of the night vision camera’s perspective we can clearly read “CAMERA 06 IR MODE SOLITARY CONFINEMENT”. Although it is suggested by the movement of the camera that they are at the time very much aware of Travis’ confused cries for help they do not abort the experiment by turning on the dreaded red light. As a black screen informs the viewer that the sixth and final day has arrived, and with it the violent climax of the film. The boiler ends up being the definitive turning point for Travis, acting as a womb for his re-birth as an angry and vengeful man. After releasing himself with the help of a metal bracelet his girlfriend gave him, he begins to free the remaining “prisoners”, who now fully embrace him as their leader. Although outnumbered, Barris is ready to fight for this territory, for in his mind “prisoners” are naturally afraid of authority figures. The rest of the “guards” cower before the riot and try to escape, forcing a reluctant Barris to run away with them. At this point the group is desperately trying to pry open the gate and exit to the outside world, ignoring Barris’ frantic attempts to unite the group and deal with the “prisoners”. Barris calls out to them saying “What are you doing? We’ve got to stand and fight. This is our world, they cannot take it from us”, this statement reveals just how jaded he truly is. He now fully believes their roles and understands subconsciously that if they do manage to open the door to the outside world it will all dissipate, his power, his control, his “mission”. The violence reaches its peak and the test subjects engage in a fight, the angry “prisoners” vs. the frightened “guards”. This climax provides “[...] a justifiable payback in kind [commensurately] in which the tortured becomes the torturer”¹⁰². Wetmore discloses how popular this trope has become in 21st century horror movies, providing such relevant examples as the *Saw* franchise (2004-2010)

¹⁰² Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema*, 98.

and *Hostel* (2005), which feature men and women who are the victims of horrible violence but manage to find revenge at the end by torturing their torturer, surviving at the end of the film even if scarred or otherwise transformed. *The Experiment* makes use of this trope, Travis is humiliated, assaulted and abused, but by the end of the film he is able to exert violence towards Barris, even if he always carried himself as a non-violent man. Watching this retaliation, the spectator is meant to feel a sense of justice accomplished, a man is being aggressively beaten but it is alright, because he did it first¹⁰³. Movies like *Saw* and *Hostel* drove David Edelstein to coin the term “torture porn” to describe graphic violence that somehow brings pleasure to the viewer. Edelstein argues in his article that even if appalled by the brutality portrayed in the Abu Ghraib photographs, many citizens feel that torturing a torturer is fair and justified¹⁰⁴, as he says:

Fear supplants empathy and makes us all potential torturers, doesn't it? Post-9/11, we've engaged in a national debate about the morality of torture, fueled by horrifying pictures of manifestly decent men and women (some of them, anyway) enacting brutal scenarios of domination at Abu Ghraib. And a large segment of the population evidently has no problem with this. Our righteousness is buoyed by propaganda like the TV series *24*, which devoted an entire season to justifying torture in the name of an imminent threat: a nuclear missile en route to a major city. Who do you want defending America? Kiefer Sutherland or terrorist-employed civil-liberties lawyers?¹⁰⁵

Edelstein argues that when the U.S. citizens look at the photographs of Abu Ghraib they are probably inclined to feel no type of sympathy for the detainees, even if non admittedly, for they have been fed information through entertainment (like the series *24*) that reassures them that such matters are not only viable, they are necessary. This idea leads Susan Sontag to say

¹⁰³ “[...] he tortured and killed *first*, and thus is not innocent and therefore morally culpable and deserving of death. If someone deserves to be tortured and killed, then we do not object when they are”: Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema*, 101.

¹⁰⁴ Even if many detainees at Abu Ghraib were innocent they still represented the “terrorist threat”.

¹⁰⁵ David Edelstein, “Now Playing in Your Local Multiplex: Torture Porn”, *New York Magazine*, January 28, 2006. Accessed April 2014. <http://nymag.com/movies/features/15622/index1.html>.

that “[...] the photographs are us. That is, they are representative of the fundamental corruptions of any foreign occupation together with the Bush administration’s distinctive policies”¹⁰⁶. Following this discourse, *The Experiment* mirrors the first decade of the 21st century, presenting “the transformation of ordinary people into perpetrators of atrocities. [...] character’s actions are justified because of what happened to them”¹⁰⁷, providing, aside from the visual representation of Abu Ghraib torture (chaining and bagging, for example), a parallel regarding the way it is seen by the general public.

Only moments before Travis beats Barris to death does the red light goes on accompanied by a buzzing sound, signaling the end of the experiment. As soon as the gate opens all the test subjects slowly remember that there is a world beyond the experiment, all their motives and rage seems to dissipate as they sparsely sit awaiting their ride, apparently forgetting about the man who was murdered inside the building as well as the rest of the atrocities. As the battered group begins to leave the facility, it is interesting to observe their zombie-like movements¹⁰⁸, their look of confusion and their overall muteness. When a bus arrives to pick them up, Barris drops his prison guard belt and begins buttoning up his shirt, returning to his former self. In the end they all get their pay checks, despite the outcome of the experiment. The ending of the movie is also aligned with several other movies which comprise the trope of “ending in despair”, when the plot has been resolved, the characters realize that none of the conflicts were in fact necessary, which is true for movies like *The Purge* (2013), or *Saw* (2004-2010), even when revenge is accomplished. Travis tries to oppose the feeling of despair by answering Nix’s question: “You still think we are higher in the evolutionary chain

¹⁰⁶ Susan Sontag. “Regarding the Torture of Others”, *New York Times*, May 23, 2004, I – V, accessed April 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/23/magazine/23PRISONS.html?src=pm&pagewanted=2>.

¹⁰⁷ Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema*, 101.

¹⁰⁸ This reminds us of the modern uprising of the zombie within the horror genre, most notably in series *The Walking Dead*, and, related to this particular segment, especially season 3, which portrays the action in an abandoned prison.

than monkeys?” with: “Yeah, ‘cus we can still do something about it”. With this statement Travis apparently regains his early idealism, but as his bruised fists indicate, he has changed, the experiment has transformed him both physically and psychologically.

At the end of the film newscast clips inform the viewer that the facility where the experiment took place was leased by a company connected to the government. It is hinted that there were other psychological tests conducted there. The subjects testify against the experiment and the lead researcher, Dr. Archuleta is charged with manslaughter. This arrest is a small victory, for the researcher’s arrest can never erase the trauma lived by the test subjects inside the facility, much like arresting several members of the U.S. Military Police stationed at Abu Ghraib can never erase the harm done to the detainees by the torture in Tier 1A, and by extension, to their families. Travis as a hero ends up falling into Frank Furedi’s category of “stress-bearing heroism” rather than “risk-taking heroism”¹⁰⁹. The former being the common type of heroism displayed after the 9/11 attacks, as supported by Wetmore when he claims that “[s]tress-bearing heroism’ becomes the model of the post-9/11 horror protagonist. We mourn those who are the victims of random and anonymous death and then celebrate those who survive [...] celebrat[ing] our ability to bear the horrors that we witness[ed] on the screen”¹¹⁰.

In *Danse Macabre*, discussing *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* (1956), Stephen King writes about “reintegration”, which he considers a “[...] magic moment of [...] safety at the end, that same feeling that comes when the roller coaster stops at the end of its run and you get off with your best girl, both of you whole and unhurt”¹¹¹. The ending of *The Experiment*, as well as many other post-9/11 movie endings, offers no “reintegration”, the audience is broken and fearful. The feeling that “everything is going to be ok” seems more and more unattainable, both in fiction and in real life, as we embrace the logic of the “War on Terror” and “Security Culture”.

¹⁰⁹ Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema*, 93.

¹¹⁰ Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema*, 93.

¹¹¹ Stephen King, *Danse Macabre* (London: Hodder and Stoghton), 1981.

3. From *Das Experiment* (2001) to *The Experiment* (2010)

The present chapter aims to further develop the analysis of the ways the War in Iraq and in particular the Abu Ghraib images influenced *The Experiment* (2010), by comparing the film and its predecessor, the 2001 film *Das Experiment*, directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel. The chapter will emphasize fundamental thematic and formal differences between the two films and draw conclusions from those discrepancies. The five topics to be compared are: the films' main themes, the question of surveillance, the matter of isolation, the representation of characters, and finally, the representation of gender, homosexuality and rape.

3.1 Main Themes and Motifs

Regarding the first topic of comparison, the films' main themes and motifs, it can be affirmed that the main inspiration for *Das Experiment* and its remake, *The Experiment*, was the Stanford Prison experiment¹¹², conducted in 1971 by Professor Philip Zimbardo, as mentioned in the previous chapter. In both cases, as well as in Zimbardo's experiment, the films concern the difficulties that arise when people are isolated, surveyed and set in dominant/subjugated roles. A broad model of the prison system was chosen as an environment likely to best generate these conditions, Zimbardo's aim, being a psychology professor, was to study the effects of that particular environment in the test subjects, to a violent yet elucidative result. Both films recreate their own interpretation of this experiment, but given their different contexts each have a different focus. In the German movie the focus is placed on the subjectivity of one specific individual, about his path to overcome the difficulties ahead, as well as his inner struggles, whereas the U.S. version emerges here clearly focused on a struggle, a clash between different people and different principles. Although there is one clear leader on each side and an effort is

¹¹² Even if through the perspective of Mario Giordano's *Black Box* (1999).

made towards providing their background stories, they are but representatives of their respective sides, a face to cheer on and a face to hate. The iconography of *Das Experiment* and *The Experiment* as conveyed by their posters, shows this fundamental difference in terms of the treatment of their themes:



14



15

Images 14/ 15. Posters for *Das Experiment* (2001) and *The Experiment* (2010) (respectively).

The poster for *Das Experiment* underlines the focus on the subjectivity of the individual, as is witnessed by the enquiring tagline: “Bist du stark genug?” (are you strong enough?) and the cowering individual in a secluded and dark location. Conversely, the poster for *The Experiment* displays an externalized conflict with an “us vs. them” storyline, ultimately carried out as “me vs. the ‘other’”. This divergence was influenced by former U.S. President George W. Bush’s statements in the aftermath of the attack on World Trade Center¹¹³, which promoted a “Good vs. Evil” mentality making way for the upcoming warfare. The confront is made clear in the poster, not only by the separation between “guards” and “prisoners”, but also by the

¹¹³ The American Presidency Project. Accessed August 2014. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=58057>.

back-to-back close-ups of the film's biggest stars (Brody and Whitaker). Although there is no tagline in *The Experiment*'s poster, we can nonetheless see that the "X" in the title is highlighted in red and is larger than the other letters, serving to underline the strict opposition between groups, rekindling, as well, thoughts of exclusion and eradication.

If *Das Experiment* did not have its focus on any kind of dichotomy, *The Experiment* clearly embodies a commentary on the aftermath of 9/11 and the "War on Terror". After the attacks U.S. citizens feared an enemy which boldly ventured on U.S. soil to attack, deliberately making no distinction between militias and civilians. This can be seen, for instance, in films like *War of Worlds* (2005) and *Cloverfield* (2008), where an outlandish entity (respectively, aliens and a monster) attacks New York City sparing no one and making no distinctions of gender, race or age. Another trait of these post-9/11 movies is that the spectator is only shown regular people dealing with the situation, their thoughts and feelings about it, usually there are not any scenes in these movies which depict people higher up in the hierarchy, namely, the President and his administration, discussing the occurrences, as happened often in films before 2000, like the 1996 movies *Mars Attacks!* and *Independence Day*, both also concerning alien invasions. Kevin J. Wetmore refers to this trope as the "lack of a big picture"¹¹⁴ and relates it to 9/11 saying that "[t]he actual experience of 9/11 for most Americans lacked the information and the "big picture" [...]. Government officials were never seen, but only reported on"¹¹⁵. This trope translates to *The Experiment* in the form of the detachment and lack of interaction between the test subjects and the researchers, which will be discussed further below.

3.2 Surveillance

As far as the representation of surveillance goes, both movies display a different take on it. Whereas in the German film there is a comfortable acceptance of the cameras' role, in the

¹¹⁴ Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema*, 42.

¹¹⁵ Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema*, 43.

U.S. remake there is nothing comfortable about the cameras' presence, on the contrary, the cameras' instigate fear and hate in both "prisoners" and "guards". This perception of the cameras draws not only from their role within security culture and war culture, but also from an escalating obsession with surveillance in culture at large. This is illustrated, for instance, by reality shows like *Big Brother*¹¹⁶, where candidates were recorded twenty-four hours a day performing mundane activities. Besides the videotaping of every moment, both movies also portray another aspect very characteristic of reality shows, the "confessional interview", mentioned above, differing in the way both films chose to represent it. In *Das Experiment* there are several moments throughout the movie that mimic the confessional format. In the early videotaped conversations professional backgrounds are discussed as well as participants' concerns for personal safety during the experiment, a subject that is never mentioned in the U.S. film. However, in *Das Experiment* the "confessional interviews" are not limited to the preliminary ones like in *The Experiment*, in the German version throughout the remaining days both "prisoners" and "guards" are called to answer researchers' questions. These follow-up conversations give a greater insight to the test subjects thoughts and feelings, and work to dissolve the isolation, as will be developed below.

Das Experiment main character, a failed journalist in search of a comeback, takes to "prison" a pair of glasses with an incorporated camera, which would enable him to record whatever occurrences he sees fit inside the facility¹¹⁷. The glasses are reminiscent of 90's spy gear featured in popular movies like *True Lies* (1994), capitalizing on a popular trend at the time of the film's production. In the U.S. movie the glasses were left out of the plot, as they did not fit the modernly remade storyline or the character's motivations. There is, nevertheless, an evolution of this spy gear nowadays, which is only now taking its first steps towards mass

¹¹⁶ Both the German and U.S. versions of the reality show *Big Brother* aired in 2000.

¹¹⁷ There is nonetheless a discrepancy in the plot regarding the mechanics of the glasses. The protagonist is given, with the glasses, a receiver masked as a Walkman, which we obviously never see on him given the possession restrictions in the "prison", raising the question of how is he recording anything?

market, called Google Glasses, a sophisticated and developed take on the spy glasses, created in order to connect its user with the world around him/her while on the go. The spy glasses downplay the aspect of external surveillance in *Das Experiment*, because they are controlled by a “prisoner”. Through this camera the spectator is able to experience the movie through the protagonist’s point of view, better yet, the viewer understands what events matter to the protagonist, since he only turns the camera on when he deems a particular occurrence to be of special importance. The grainy black and white images show us moments of despair, suffering individuals and intimate confessions, reinforcing the previously stated idea of individual pain and isolation throughout the film. In the years following 9/11 these type of scenes (grainy black



**Image 16. *Das Experiment* - Movie still:
Image captured with the spy glasses.**

and white segments) grew to be quite common in movies conveying an increased concern about surveillance. This can be seen more frequently in horror movies, like *Vacancy* (2007) the *Paranormal Activity* films (2007 - 2012), or even the aforementioned *Saw* franchise (2004-2010). This last series of films unleashed a new type of villain, a mysterious man who places his victims in a secluded location and offers escape if the victim agrees to the self-infliction of injuries or to harm someone else, depending on the case and often resulting in murder. Jigsaw abundantly uses recorded images as a part of his process, whether to record himself (concealed by his famous spiral-cheeked white mask) or to observe his captives while they are undergoing their trials. This is one of the most successful horror movie franchises of early 21st century, and Jigsaw’s actions can be aligned to the researcher’s in *The Experiment*, as the audience follows their camera’s movements as they look for moments of pain and violence. These movies showcase the influence of the “War on Terror”, as Wetmore states, about the grainy images Jigsaw shows, they “resemble both security camera

footage, made familiar on the evening news, and videos of hostages presented by terrorists”¹¹⁸. Wetmore takes it a step further in identifying the influence of “War on Terror” in *Saw* by comparing Jigsaw to a terrorist for, like them, he claims, “Jigsaw videotapes his atrocities in order to further terrorize his victims”¹¹⁹. In *The Experiment*, the knowledge of the camera’s watchful eye, alone, was enough to add further terror to an already dreadful experience, as testified by images of Travis shying away from the camera in a vulnerable moment.



Image 17. *The Experiment* - Movie Still: Camera zooms in on Travis crying.

The lack of knowledge about the people/entity in charge of the experiment is one of the most disquieting aspects of the film. At first the organization in charge is not disclosed by the researchers, but by the end of the movie a journalist reports the following: “The facility is actively leased by a corporate think tank with ties to the government. A spokesperson with the Monad Corporation tells us the facilities have been used for psychological testing”¹²⁰. The Monad Corporation is a technology and retail science company, and as its presentation reads on their website:

MONAD[®] focuses on information diffusion and human computation. Our core competency is serving advertisements through social media and viral channels. We actively engage target demographics through product placement and affiliations through ad networks.¹²¹

The Corporation’s agenda is never clarified, and the inclusion of a real business in the movie is also unclear, but its use as the source of the experiment does say something, it directly speaks to the current uneasiness towards companies, institutions, or, as Kim Newman puts it:

¹¹⁸ Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema*, 75.

¹¹⁹ Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema*, 76.

¹²⁰ *The Experiment*. Directed by Paul Scheuring, 2010.

¹²¹ MONAD. Accessed August 2014. <http://monad.co/about.html>.

“In the world after 9/11, everyone felt they were at the mercy of financial institutions, media cartels, terrorist groups and government agencies – not to mention private corporations given to acting like terrorist groups or government agencies”¹²². *The Experiment* capitalizes on this fear, holding a shadowy company responsible for the horror that had taken place inside the mock prison. Other movies have also portrayed this uneasiness, for example, the 2005 movie *Hostel*. In a way, the Monad Corporation acts like the organization Elite Hunting, featured in *Hostel*, in this secret society of men and women across the globe high amounts of money are paid to rape, torture and kill¹²³ people of a desired race, age, gender or nationality. In these movies there is no longer a clear distinction between terrorists and businessmen. It seems that the jihadists are as mysterious to us as the CEOs of many companies, and for the most part we are oblivious to their plans and intentions. The revealing of the accountability of the Monad Corporation at the end of *The Experiment* causes the audience to re-think some of their possible assumptions, forcing them to ask questions like: Why should a technology and retail science company be interested in simulating a prison environment as a social experiment? And, was the U.S. government involved in any way in this (and possibly other) experiments? Could this be a continuation of C.I.A.’s Project MKUltra¹²⁴ updated to the current concerns of the U.S.A.? The exposing of the Monad Corporation does raise a number of questions, and makes the surveillance issue that more problematic. Since the business deals with “social media and viral channels” one can wonder about the true purpose of the cameras, where the images captured meant to be somehow clandestinely disseminated in a sort of “Big Brother: Prison Edition”? Any guess is purely speculative, but still, speculation is inevitable when discussing the ulterior motives of fictional companies meant to make us confront our distress towards corporations in

¹²² Newman. *Nightmare Movies*. 492.

¹²³ In a way, the torture scenes visually suggest the photographs of Abu Ghraib.

¹²⁴ Illegal and clandestine mind control program run by the C.I.A. (1950’s – 1970’s).

the 21st century. Hence, when Barris points to a camera and asks Travis “what do you think is on the other side of those cameras?”¹²⁵ he might as well be asking a rhetorical question.

3.3 Isolation

The topic of isolation is closely related to the previous one, surveillance, and both are of great importance when discussing the way “War on Terror” influenced the U.S. film, *The Experiment*. This claim arises from the fact that, even though the plot for both films involves a group of test subjects inside a secluded location being watched by researchers, each movie represents that in a very different way, and both ways speak to a very definite cultural frame. For instance, in the U.S. version not only “guards” and “prisoners” are forced to feel the suffocating entrapment of the experiment’s isolation, but also the movie’s spectators are meant to accompany the test group throughout the film, since between the moment the test subjects enter the mock prison and the moment they reluctantly exit it, there is not one single shot of the world outside the “prison”, neither a frame of the sky or the “prison” seen from outside, nor even the place where the researchers were monitoring the cameras, presumably inside the facility. This choice (sub-conscious or not) reflects the fear of undisclosed surveillance while adding to the dread of an external attack by a mysterious enemy while isolated. There are three key differences regarding the representation of isolation when comparing the two films, first is the exposure and interaction of the test subjects with the researchers, second is the interaction with the cameras and the presence of the red light, third and last is the functioning of the “prison”.

Concerning the first key difference, the exposure and interaction of the researchers, it can be observed that the German original, compared with the estrangement and mystery enfolding the researchers in the U.S. remake, works to lessen the isolation felt by the

¹²⁵ *The Experiment*. Directed by Paul Scheuring, 2010.

characters. Focusing first on *Das Experiment*, it features three identifiable stages of researcher's involvement. Firstly, the film provides footage of amiable researchers advising the



Image 18. *Das Experiment* – Movie still: The researchers calmly watch the monitors.

test subjects on the nature of the experiment, reassuring them regarding the harmless nature of some of the trial exams. This conduct by the researchers has a positive effect on the remaining characters, which manifested itself in the form of trust, especially from the “guards”, whose conviction in Professor Thon’s (the main researcher) design is so strong that they feel justified in their following course of actions. Secondly, the researchers are seen perusing the surveillance monitors, casually laughing at overheard jokes told by test subjects or commenting on their behavior. If the first stage of interaction was aimed at the characters, this one is aimed at the viewer, he/she is allowed to see how the researchers react to the experiment, their thoughts on a particular subject and their plans regarding significant alterations throughout the experiment. As the previous stage intended to appease the characters about the upcoming experiment, this stage intends to placate the viewer, demystifying the researchers and suggesting no ulterior motive, thus, no source of danger. Thirdly and finally, the last stage of researcher’s involvement is much more unsettling, as it comes from the overthrowing of the facilities by the “guards”, after what they proceed to the imprisonment of the researchers and the almost rape of the female researcher¹²⁶. The movie seems to convey that the scientists who concocted the whole experiment, who created these situations, are not really above the law, they can be snatched and thrown in a cell as fast as any “prisoner” might be, their position in the chain of command is frail and can be disrupted at any time, as it was. These three stages of exposure and interaction do not apply to the researchers in the U.S. film, who maintain a

¹²⁶ Which will be analyzed in further detail bellow.

taciturn and distant posture in the first section of the film (the test trials) and completely disappear from screen during the remaining duration of the motion picture, only to be mentioned in a direct manner in the closing minutes of the film, as a journalist reports that the main researcher, Dr. John Archuleta was arrested and charged with manslaughter. Turning our attention to a more concrete analysis of the researchers, concerning the representation of isolation in *The Experiment*, we observe that they represent the unreachable group of powerful people who “watches” over the society, as mentioned, they are distant, unsympathetic, and much too mysterious for the role of supposedly curious scientists. They exist without being seen, represented by non-resting exploratory cameras and an ominous red light. Which brings us to our second key difference, the interaction of the characters with the cameras and the red light.

In *Das Experiment* there is no rule prohibiting the test subjects from interacting with the cameras, and consequently with the researchers watching the images they capture. This freedom allows for many unilateral appeals towards the camera, as “prisoners” direct playful remarks as well as cries for help and even the “guards” turn to them, blurting calls like: “Professor, what should we do now?”¹²⁷ to no avail. Even though in both movies there is no direct response to any of the attempted communications through the cameras, it is still quite relevant to highlight that the psychological strain of being forbidden to address the cameras places the test subjects in a much more tense environment, since the ability to speak to the cameras without fearing any reprisals creates the illusion of support and integration, and the denial to do so isolates the test subjects even more. This difference is crucial when it comes to contextualizing each movie, the 2010 film is heavily influenced by the U.S. dread and anxiety over surveillance issues, while the 2001 European movie did not suffer such influences. Accompanying the cameras in *The Experiment* was the dreaded red light, which, as discussed

¹²⁷ *Das Experiment*. Directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2001.

in the previous chapter, represented the ruling of the absent researchers, contributing to a secluded and subdued environment. However it may be an important part of the U.S. film, it does not feature at all in the German movie, there is no red light or any other similar object that might serve the same purpose. Why this major difference in the plot then? The absence of the red light may, in a first instance, be justified by the simple lack of its need, since the researchers are an active part of the experiment, interacting with all test subjects during the “confessional interviews”, besides that, the “guards” cross paths with them multiple times and can do so whenever they see fit by simply entering the researchers control room. In a second instance it must be considered that given the absence of the researchers from the experiment in the 2010 film, the cameras alone would not suffice when aiming to create the necessary discomfort to portray the desired climate of anxiety. Besides representing the constant monitoring, it is also important to depict the tangible contemporary tensions regarding the decisions of an unknown group of powerful people.

The last key difference between *Das Experiment* and *The Experiment* regarding the isolation factor is the functioning of both mock prisons. The dissimilar ways they were “built” reveals plenty when discussing the isolation and its relation with the influence of “War on Terror” in the U.S. film. Both “prisoners” and “guards” have privileges in the German movie that are non-existing in the U.S. one. Beginning with the privileges of the “prisoners”, in the 2001 version, part of the “prison” functioning allowed “prisoners” to write letters, which would subsequently be scrutinized by the “guards” and sent to their destination. Another privilege is that “prisoners” are allowed visiting hours. *Das Experiment*, besides being accurate regarding the portrayal of the Stanford Prison experiment, best represent life in actual prison, where inmates are allowed such contact with the outside world. Additionally to these two liberties, the test subjects in the German film are also allowed by the researchers to abandon the experiment at any time they wish to do so (as two of the “prisoners” did). These privileges allowed for a

lesser sense of imprisonment and contact with the outside world. The “guards” privileges, however, were even greater, for they had their own schedule inside the artificial prison, as if it was their regular job, and they were allowed to leave the facilities, returning for their corresponding shifts. This creates a different type of environment, where the “guards” do not feel quite as alienated and estranged as they would feel had they been kept from leaving the premises. Due to this liberty to leave the facilities, the German “guards” are not as aggressive and deluded as their U.S. counterparts. None of these privileges, for either “prisoners” or “guards” occur in *The Experiment*, as said before, a great effort is made in order to portray an environment as secluded as possible, allowing for the desired hostilities to brew on the inside. The differences in terms of both freedom and agency of the characters is paramount regarding the movies’ different contexts. The German “guards” were given autonomy to roam free inside the facilities, make decisions and enquire about their safety, and even head home for the night, on the other hand, the U.S. “guards” are a product of the paternalist culture associated with military.

3.4 Characters

Considering the way the characters are represented is an important section of any movie analysis, for characters are created in a way to cause a specific reaction from the spectators, who may identify with some and repudiate others. For this reason we will allude to their representation in *Das Experiment* and their transformation and revision in *The Experiment*. Since characters are often aimed to be a reflection of specific groups within society we can thus comment on traits of U.S. society by examining the characters of this 2010 movie, namely, the citizen’s fears and reactions towards violence, torture and terrorism. Commencing this analysis, we will first compare the main protagonists (Tarek/ Travis) and the main antagonists (Berus/ Barris), shedding a light on the way the U.S. pair reflect post-9/11 tropes. We will inform the

character analysis with the representation of groups: the “guards” and the “prisoners”, comprising the aforementioned character’s behavior in their respective groups’ mentality.

Das Experiment’s (2001) leading character is played by actor Moritz Bleibtreu, best known for *Run, Lola Run* (1999), Tarek Fahd, whose name, tāriq, features in the Qur’an, referred as a brilliant star which leads the way, a protector, a night comer or a star of piercing brightness (At-Tariq, verse 3)¹²⁸, an unaccomplished journalist who works as a taxi cab driver. This occupation provides worldliness to the character, while at the same time providing a degree of anonymity which allows Tarek to quietly observe his passengers with the keen eye of a journalist. Indeed, as Robert DeNiro’s character, an unstable Vietnam War veteran, claimed in Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver* (1976): “People will do anything in front of a taxi driver. [...] It’s like you’re not even there, not even a person. Nobody knows you”¹²⁹. Tarek’s job differs from Travis’ in *The Experiment* (2010), who in this movie works in a retirement home, establishing himself as a humane character, connecting with the elderly and appealing to the viewer’s sympathy, far from the ordinary and practical work of a taxi driver. In this sense, the U.S. film follows Hollywood’s tradition to feature a bona fide hero, giving the audience a clear indication of whom they should be cheering for, or, identifying with from the very beginning. These two characters are a part of the group of “prisoners”, having similar experiences concerning the friendships with the remaining members of the group, for both are friendly and care about their fellow “prisoners”. This aspect is perhaps best showcased when it comes to their relationship with what could be perceived as the weaker “prisoner”. For Travis there was the already discussed Benjy, whose frailty was masked by his fraudulent graphic novel “Flying Man”, for Tarek there is Schutte, a kiosk owner whose dream of owning a yellow Ferrari brings him to this experiment as it bought him to many others before this one, like he confesses to Tarek. Both protagonists take a special interest in these dreamers, who eventually die in the course of

¹²⁸ Qur’an. Accessed April 2014. <http://quran.com/86>.

¹²⁹ *Taxi Driver*. DVD. Directed by Martin Scorsese. New York: Columbia Pictures Corporation, 1976.

the experiment. Not only do they show to be supportive of these men, but they speak up for them and their deaths will serve as a motivator, also a common trope in Hollywood. There is, nonetheless, a crucial difference that drives the protagonists apart, where clothing is concerned. Whereas the “prisoners” of *The Experiment* wore a simple shirt, pants and shoes, the men depicted in *Das Experiment* suffered a deeper humiliation, for they were given nothing but a garment that resembles a potato sack turned into a dress, a pair of flip-flops and no underwear. This type of garment was chosen to best represent the attires worn by the “inmates” at the Stanford chosen because, paired with the denial of underwear, it would cause a great amount of discomfort every time the “prisoner” wished to bend over, sit or lie down, even the knowledge of the lack of underwear alone would be enough to cause embarrassment and discomfort among the men. On the other hand, the “prisoner” attires for *The Experiment* were probably chosen to best replicate those worn by inmates in actual prisons across the U.S.A.¹³⁰

Regarding the antagonists, it can be stated that *Das Experiment*'s Berus and *The Experiment*'s Barris share a few traits. For example, the escalating dominance and feeling of empowerment throughout the movie, signaled by a decisive moment, which in Barris case is manifested through sexual arousal and in Berus case is manifested by a twitching hand, which in both cases offers a visual trigger for the spectators, a blunt warning that something is changing in the characters, and something is about to change in the movie. Another similarity is that they both perform similar forms of abuse, from shaving a prisoner's head to urinating on them. Nonetheless, Berus does not share Barris' respect and fear towards the researchers, nor does he equals them to a deity, far from it. Berus does not appear to have any respect towards the researchers, which is verified by the disrespectful way he addresses two of them. The only person Berus appears to have some form of respect for is Professor Thon, the main researcher, whose absence causes Berus to believe that the “guards” are being tested regarding their ability

¹³⁰ The “prisoners” clothing in each movie will be discussed regarding gender issues further below.

to act apparently unsupervised. These two characters serve the purpose of giving the hero a villain, someone to rouse and lead the group the protagonist is opposing. However, Barris is a much more particular malefactor than Berus, for he is a U.S. product of almost a decade fearing terrorist and their “leader”, whose name and face was more than often present when the topic of terrorism surfaced, whether in the media or in citizen’s conversations, Osama Bin Laden. Berus is simply the “guard” who provokes the greater amount of trouble, but still, a part of a group, Barris is completely detached from the group, he is the focus of Travis’ anger, regardless of the rest of the group and their inglorious actions. Regarding Travis’ anger, we can observe that the protagonist of *The Experiment* goes through a particular set of dispositions from the beginning until the end of the film, what Wetmore describes as “Americans as victims, Americans as heroic defenders of freedom and Americans as torturers”¹³¹. The main character is thus fashioned to follow the trope mentioned in the previous chapter, the “tortured becoming the torturer”, which describes the post-9/11 tendency to have protagonists suffer greatly throughout a film only to find retaliation by physically punishing their tormentors, with an expected concordance of the audience. This trope, while clearly present in *The Experiment*, is non-existent in *Das Experiment*. While the characters in the German version do try to break out of the “prison” in order to escape further abuses and avoid confrontations, in *The Experiment* the “prisoners” do not seek to escape, they seek revenge, which often is part of the war logic and is emblemized by the post 9/11 political discourse. Travis and the group he leads and instigates break into the “guards” quarters and chase them in order to exert retaliation. This character construction is crucial when perceiving the ways the “War on Terror” influenced *The Experiment*.

¹³¹ Wetmore, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema*, 100.

3.5. Gender, Homosexuality and Rape

We now turn our attention to the way *The Experiment* portrays issues concerning gender and homosexuality, relating these topics to the fact that the movie has an attempted rape scene. This analysis will be conducted bearing in mind considerations about sexual abuse; gender and homosexuality in the armed forces during the “War on Terror”, with special focus on the group of soldiers present in Tier 1A of the Abu Ghraib prison during the time the infamous photographs were taken. Ultimately, we aim to examine how the depictions related to gender, homosexuality and rape present in several of the Abu Ghraib photographs influenced *The Experiment*, distancing it even further from the German original, *Das Experiment*.

Regarding the gender representation in both films, there is a significant difference between them, for while there are two significant female characters in *Das Experiment* (a female researcher and Tarek’s girlfriend), there is not a single relevant female character in *The Experiment*, the only woman who could possibly be considered to be slightly more substantial than an extra, is Travis’ love interest, but her little time on screen and the fact that she is never addressed by her first name, render her to a mere source of motivation for the protagonist, as he recurrently daydreams about her smiling and wandering in India. This shortage of female characters speaks to the insignificance of women in a context of conflict in post-9/11 society, and it highlights the male-centered environment that is the U.S.A. armed forces.

The Experiment is a product of a war that both dismisses the legitimacy of women in the armed forces during warfare and actively uses them as a means of attacking detainees and manipulating them. The already mentioned “torture chicks”¹³² are a paramount example of the latter, as these women were actively used as objects of torture, exposing their naked bodies to detainees, saying profanities and occasionally smearing fake menstrual blood on them, targeting the Muslim sensibilities about cleanliness before Allah. *The Experiment*, however,

¹³² The New York Times. “Torture Chicks Gone Wild”. Accessed December 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2005/01/30/opinion/30dowd.html?_r=0.

does not feature any women inside the facilities, which could be attributed to the film makers wish to have everything seem as similar to a jail environment as possible. Nonetheless, the film's producers apparently overlooked the fact that in U.S. jails, although the inmate population is restricted to one gender, there are both male and female guards inside the facilities. It is then safe to assume that the interest for the experiment relies solely on the behavior of male test subjects. So, it could be reasoned that, since we argue that the "War on Terror" has influenced *The Experiment*, that the male-centered mentality during this particular



Image 19. Charles Graner and Sabrina Harman with detainees at Abu Ghraib. Source: Public Domain.

warfare has swayed the makers of the film non only to leave out any female presence inside the "prison", but also to portray similar humiliating and emasculating actions, some of which feminizing the detainees (i.e. "alright girls, everyone on the line!"¹³³). Also, in some of the photographs taken by the soldiers at Abu Ghraib, it is evident the feminizing of detainees as a means to humiliate

them, and the inclusion of female soldiers in the pictures ends up causing further humiliation. In many of these pictures the detainees appear naked, captured on camera next to a smiling female member of the Military Police, the digital encapsulation of that degrading moment, beyond being a source of entertainment for many soldiers is also a permanent reminder of the Iraqi man's dishonor. As Isis Nusair writes in "Gendered, racialized, and sexualized torture at Abu Ghraib", "[t]he prisoners were represented as helpless, obedient, and docile (read feminine) others. [...] Within this homophobic, militarized, racist, and sexist representation, the perpetrators were defining their position as well as the nature of their domination over Iraqi

¹³³ *The Experiment*. Directed by Paul Scheuring, 2010.

others”¹³⁴. In her essay, Nusair aims to show how “military and political institutions, practices and discourses” were partly responsible for the development of an Orientalized Other in the U.S. controlled Abu Ghraib prison. We agree with Nusair’s stand when she exposes the events depicted on the photographs not as singular or pathologized, but as “[...] systematic oppressive acts integral to power relations and complex productions and significations of gender, race and sexuality”¹³⁵. Still, when arguing that by taking pictures of the tortured detainees the soldiers were automatically distancing themselves from the objectified “other”¹³⁶, what Nusair neglects to address is that the soldiers included themselves in the photographs, and this inclusion speaks to their own low place in the hierarchy, as one of the pyramid photos suggests, the one with Charles Graner standing tall, Sabrina Harman below him, almost a undistinguishable part of the pile of naked detainees immediately below her¹³⁷, they might be slightly above the Iraqi men, certainly in that prison, but still, they are a part of the “bigger picture” as pawns as well. In *The Experiment* we can also find traces of an attempted distancing that ultimately becomes proximity, as witnessed first in the scene where Barris shaves Travis’ head in order to humiliate him, depriving him of a characteristic of his identity. Later Barris shaves his own head, saying to Travis: “See? I’m a reasonable man”, as if the free wiling action of shaving one’s own head could in any way compare to the forceful imposition of a military-type crew cut on an anti-war pacifist. Barris, as described in the previous chapter, had very different motivations for his new look from those that drove him to bring the group of “guards” to shave Travis’ head, but still, his actions do end up making them have a similar look, involuntarily inscribing Barris in the same “test subject”/“puppet” role as Travis. This “distancing that ultimately becomes proximity” relates intimately to the discussed pyramid photograph, as we now know through multiple sources that most of the polemic photographs were orchestrated by Graner, we can

¹³⁴ Isis Nusair. Gendered, racialized, and sexualized torture at Abu Ghraib. In *Feminism and War: Confronting US Imperialism*. (London/New York: Zed Book Ltd, 2008), 184.

¹³⁵ Nusair. Gendered, racialized, and sexualized torture at Abu Ghraib. 182.

¹³⁶ Nusair. Gendered, racialized, and sexualized torture at Abu Ghraib. 185.

¹³⁷ See Image 7 in the 2nd chapter.

attempt to understand his perspectives on his role, as well as on the role of women, in the detention center. Specialist Harman, the representative of women in that image, as both a female and a lesbian is “placed” in a much inferior position than Graner, the representative of the male W.A.S.P.¹³⁸, exposing, (doubtfully to the surprise of many) the retrograde, century’s old heavy connection between gender, sexuality and power.

Precisely because of this connection, women in the military tend to abandon what could be perceived as “feminine mannerisms”, in order to tip the scale of power relations, even if slightly, to their side. As Eileen L. Zurbriggen argues, in her article “Sexualized Torture and Abuse at Abu Ghraib Prison: Feminist Psychological Analysis”, female soldiers tend to adopt a “masculine identity”. Zurbriggen thus elaborates:

Becoming ‘one of the guys’ has many benefits to a woman in the military, not the least of which is that it minimizes the chance that she will be seen as a sexual object. Given that sexual assault by a fellow soldier is a real risk for women serving in the U.S. military, being perceived as masculine or asexual might have many benefits.¹³⁹

Although there are reported cases of men being victims of sexual assault, the female victims within the armed forces surpass the male percentage, as corroborated in a 2013 article, which writes: “Women make up 15 percent of active-duty forces, but 47 percent of sexual assault victims”, and knowing that “[t]he Pentagon estimates that 85 percent of sexual assault crimes go unreported”¹⁴⁰ it is only understandable that some female soldiers might feel constricted to downplay their femininity in order to avoid possible unwanted attention. It should also be mentioned that, at the time the pictures were snapped, the infamous United States policy on gays and lesbian serving in the military, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”, was still in

¹³⁸ Acronym for White Anglo-Saxon Protestant.

¹³⁹ Eileen L. Zurbriggen. “Sexualized Torture and Abuse at Abu Ghraib Prison: Feminist Psychological Analysis”. In *Feminism & Psychology*, 2008 (Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, and Singapore), vol. 18 (3). 308.

¹⁴⁰ Huffington Post. “Why pass #MJIA? 50 Facts About Sexual Assault in the US Military. Accessed August 2014. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/soraya-chemaly/military-sexual-assault-facts_b_4281704.html.

effect, additionally complicating the service of soldiers like Harman. It could be argued, analyzing the Abu Ghraib photographs, that Specialist Harman did try to “masculinize” herself, as evidenced by her writing “I am a rapist [sic]” on a detainee’s body¹⁴¹. By literally marking the “other” with a label commonly attributed to male violence against women and then snapping pictures of it, Harman effectively demonstrated a very masculine-type of behavior (no need to disregard the spelling error), deviating the liability of that foul conduct from many of her fellow soldiers who raped not only Iraqi women (and men) but probably some U.S. female (and male) soldiers throughout their military career, showing an effort to integrate that masculine dominated sphere.

The Experiment does not portray the rape of women inside the jail, simply because there is not a woman in sight, but it does comment on the issue of discrimination and rape of gay men. Most of the blunt discrimination we speak of comes from Cam Gigandet’s character, Chase, who from the get go displays a very homophobic attitude towards a gay “prisoner” named Oscar, calling him “Boy George” and “Moulin Rouge” among other homophobic slurs. By the end of the experiment, Chase, apparently overridden by his sexual urges, attempts to force himself on Oscar, to no avail, since Travis prevents him from proceeding with the abuse. The portrayal of the attempted rape of a gay man in *The Experiment* accentuates a latent fear of homosexuality present in the U.S. culture, where LGBT people are still a target of open discrimination and are often assaulted (both physically and verbally), even with a legislation that perceives these actions as hate-crimes. Whereas in *Das Experiment* there is an attempted rape of a female, stripped of both her clothes and her power, in *The Experiment* the “weaker” role is bestowed upon a gay man. Chase’s actions ultimately represent the sadly common

¹⁴¹ See image 3 in the 1st chapter.

procedures of establishing control and dominance through sex, even if his own sexual preferences are unclear¹⁴².

In *The Experiment* the “guards”, as a means to gain control of the escalating rebellious “prisoners”, decide to pry them off their beds and chaining Travis to a cell in his underwear¹⁴³. The humiliation of exposure (intensified by the presence of the cameras) aimed to remove his masculinity, making him feel powerless, asserting the “guards” status as the “alpha males”, validated by the later animalesque behavior of urinating on a Travis as a territorial mark. As the removal of clothes in Abu Ghraib was a direct offense towards Iraqi culture and masculinity, the removal of clothes in *The Experiment* is a direct offense towards U.S. own culture and masculinity, for as Slavoj Žižek argues in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* regarding George W. Bush’s admission of the high probability of the anthrax attacks having been committed by U.S. citizens, “[...] the true clash is the clash within each civilization”¹⁴⁴. The “guards” of both *Das Experiment* and *The Experiment* feminize the “prisoners”, specially the main characters, in a particular scene, through the imposition of domestic chores. In *Das Experiment* Tarek is ordered to clean a toilet with his garment, completely naked, on his knees in front of three “guards” who instruct him on how to clean the toilet in a sexualized tone, referring to Tarek as “our nude cleaning lady” and encouraging him saying “very nice”¹⁴⁵. After he is done cleaning he is ordered to put on the dirty garment to publicly display his humiliation. The equivalent scene in the 2010 remake features Barris ordering Travis to clean *his* toilet, when he refuses, Barris has another “guard” dunk his head in the toilet. This scene evokes the willingness to push the detainees until they comply, or until, in this case, admit their inferiority.

In Tier 1A of the Abu Ghraib prison, as well as in countless similar places, masculinity is rewarded, participating in activities deemed manly would integrate and validate a soldier’s

¹⁴² Since not only he hesitates when asked the gender of his partners in his many sexual encounters, but also he asks Oscar to face him during the first “prisoners” shower, when he asked none of the others to do the same.

¹⁴³ See image 5 in the 2nd chapter.

¹⁴⁴ Slavoj Žižek. *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*. (London: Verso. 2002), 55.

¹⁴⁵ *Das Experiment*. Directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2001.

position in the army. The lack of masculinity, is on the other hand punished. This consequence of a male-dominated army is reflected in *The Experiment*, where docile Benjy is killed and homosexual Oscar is sexually assaulted, but Bosch's character is perhaps the most pertinent example of the majority punishing a member of the group deemed "less masculine". Bosch is dissatisfied with the actions of the "guards", distancing himself from participating in the shaving and urinating on Travis, even telling the group that if anything similar happens again he would abandon the experiment, causing the whole of the test subjects to lose their payment. The "guards" solution is to beat Bosch, place a bag on his head and imprison him, thus making an example out of him, asserting their dominance and securing their money. Bosch was punished because he did not partake in the manly rituals at the "prison". Bosch could then be associated to the man who denounced the horrid proceedings at Abu Ghraib, by giving two CDs containing numerous photographs (many of them never made public) and videos taken by the soldiers to the U.S. military command, Joe Darby, now a Sergeant. Darby was, as Mary Ann Tétreault stated, "[...] the only one at Abu Ghraib who stood against what he saw as illegal acts, a confirmation of the success of ritual violence as a strategy for normalization"¹⁴⁶. The identity of the whistleblower was maintained anonymous, for Darby feared for his life if the remaining soldiers came to be aware of his "betrayal". His identity was protected until Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld mentioned his name during a Senate hearing, inexplicably exposing him to possible retaliations. Thankfully Darby was not harmed but the character of Bosh in *The Experiment* is, nevertheless, a reminder of what could have been, and what the repercussions of going against the grain are.

¹⁴⁶ Mary Ann Tétreault. The Sexual Politics of Abu Ghraib: Hegemony, Spectacle and War on Terror. In *WNSA Journal*, vol. 18, no. 3 (fall), 2006. 44.

4. Other Visual “Experiments” With Abu Ghraib

“Art is a permanent accusation.”

Fernando Botero

In order to accomplish the main goal of this thesis, to understand how the Abu Ghraib photographs have changed the way western societies think about the “War on Terror”, It is important to deviate my attention from solely focusing on *The Experiment* (2010) as an artistic representation of Abu Ghraib in order to show how other visual works deal with this subject. The reference to these other works will hopefully complement the study of my main object of analysis of the thesis, *The Experiment*, and will add different perspectives on important topics first highlighted in here. In the first part of this chapter I will address the following visual portrayals, inspired not only by the events captured by the U.S. soldier’s cameras in Abu Ghraib, but, in a larger scale, by the “War on Terror” itself:

- the movie “Boys of Abu Ghraib” (2014) by Luke Moran;
- the series of paintings “Abu Ghraib” (2004/2005) by Fernando Botero;
- the collages and photomontages “Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful, New Series” (2004) by Martha Rosler;
- the performance “Confession” (2007) by Regina José Galindo.

The second part of this chapter will center on Jonathan Hobin’s photograph “A Boo Grave” (2010), a work from his series “In the Playroom”, which features only children, as if toying with the performance and staging aspects of the Abu Ghraib pictures. I will argue that Hobin’s photograph ultimately forces the audience to consider the implications of the “War on Terror” on younger generations and those succeeding it, as well as on future memories.

4.1 Beyond *The Experiment*: Visually Portraying Abu Ghraib

In 2004, after the news magazine television program *60 Minutes II* broadcast the Abu Ghraib photographs, President Bush reacted with a statement that suggested that the events that took place in Abu Ghraib were to be considered exceptional, saying: “I share a deep disgust that those prisoners were treated the way they were treated. Their treatment does not reflect the nature of the American people. That's not the way we do things in America”¹⁴⁷. Since then, artists began to convey their own thoughts, ideas and reactions about the infamous images, as well as on the “War on Terror”, in the form of artistic responses of various sorts, hoping to shine a light on the reprehensible U.S. military conduct outside of their country. Many of these early artistic statements focus on the figure of the “Hooded Man”. Arguably, this figure came to represent torture in Abu Ghraib, most likely for its strong visual portrayal, for as W. J. T. Mitchell argues, the iconic picture of the “Hooded Man” “[...] is not a masterpiece but a master *image*”¹⁴⁸, the image of the hooded detainee standing on a box, arms opened and apparently linked to electrical current has rapidly reached a status of symbolic representation of power over the “other” through the means of torture. The fact that the photo does not show the man’s face (only his name, Abdou Hussain Saad Faleh, is known) makes him comparable with the mysterious man in Richard Drew’s “Falling Man”¹⁴⁹, adding a symbolic weight to the image. It was precisely because of the image’s powerful message that it began surfacing on the covers of several national and international newspapers and magazines, as well as on the streets, in many different forms, such as murals (“That Freedom for Bush”), installations (“The War is Over”) and billboards (“Stop Bush”) (see images 20/21/22). Said artworks aim to distort the idea of

¹⁴⁷ The New York Times. “Bush Expresses 'Deep Disgust' Over Abuse of Iraqi Prisoners”. Accessed September 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/30/politics/30CND-BUSH.html>.

¹⁴⁸ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Cloning Terror*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Ltd, 2011), 136.

¹⁴⁹ About the nearly frantic search for the real “Hooded Man”, see Errol Morris article on The New York Times. “Will the *Real* “Hooded Man” Please Stand Up?”. Accessed September 2014. <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/08/15/will-the-real-hooded-man-please-stand-up/>.

publicly displaying images of supremacy, or even power over the “other” as a statement for the end of a war.



Image 20/21/22. Upper right: "That Freedom for Bush" (2004) by Sallah Edine Sallat. Bottom right: "The War is Over" (2004) by FreewayBlogger. Left: "Stop Bush" (2004) by Richard Serra.

These, as well as many other street art depictions of the “Hooded Man”, serve as an inescapable protest to a seemingly never-ending conflict. One of those was authored by an artist known as The FreewayBlogger, accredited for placing politically charged cardboard signs above busy freeways. The installation “The War

is Over” (image 21, bottom right), placed on an over-pass over the Interstate 10 West freeway in Los Angeles, does just that. While sitting in traffic, hoping to make a fast and safe journey back home to your loved ones, drivers will be confronted with the weight that gloomy figure bestows upon its viewers, forcing them to confront the torture, violence and humiliation the “Hooded Man” stands for. The accompanying message “The War is Over.” is interrupted by the black cutout of the “Hooded Man”, as if commenting on the 2003 “Mission Accomplished” speech given by President Bush to signal the end of major combat operations in Iraq (and to inform that the U.S. and their allies have prevailed). Much like The FreewayBlogger’s installation, Bush’s premature message claiming the end of the conflict in Iraq was disturbed by the following torture scandal. The FreewayBlogger’s message seems to commendably echo John Lennon’s and Yoko Ono’s famous 1969 anti-Vietnam War billboard propaganda “WAR IS OVER! (If You Want To)”.

Bearing in mind that the main subject of this thesis is a motion picture, it may be useful to consider another film focusing on Abu Ghraib, but which gives more emphasis to the role of the soldier rather than to the role of the prisoners, conveying a more pro-war approach to the events than that presented by *The Experiment*. To this end I will briefly discuss a 2014 movie by writer/director/producer/actor Luke Moran entitled *Boys of Abu Ghraib*¹⁵⁰. The film tells the story of a young adult (played by Moran) who joins the army reserve in the hope of becoming a part of something bigger than himself. However in Iraq he finds no fulfilment, as his days and the days of those around him go by painfully slow. To amuse themselves, the soldiers play games, race and play pranks on each other, but Moran's character, Jake, feels that there is still more he could be doing for his country. He then volunteers to be a member of the Military Police, and is sent to the "Hard Site", where he acts as a guard and spends his day learning his position from his colleagues and finding new ways to bide his time, which included torturing detainees. When Jake finally comes back home, he astonishingly watches himself on TV's breaking news torturing Iraqi prisoners, as the movie comes to its end.

This low budget movie, shot in Mexico, was meant to serve as an explanation of the actions performed by U.S. soldiers actions, or as Moran said during an interview: "I wanted to



Image 23. *Boys of Abu Ghraib* (2014) - Movie still: Jack crying at Abu Ghraib prison.

study it from a human perspective. How does a human go into Abu Ghraib with good intentions, like the character of Jack and come out of the other end capable of doing some of these things?"¹⁵¹. The "human perspective" Moran speaks about apparently leaves out the Iraqi detainees' perspective, for Moran thoroughly shows the tribulations Jack goes through, missing his family, his

girlfriend (often in flashbacks) and even the comfort of his home, and does not accurately

¹⁵⁰ *Boys of Abu Ghraib*. DVD. Directed by Luke Moran. Los Angeles: Vertical Entertainment. 2014.

¹⁵¹ Examiner.com. "Interview: Luke Moran – *Boys of Abu Ghraib*". Accessed September 2014. <http://www.examiner.com/article/interview-luke-moran-boys-of-abu-ghraib>.

portray the psychological torment the detainees were going through. Their story is never told, with the exception of Ghazi Hammoud, a well-spoken Iraqi man who befriends Jack only to seemingly betray his trust by admitting to be responsible for a deadly bombing. In this movie the only Iraqi with a voice is perceived as a manipulative murderer and traitor. Before learning about the bombing, Jack took pity in him for the torture he was being submitted to, but after hearing Hammoud's confession he stops feeling bad for the man, or for the rest of the prisoners under his watch. Actually, Hammoud's guilt is questionable, since he admitted to be responsible for the bombing after several days of imprisonment and torture. However the soldier does not even take that into consideration, and does not even wish to understand why Hammoud did it (if at all). Arguably one of the most striking aspects of the Abu Ghraib photographs was the depiction of women as perpetrators of torture, so if Moran was hoping deliver a study of Abu Ghraib from a "human perspective" he also fails to address the depiction of both genders, as even the movies' title, "Boys of Abu Ghraib" reveals. Indeed, the only "human perspective" Moran is interested in is the male W.A.S.P.'s perspective, as he largely avoids crucial aspects of the scandal. *Boys of Abu Ghraib*, although delivering a simplistic and meager depiction on the Abu Ghraib torture scandal, as it aims to blaming monotony and frustration for the inhumane torture and focus solely on the soldier's inner struggles. The movie does, however, succeed in portraying the soldiers' reported boredom, anger and frustration. In contrast to *The Experiment*, *Boys of Abu Ghraib* seems to incorporate the U.S. government's discourse about the "War on Terror", by reinforcing the dichotomy between "Us" and "Them"¹⁵². Apart from cinematic approaches to the Abu Ghraib photographs and the "War on Terror", there are many other relevant artistic responses to the events that took place in Abu Ghraib. Fernando Botero's series of paintings entitled "Abu Ghraib" (2004/2005) is a

¹⁵² To this effect, it is interesting to consider the fact that *The Experiment* was a straight-to-DVD production and *Boys of Abu Ghraib* screened at the Gasparilla Film Festival and won the 2014 Audience Award.

significant example of a visual work that deals with some iconic images related with Abu Ghraib. The famed Latin American painter and sculptor, known for his rather large figures, or “Boterismo”, delivered a series of paintings which arose from his urge to give his artistic contribution to the pressing occasion. These were not the images of robust ladies dancing or the sculptures of pudgy animals Botero is perhaps best known for, these were paintings filled with anger, violence and pain, as the three following Botero paintings verify.



Image 24 -“Abu Ghraib 59”(2004)

Image 25 –“Abu Ghraib 60”(2004)

Image 26 –“Abu Ghraib 52”(2004)

While most of the focus of the Abu Ghraib scandal was directed at the U.S. soldiers who humiliated and tortured Iraqi detainees, Botero, on the other hand, gave the limelight of his canvas to the abused. Surprisingly, no female soldiers appear in this series, but it could be argued that his representations of the soldiers, scarce and concealed as they are, are meant to represent the whole of the U.S. military, highly perceived as a “masculine” entity. When Botero first saw the photographs, he was particularly struck by the unwillingness of the soldiers to touch detainees with their bare hands, thus wearing colored gloves¹⁵³. In many of the paintings in this series the only parts of a soldier that appear on canvas are a gloved hand or a boot, unrelenting symbols of detachment and oppression. For Botero, this was part of a lineage of war-paintings started by other great artists before him, such as Goya or Picasso. Like them, Botero had previously addressed instances of violence in his own country in works such as “El

¹⁵³ See Botero’s interview with Berkeley Professor and Poet Robert Hass. Botero and Berkeley. Accessed September 2014. <http://clasarchive.berkeley.edu/Gallery/botero/multimedia.html>.

Dolor de Colombia” (“The Pain of Colombia”)¹⁵⁴, and facing the events that took place in Abu Ghraib he felt the need respond to these more recent instances of violence.

Susan Sontag wrote in *Regarding the Torture of Others* that when one gazes at the Abu Ghraib photographs the “[...] reigning admiration for unapologetic brutality”¹⁵⁵ is evident. However, the acceptance of brutality does not apply to Botero’s paintings. The artist charges against moral numbness with brute force, exposing the figure’s pain and obscuring the soldiers. Furthermore, we can identify similar motifs in these paintings and the movie, *The Experiment*, such as soldiers urinating on detainees, prisoners being hooded, undressed and feminized. This recurrence reiterates the importance of those aspects when artistically representing Abu Ghraib. When it came the time to choose what end to give to the series “Abu Ghraib”, Fernando Botero decided that he would not sell the paintings, as he does not wish to directly profit from the suffering of others, as he claimed in an interview at UC Berkeley¹⁵⁶. He would prefer for his work to be shown in museums, rather than to be hidden away in the house of an art collector. The fact that Botero was drawing on real facts and real suffering made the author uncomfortable with the idea of keeping these specific paintings under the same commercial



Image 27. "Election (Lyndie)" (2004).

status as some of his other works. For this reason he decided not to put a price on the “Abu Ghraib” series and allowed them to be displayed for free.

U.S. artist Martha Rosler expressed her vision of the events in Abu Ghraib in a very different fashion. Rosler addressed the spotless dome U.S. citizens were living under at the peak of the U.S. conflicts with

Vietnam with “Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful” (1967-72), a series made with a

¹⁵⁴ “El Dolor de Colombia” aimed to denounce the violence present in Colombia due to drug traffic and disputes between guerilla, political and military groups.

¹⁵⁵ Susan Sontag. “Regarding the Torture of Others”. *New York Times Magazine*. May 23rd. 2004. 7.

¹⁵⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGla-9vCSto>.

collage technique we now recognize from the Surrealists and the Pop artists. Rosler shattered the dome, and using images from *House Beautiful* magazine, composed scenarios where happy housewives would pose next to alarming scenes of the Vietnam War. “Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful, New Series” (2004) is a self-referential replication of that work, for yet again, Rosler felt she should shatter this new and improved dome, which once more pushed the horrors overseas. Much like the FreewayBlogger, Rosler uses her art work to approximate the viewer to an apparently distant, but inescapable reality.

Rosler’s collage entitled “Election (Lynndie)” (2004) displays a spacious and modern kitchen, and what better place for the perfect little housewife to be in, but instead, we find a pixelated Lynndie England (coupling her image to digital cameras and the internet). England is holding a leash, its end concealed by a kitchen appliance, behind her we see the Iraqi man she held in the original image, as if contemplating her. Outside, a black and white, smoke-filled background of the “War on Terror”. All through the kitchen we can see numerous Abu Ghraib images and a newspaper clipping from an actual *New York Times* article that reads: “Be a Part of the Solution”¹⁵⁷. The full 2004 article denounces the vulnerability of the elections, and urges concerned citizens to monitor the voting process in their own precincts in the upcoming presidential election¹⁵⁸ as a way to avoid repeating the infamous 2000 disarray in Florida¹⁵⁹. Rosler’s inclusion of this particular article in the setting she created suggests the accusation of political manipulations as well as a wish to promote anti-war activism, again linking her thoughts about this particular conflict to the Vietnam War. While Rosler was not the only artist

¹⁵⁷ The clipping features the title of the article and its very last phrase: “Be Part of the Solution - Oct. 11. 2004 – If this election is going to be a fair and honest one, concerned citizens will have to do their part to ensure that every vote counts.” – See *The New York Times*, Oct. 11, 2004. Accessed December 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/11/opinion/11mon1.html?_r=0.

¹⁵⁸ The election (took place in November and the article was published in October.

¹⁵⁹ In the 2000 U.S. elections Al Gore lost the presidency to George W. Bush by a slim margin, and a great focus was on the Florida recount.

who made a parallel between these two conflicts¹⁶⁰, she was, however, compelled to rediscover her work and update it to this new war, in order to oppose historical amnesia. The “New Series” thus addresses “[...] the historical, political and cultural erasure that has allowed America to engage, again, in yet another ‘living room war’, as if the Vietnam War had never happened”¹⁶¹. We can then understand the crucial role art plays in generating awareness towards these type of connections that seem to be deliberately forgotten by the media in general.

Rosler straightforwardly revisited “Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful”, and made no effort to disguise her self-referential source as it was precisely that thematic repetition that provided the cyclical aspect she wished to comment on. Nonetheless, there is one other work by Rosler subtly embedded which could inform to analysis of “Election (Lynndie)”, that is the video-performance “Semiotics of the Kitchen” (1975). In this parody of the famous Julia Child’s cooking shows, a young Martha Rosler alphabetically presents to the camera a series of cooking utensils and mimics the movements which accompany their handling, often in a threatening and violent manner (e.g. stabbing motion while presenting the knife and fork). In this performance Rosler critiques the domesticizing influence of cooking programs, which prepare women for their social functions, which were deemed to be merely domestic. This feminist aspect in Rosler’s work is interesting when applied to “Election (Lynndie)”, adding another layer of interpretation to the collage. A woman is yet again placed in a kitchen, but not just any ordinary woman, a soldier responsible for much controversy. Placing her in a kitchen, surrounded by Abu Ghraib images might imply the question: is England the one holding the leash, or is she the one being held? A parallel is visible between male-dominated domestic life

¹⁶⁰ Another artist who makes a parallel between the “War on Terror” and the Vietnam War is Dennis Draughon, with his composition “Abu Ghraib Nam” (2004). See W.J.T. Mitchell, *Cloning Terror*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Ltd, 2011), 5.

¹⁶¹ Heather Diack. “Too Close to Home: Rethinking Representation in Martha Rosler’s Photomontages of War”. *Prefix*. 14:2, 2006. 68.

and male-centered military life as Rosler questions traditional women's roles in a contemporary military-dependent society.

There are also other, less materially permanent, types of artistic expressions that suitably inform artistic practices about Abu Ghraib. One of these comes from Regina José Galindo. Galindo is a performance artist from Guatemala, who specializes in Body Art, a sub-category of performance art, in which performers utilize their own bodies (often recurring to mutilation) to convey a message. In 2007 Galindo debuted "Confession", a performance which consisted in having a large and muscular man repeatedly dunking her head in water against her will. This goes on for a couple of minutes, until he aggressively shoves her to the other side of the room, Galindo falls down hard and the man exits the area¹⁶². The audience is confronted with a brief but violent exhibition on torture, which is made more shocking when contrasting Galindo's petit frame with the body of such a large and imposing man. As Professor Julian Stallabrass writes: "Their contest could be read as an allegory of the absurdly skewed power struggles played out between nations"¹⁶³.



Image 28. "Confession" (2007) stills.

Galindo forces the audience to be more than witnesses, to be accomplices, no longer passive observers of a performance act, as they stand motionless as Galindo is physically abused. Only Galindo's first performance of "Confession" was performed live, the latter (2009,

¹⁶² Julian Stallabrass, "Performing Torture". Accessed September 2014. www.scribd.com/doc/31591443/Regina-Jose-Galindo.

¹⁶³ Stallabrass. "Performing Torture".

2010) were installations which featured a video of the original performance, which mirrored to a greater extent the Abu Ghraib experience for the audience. These recorded moments of torment were bound to have reminded the audience of the tilted balance of power which transpired through the Abu Ghraib photographs.

4.2 Between Abu Ghraib and “A Boo Grave”

In this section I will examine “A Boo Grave” (2010), a photograph by Canadian photographer and art director Jonathan Hobin. This image is a part of Hobin’s series entitled “In the Playroom” in which the artist places children reenacting polemic world events, such as the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center, the death of Princess Diana, the 1978 Jonestown deaths, among others. “A Boo Grave” was based on the photographs of Abu Ghraib, it is not a mere reimagination of a single shot, but a composition of what Hobin felt were the most striking aspects of the Abu Ghraib imagery.



Image 29. "A Boo Grave" (2010).

I begin by identifying the main three figures, widely recognizable, as Lynndie England, the “Hooded Man”, and a general representation of an Abu Ghraib detainee. On the far left, a

young girl portrays private England with both the easiness and confidence of a child, and the arrogance of a soldier (as we can infer from the lollypop mimicking a cigar). Ultimately, in a broader interpretation, this little girl could stand for, not just all the women, but all soldiers, regardless of gender, who stood dispassionately next to detainees in pain and posed for a picture. The child in the middle is directly representing the figure of the “Hooded Man”, which is, as was discussed above, an iconic and almost inescapable reference when considering the infamous photographs. Hobin not only used a black attire and hood to convey the desired image, but also added a Cereal carton box instead of the MRE (Meals Ready to Eat) box on which the “Hooded Man” was struggling to stand on. Hobin also included in the shot black wires connected to the boys hands, taking the picture to a higher level of uneasiness. The viewer is unsure if the wires are actually connected to electricity, (a white cable is clearly plugged in the back wall). The uncertainty about these wires provides the same feeling of hesitation one gets when pondering if the “Hooded Man” was actually about to be electrocuted or if the soldier’s explanation (that the wires were disconnected) was truthful. The child on the far right is representing all the detainees who were humiliated by the removal of clothes, threatened with ferocious dogs and tormented until mental breakdown. In an interview I was conducted with Jonathan Hobin¹⁶⁴, the artist mentioned how children have, throughout the ages, processed the culturally challenging aspects in their playtimes, as was the case of the “Cowboys and Indians” roleplaying, which persists until this day. Hobin goes even further, saying that the “War on Terror” will probably give humanity the material for future cautionary tales, as he poses the question “If war, death, disease, torture, suicide and conquerors were the source material for the rhymes and fairytales of our youth, are we witnessing the source material for future fairytales being played out in our modern day wars?”¹⁶⁵. In Hobin’s “A Boo Grave” we might be foreseeing a role-play fairly common and accepted in the social

¹⁶⁴ See full interview with Jonathan Hobin in Annex attached.

¹⁶⁵ Otherwise specified, all quotes in this segment refer to the attached interview.

conventions of future generations. Hobin encountered much resistance to his work, from art critics, the media in general and the public. This criticism was translated into “[...] hate mail, death threats and a public outcall for my arrest or murder”¹⁶⁶. This indignation arose mainly from the United States media. Hobin attributes this to a general difficulty viewers have in stepping out of their comfort zone and being confronted with harsh realities¹⁶⁷. By opposing the harmless playroom to horrific realities Hobin, much like Rosler, removed a comfortable barrier and allowed reality to slither inside the household.

One other interesting possibility of interpreting this photograph concerns the similarities between the acts of staging/performance in the Abu Ghraib images and Hobin’s picture. In many Abu Ghraib photographs we can find behavioral similarities with children playing with dolls, dressing and undressing them at will, propping them in whatever position they want. From this angle, children’s innocence and ingenuity is warped in the Abu Ghraib images, where the carelessness and joyfulness displayed by the soldiers seems to breathe new life to Walter Benjamin’s words¹⁶⁸: “[...] self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can



Image 30. "Shitboy", photographed by Abu Ghraib soldiers.

experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order”¹⁶⁹.

If we take a closer look at the third child (barely naked with a stuffed dog wrapped around his leg), it is noticeable that the child’s body is smeared with a brown substance, perhaps chocolate. This depiction brings to mind some

photographs taken by the soldiers of a mentally challenged detainee who they nicknamed

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ As he says: “[...] I feel the biggest reason my work has received some negative response is because people don’t want to think and don’t want life to be complicated”.

¹⁶⁸ Walter Benjamin’s quote was originally about Marinetti’s wish for war to inspire artists. Which by itself comments on the cyclic pertinence of the quote.

¹⁶⁹ Walter Benjamin. *Illuminations*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1968). 242.

“Shitboy”, a rather childish lable¹⁷⁰, given the fact that he would smear himself with his bodily wastes. Instead of trying to minimize the demeanors of this verified mentally ill person, the soldiers not only encouraged this type of behavior but also photographed it. We could then perceive these images as representations of a twisted interpretation of Freud’s “Anal Stage”, in which Freud explained how children would derive pleasure from the newfound control of their bowel movements. In the many photographs taken of “Shitboy”, the soldiers therefore captured their newfound pleasure in controlling other people’s bodily wastes. The “Anal Stage” is the second stage of Freud’s Child Development Theory, a theory that defines children through their specific need and instinctual drives, deeply connected to a sexual element. Children are meant to explore, experiment and be curious about, not only their sexuality, but also about everything else that provokes their interest.

Jonathan Hobin’s employment of children in the series (and in particular in “A Boo Grave”) asks the question: “Are we not all still just children fighting over toys in a much larger playroom?”. With this in mind, let us turn our gaze towards the “playground” Hobin has created in this photograph. Even though there were a number of ways in which Hobin could have artistically commented on the Abu Ghraib pictures, the photographer chose a child’s room to portray these horrible situations as if it was merely an entertaining game or an innocent Halloween costume. When asked about the presence of Halloween motifs in this image, Hobin attributed it to the great significance of Halloween as a cultural event in North America. The artist hoped to “[...] express the cultural reality in which some killers are celebrated and some are demonized”, and ultimately consider children’s awareness of the differences between the both of them. Hobin acknowledges that society holds intricate cultural rules, and thus justifies his use of the Halloween theme in “A Boo Grave”. The inclusion of the Halloween context in provides an aspect of legitimacy to the photograph, since it raises the question: Is there a

¹⁷⁰ “Shitboy” is a label which falls in line with other infantile nicknames the soldiers attributed to detainees, such as the ones aforementioned: “Iceman”, “Mr. Frosty”, “Gilligan”, etc.

difference between children dressing up as Second World War soldiers (for example) and Abu Ghraib soldiers?

Although the Halloween motifs might help standardize the image, there are still elements of the macabre that when contrasted with the setting of the picture can serve as a critique, for example: while the Jack O' Lantern and the witch mask are props you would most likely associate with a child's Halloween paraphernalia, you would hardly consider a rotting skull with leaking brain matter a fun addition to the decoration. Moreover, while the ghost made out of a cloth can be delightfully spooky, the ghoul bearing skeleton parts would most likely provoke nightmares to most youngsters. Hobin places elements of the macabre somewhat concealed, so that at a first look you find the objects coherent with the context, but after a closer look you understand that there are some misplaced elements that absolutely should not be featured in a child's game even if it is Halloween (note the jar filled with eyeballs). The dichotomy between innocence and horror existed as well within the very walls of Abu Ghraib Prison, Lynndie England herself became pregnant of Charles Graner, her boyfriend at the time. The birth of England and Graner's son, Carter Allan England, rapidly attracted a lot of negative attention from the press. The media covered the 2009 paternity test which confirmed that Graner is in fact the father, They covered as well Graner's complete disregard for his son as he has since then married another soldier involved in the Abu Ghraib scandal, Megan Ambuhl.¹⁷¹ What does this child represent? If the children of U.S. paternalistic culture of hazing and violent TV shows were capable of performing such actions, what will the children of torture be capable of in the future? And what about the children of rape? As several detained Iraqi women were raped and bore the fruits of sexual assault. One of the women confined at Abu Ghraib at the time, managed to smuggle a letter to the outside, and its content revealed just how desperate those women were. According to Nusair, the letter stated that: "[...] US guards had been raping

¹⁷¹ NBC News. Iraq War 10 Years Later: Where are they Now? (Lynndie England - Abu Ghraib). Accessed September 2014). http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/03/19/17373769-iraq-war-10-years-later-where-are-they-now-lyndie-england-abu-ghraib.

women detainees and that several of the women were now pregnant. The letter added that women had been forced to strip naked in front of men, and it urged the Iraqi resistance to bomb the jail to spare the women further shame¹⁷². Some of these women actually committed suicide; those mothers who survived the ordeal and were released will always have their son or daughter to remind them of the awfulness lived inside that prison, that beacon of horror. These infants are the living and breathing aftermath of the events in Abu Ghraib Prison, and while the photographs will never change their story, these children will have the opportunity to actively change the way humanity thinks about the Abu Ghraib scandal.

For Jonathan Hobin, the Abu Ghraib scandal is slowly but surely abandoning its status of an isolated instance and becoming a concept, a symbol of torture, as it was, for many people, the first time they confronted images of non-fictional torture¹⁷³. Hobin defends that torture is no longer an abstract concept in western culture since we now have iconic figures (such as the “Hooded Man”) to serve as visual references. There are, nonetheless, those with different opinions, such is the case of historian Alfred W. McCoy, who argued that society will soon forget about Abu Ghraib all together, as he wrote in *A Question of Torture*: “Ironically, the gravity of the scandal [at the Abu Ghraib prison] has discouraged television coverage, defied close analysis, and may ultimately drive Abu Ghraib from America’s collective memory¹⁷⁴. I disagree with McCoy’s view, for while there might still persist (in some circles) the drive to muffle the already full blown scandal, and there are many people who will downplay or straightforwardly lie about the facts, there are still, fortunately, a great deal of voices ready to remind us and make us reflect about what happened, keeping the memory and the debate of these events alive, either it be in the form of a discourse, an article, a canvas, a performance, or

¹⁷² Isis Nusair. Gendered, racialized, and sexualized torture at Abu Ghraib. In *Feminism and War: Confronting US Imperialism*. (London/New York: Zed Book Ltd, 2008), 189.

¹⁷³ Hobin states: “Human memory is a strange thing. I can remember my first kiss and my last kiss, but none in between. Perhaps the same can be said when we experience trauma, you always remember your first”.

¹⁷⁴ Alfred W. MacCoy. *A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation from the Cold War to the War on Terror*. (New York: Metropolitan Books/ Henry Holt and Co. 2006). 7.

in a multitude of other ways. All of the artworks presented, as well as many other, were the result of how the Abu Ghraib scandal and the “War on Terror” affected artists. Their artworks will forever influence how people remember this conflict.

5. Final Words: Insidious Influences

This thesis was set out to reflect on the way the photographs taken by U.S. soldiers at Abu Ghraib, in the context of the “War on Terror”, have influenced representations of terror, torture and violence in western visual culture by drawing on the film *The Experiment* as a case in point. This particular kind of representation is of major importance when attempting to understand the social and cultural implications of a highly visual war, a conflict partly shaped by the use of digital images and videos. The War in Iraq affected the way many artists thought about the visual (self-)representation of U.S. soldiers in context of warfare, how they carelessly recorded acts of torture and human rights violation. The final section of this thesis will synthesize its two major questions: How have Abu Ghraib images and the “War on Terror” in general and the War in Iraq, in specific, affected visual representations of violence, terror and torture as depicted in the 2010 movie *The Experiment*? How have these photographs affected the representation of violence, terror and torture in other artworks?

In the first chapter, after a brief contextualization of the Abu Ghraib scandal and an overview of the Stanford Prison experiment (which was the main thematic inspiration for *The Experiment*), an analysis of the creation of new identities was provided. This examination was important to identify patterns between the Abu Ghraib photographs, the Stanford Prison experiment and the film under consideration. The most explicit connections between *The Experiment* and the Abu Ghraib photographs were further explored in the second chapter. Common motifs between film and photographs were juxtaposed, such as their discernible patterns of power and control, which manifested themselves through the oppression and dehumanization of the “other” by a group of manipulated individuals who believed to be acting in a righteous and sanctioned way. The film also conveys anxieties regarding constant surveillance, as the digital eye assumes a very important role in the warfare processes and

representation of the “War on Terror”, not only as a tool for documenting events, but also as a weapon that can by itself both terrorize and control individuals. Another theme shared by the film and the Abu Ghraib photographs is a reflection of religious fervor. The Muslim detainees at Abu Ghraib had their religion used against them, while in *The Experiment* religious fanaticism was a characteristic of the “guards”, not the “prisoners”. This interesting shift of perspective shows us that different religions can be used both as a weapon (Muslim religion is used against detainees) and as a motivational tool (Christian religion is used as a source of strength for some “guards” such as Barris).

Other aspects that evoke the ideals of the “War on Terror” in the film are the notions of “retaliation in kind” and the “tortured becoming the torturer”. The approach to these cinematic tropes differ from film to film, depending primarily on the director’s perspective on the matter. In *The Experiment*, director Paul Scheuring did not provide a satisfactory revenge narrative, as movies such as *Kill Bill* (2003/2004) or *Inglorious Basterds* (2009) did. *The Experiment* climaxes with a display of violent aggression from the “prisoners”, but this retaliation offers no satisfaction to the viewer, only the emptiness of impulsive actions.

The importance of humiliating the “other” – which, as some authors suggest, may be considered a symptom of a more generalized culture of humiliation (and self-humiliation) that is growing in the western societies – is also very striking in both the Abu Ghraib images and in the movie’s narrative. The fraternity hazing behavior, addressed several times during the media frenzy surrounding the Abu Ghraib scandal, is also represented in the film, with the inclusion of a scene where the “guards” agree to behave as if the “prisoners” were pledging to a fraternity. This was how the “guards” chose to interpret the notion of commensurate punishment. Lastly, it is worth mentioning the aura of despair left by *The Experiment*, resonating the hopelessness present during the “War on Terror”. Overall, *The Experiment*, provided an interesting example of how the “War on Terror” can be present in depictions of

violence towards the “other” after 9/11. Certain details and aesthetic choices eventually reveal, thus, the film’s context and its cultural influences, in a movie where the “War on Terror” is not explicitly presented as a major topic. Direct examples of these details/choices can be seen in the depiction of the characters: the use of bags placed over the head of a “guard” made “prisoner”; the chaining of semi-naked “prisoners” to cell bars; the image of a group of “guards” urinating on a “prisoner” and an overall animalistic behavior from all the test subjects in many other scenes. The second chapter was also important to establish a parallel between a form of visual culture and the influences left by the Abu Ghraib photographs and the “War on Terror”. Moreover it revealed that, even though the film found inspiration in the Stanford Prison experiment which took place in the 1970s, the themes and style of *The Experiment* were clearly influenced by images deriving from the recent War in Iraq and the ongoing “War on Terror”.

The third chapter of this thesis offered new arguments which further highlighted the influence of the Abu Ghraib photographs and the “War on Terror” on the movie *The Experiment*. It compared the 2010 movie with *Das Experiment* (2001), a pre-9/11 German movie from which the 2010 version *The Experiment* was remade. The analysis of these two movies allowed for a contrast between two cinematic points of view, before and after the Abu Ghraib scandal. Regarding the films’ main themes and motifs it was established that while *Das Experiment* focused on individual struggles, *The Experiment* focused on the clash between opposing groups of people with different access to power. This clash between opposite groups reflects, not only the hierarchical structure of which defines the position of the guards themselves, but also the recurring dichotomy of “Us vs. Them” which, during the “War on Terror” was reinforced by the speeches made by former President George W. Bush about good and evil, encouraging the “guards” to dehumanize the “prisoners” as a group.

The treatment of the topic of surveillance is another relevant example of how the “War on Terror”, as a digitally staged warfare influenced *The Experiment*. In the 2001 version there

was still a naive easiness around cameras, (both “prisoners” and “guards” comfortably accept being filmed and were happy to interact directly with the surveillance devices). The same does not occur in the 2010 version, where the cameras enhance the palpable tension and anxiety felt among the test subjects, which was intensified by their acute isolation from the outside world. In the 2010 film there was also a concern with the person/entity behind the cameras. By the end of the film it was suggested by a news reporter that the experiment might actually been run by the government, operating behind the façade of a corporation. However, these suppositions are not pursued and the movie comes to an end, further reinforcing the feeling of hopelessness mentioned above.

The third chapter presents an analysis on the representation of gender, homosexuality and rape in both films and highlights the differences between them. The major difference between the two films is the fact that *The Experiment* has no relevant female characters (inside the mock prison there is not a single woman, the entire experiment is constituted by two groups of men), while in *Das Experiment* there are two female characters with significant roles. While apparently failing to represent both genders as they exist in the U.S. military forces, the 2010 film reflects, thus, a male-centered and rather homophobic army, which resorts to feminizing detainees as a form of humiliation. This is visible in the Abu Ghraib images that show, for example, detainees with female underwear placed on their heads and prisoners forced to simulate oral sex with each other. Concerning the issue of rape, it was noted that in *Das Experiment* there was an attempt to rape a woman, while in *The Experiment* there was an attempt to rape a man. This difference of gender in terms of the object of sexual assault may emphasize how the 2010 movie also stresses homophobia as a characteristic of the army – a trait which is inescapable in the Abu Ghraib pictures.

The fourth, and last, chapter of the thesis, aimed to open up the analysis to other works, by providing further examples of art/media works which represent violence, torture and terror

after “War on Terror” by alluding directly to the Abu Ghraib images. The movie *Boys of Abu Ghraib* (2014) shows a very different approach to the events that took place in Abu Ghraib from that portrayed in *The Experiment*. While it is also a movie that concerns the mistreatment of detainees by soldiers, it does not focus on the pain of those oppressed, but instead appeals to an understanding of the soldier’s positions who are portrayed as being frustrated by the lack of action in the Army Reserves in Iraq.

Fernando Botero’s series of paintings entitled “Abu Ghraib” (2004/2005), focuses on and explores, through painting, the pain and the physical humiliation of the detainees, and barely focuses on the soldiers, while Martha Rosler’s work “Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful, New Series” (2004) focuses solely on the soldiers, more significantly, on the female soldiers. Rosler offers not only a connection between the behavior of the soldiers in Iraq and the way U.S. citizens dealt with the Vietnam War, but also provides a critique of the male-dominated society, which continues to tie women to certain spheres, such as the “kitchen”. Another pertinent approach to the power struggles inherent to the Abu Ghraib images is conveyed by the performance “Confession” by Regina José Galindo. This performance, also incorporated the component of digital presentation, underlines how visually saturated the “War on Terror” has become.

In the last section of the fourth chapter I analyzed the photograph “A Boo Grave” (2010) by Jonathan Hobin. I attempted to show how soldier’s behavior can be remarkably child-like, and how the Abu Ghraib images could be informed by the relation between children’s games and war games. Hobin’s use of children to portray the Abu Ghraib events brings a fresh perspective to the way those photographs were first examined, as it also invites reflection on what visual outcomes/residues the “War on Terror” will have on future generations.

Although much has already been written on the topic of violence, torture and terror in the context of the “War on Terror”, there is still room for new considerations, since new information continues to emerge about the war (which has been planned and announced as an ongoing war, without end in sight). New enemies take shape in the form of members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (I.S.I.S.) at the same time that the Democratic staff members of the Senate Intelligence Committee have divulged reports examining the interrogation program created by the C.I.A. at the request of President Bush in the aftermath of 9/11. The 6000 page report published in 2014 gathered information about techniques of “enhanced interrogation” (which was revealed to be a euphemism for torture) confirmed previous claims that torture is not particularly effective (more useful information was gathered through regular interrogation than through waterboarding or stress positions, for example). This report continues to instigate debates about torture, primarily between democrats and republicans (who chose not to participate in the report). So, possible new paths for future research could be observed overtime, translating these new developments into visual culture. Will these developments convey a shift in the way artists portray violence and torture? Will the “tortured becomes the torturer” trope analyzed in this thesis die out?

Another interesting route for future research could be to relate the issues raised by the Abu Ghraib photos with ongoing debates about prisons as national, international and transactional institutions¹⁷⁵. Particularly in relation to a country with a high rate of population under correctional supervision (jail, prison, probation or parole) such as the U.S.A., it would be valuable to analyze how western visual culture portrays detention centers. The movie *The Experiment* could, thus, be used as a case study in debates regarding correctional facilities in the U.S., since it comments upon the social and psychological issues which the Stanford Prison

¹⁷⁵ See Angela Davis “Are Prisons Obsolete?” (2003).

experiment has so adamantly exposed. Although this type of analysis would be pertinent, this is not the route I chose to take here.

The inter-medial nature of the analysis conducted in this thesis allowed me to perceive the effects of the “War on Terror” through the “lenses” of different media, of different arts and of artists with different backgrounds. With this thesis, I hope to have provided a study that sheds light on how the Abu Ghraib Prison photographs changed the way directors and artists think about terror, violence and torture since the launching of the “War on Terror”.

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Appendix

Interview with Jonathan Hobin – August 2014

1. During my research of your work I would often come across the word “controversial”. Do you consider yourself a controversial artist?

Ans: This is a hard question to answer because amongst my likeminded peers there is nothing controversial about what I do. They understand me and they understand my motivations and perspective. It is understood that my subject matter is delicate and sensitive however, I don't think anyone expected the passionate responses I have gotten. I have received a primarily positive response to what I do however I have also received some pushback, including hate mail, death threats and a public outcall for my arrest or murder. I don't feel my work is controversial however, based on other people's reaction, I have had to accept that it is.

2. What kind of impact did 9/11, and the consequent War on Terror as a whole had on you and your art?

Ans: It was on 9/11 that the seed was planted in my mind for the *In the Playroom* series so I would say that it has had a significant impact on me. Although my work and my perspective on that series has grown and evolved, the original thought was simple. “These images will be replayed and reflected in our culture forever. If these images are this challenging for me, how is a child with limited context and experience going to understand the horrors that we are witness to in the new 24 hour media reality?” It wasn't long before I realized that this was not necessarily going to be a new phenomenon. One merely needs to analyze the oral tradition of nursery rhymes or recall the war games of years gone by to see that children have always used play and spoken word to reflect on and process the challenging aspects of their cultural experience. If war, death, disease, torture, suicide and conquerors were the source material for the rhymes and fairytales of our youth, are we witnessing the source material for future fairytales being played out in our modern day wars? I think one aspect of my work begs the question “How do we reconcile a world where children's play and adult warfare draw so many parallels.” I think each generation's cultural expression has been impacted by war. My war just happens to be the War on Terror.

3. Why did you choose to feature only children in these series of photographs?

Ans: One of the criticisms my work has received is due to my use of children. I largely attribute this to “projection” as people want to see me as some sort of perpetrator in this scenario. For me the reality is clearly the opposite, I AM the child. I consider my childhood to be somewhat traumatic and as a result, the memories and anxiety of that time have often served as fuel and inspiration for what I do. I've become sensitive to issues concerning childhood experience and it's effect on culture as a result. Expressing emotions from that time is where I draw my strength, not in the reliving of those feeling but in taking ownership of them. Expressing my internal fears outward for the world to see is how I do this. All that being said, the use of children raises another question, “Are we not all still just children fighting over toys in a much larger playroom?”

4. Many people had negative and harsh reactions to “In the Playroom”, why do you think that has happened?

Ans: Because my work often deals with international and political issues, this has made it of interest to many groups and has been far reaching. With the aid of social media I have been able to reach millions of people and with that comes a wide range of perspectives and opinions I had not encountered directly before. I have had to realize that outside of my colleagues and peers, there is a massive amount of people that do not, or refuse to, analyze and deconstruct political messages delivered in a visual medium. Outside of photojournalism, there is one perspective that photographs and art are trivial and therefore they trivialize the seriousness of the subject matter. Some people believe that the use of children simplifies and trivializes the sensitive issues as well. Others simply feel that children should never be portrayed in any scenario other than a happy one. There is this small element of a dark humour in my work as well. People have a tendency to smirk and immediately feel guilty. I feel that the most successful images evoke a range of emotions and some people don't like that. However, in my experience I feel the biggest reason my work has received some negative response is because people don't want to think and don't want life to be complicated. By contrasting the "safety" of the playroom with the disturbing realities of the world, implies a total lack of a barrier from the viewer and the horrors outside. The arguments and the reason for criticism seems to change but ultimately I believe it's easier for people to vilify my rather than face the complexity I am suggesting.

5. The attention to detail in "A Boo Grave" (as well as in the remaining photos in "In the Playroom") is remarkable. What is the role of the Halloween elements included in that photograph?

Ans: Halloween is a hugely important event in North America. Strangely it's a time where we dress up as monsters and murderers without a second thought. I felt it was important to express the cultural reality in which some killers are celebrated and some are demonized. How is a child expected to understand the difference? Is there a difference? In the west we see television dramas depicting child murders as entertainment however we shame women who breast-feed in public. We have created strange and complicated cultural rules for ourselves and I felt this was perfectly embodied in the concept of Halloween.

6. Were the children in "A Boo Grave" at all previously aware of the characters and situations they were portraying? If not, was it explained to them?

Ans: Ultimately it's up to the parents of the children to decide the extent of which the scenarios are explained to them. More often than not it's not needed. By the age of 2 kids will pick up a gun and know what its purpose is, to inflict harm. Our society is so saturated with violence and perhaps it is even ingrained in our DNA that when it comes to kids dressing up and portraying a violent scenario, it's just another day of pretending to kill one another. If I recall correctly (because it has been some time) the extent of what the children were told was "you are dressing up as people that hurt one another" or something of that nature. The kids didn't need anymore than that. I expect that as the children age they may have additional questions for their parents and the parents (who are loving people) are prepared to deal with those questions as they come. I've heard from some of the parents that have suggested that participating in the photographs has opened the door to healthy discussions with their children that they might not have otherwise had. Unbeknownst to some parents, certain subject matter had been on their children's minds but until the photographs were taken, they didn't feel they were allowed to engage in conversations about these darker subjects. For instance, when *The Twins* photograph was taken, the mother of one boy was shocked to discover that her 5 year old was well aware

about 9/11 and could recognize that this is what would be portrayed in the photograph once he saw the 2 towers of building blocks.

7. Where you worried that re-creating such heavy events in front of a camera could possibly create negative experiences for the children?

Ans: Absolutely not. I suspected that this might be a challenge for the parents as it's forcing them to acknowledge this dark reality. Ultimately the parents were just as game as the children. Most of the parents acknowledged that children are exposed to much worse whether it's fictional television or news. Despite a parent's best efforts to shield their child, violence is inescapable. It's important to know that the majority of the context of what the kids are doing is lost to them. They may be aware early in life that people get hurt, sick or murdered however, when it comes to these photographs, they are just dressing up. As previously mentioned, kids dress up as soldiers and serial killers at Halloween so, without forcing these children to accept that these stories have real victims, it's just another day of play for them.

8. Did you get any restrictions from the parents of the children you photographed?

Ans: The parents are always present when I photograph their child. The whole process is totally transparent so there is very little need for restrictions. The parents want to ensure that their child isn't put in physical danger but that goes without saying. Any fear for a child's emotional well-being is quickly negated as soon as we begin because the parent sees their child behaving as they normally would and that they are really enjoying themselves. One photograph from *In the Playroom* dealt with sexual abuse, where the mother and I took particular care to be very brief. I took the photograph I needed and we moved on. Trust is very important and I take the time in advance for parents to understand my motivation and perspective before we agree to work together.

9. Was it important for you to address the topic of parental supervision (or lack thereof) in your work?

Ans: My work is not meant to suggest that we need more adult supervision rather, I do suggest that exposure to the darker aspects of life is unavoidable. We tend to romanticize the "innocence of childhood" and want to believe that our children are sheltered. The reality of it is that ignorance does not equate to protection. Is the answer more dialogue with our children? I don't know. The reality I am portraying is not simplistic and I do not claim to have all the answers. I don't feel that my job as an artist is to solve problems but rather reflect aspects of our culture back to us for analysis. It's ALL of our responsibility as a society to try to solve our problems.

10. In your opinion, in what way does your understanding of the Abu Ghraib pictures, as a Canadian artist, differ from that of U.S. artists?

Ans: Canada is the closest culture to the US however; there are some fundamental differences between us as we have maintained some of our European connection as well as the fact that we rely heavily on immigration to support our population growth. New immigrants are encouraged to maintain their culture while simultaneously embracing Canadian culture. Canadians generally have a more global perspective on the world and because of that we can remain a little more objective than the US. I can't speak for every Canadian artist but for me, I think I see the scandal in terms of the larger themes of abuse of power and accountability within the

global society. I get the sense that within the US, the discussion remains halted on the idea of “did we do it and were we justified?” Although this is not always true, I get the sense that a Canadian artist might think “How could humanity do that to itself?” whereas an American artist might ask the question “How could WE do that to THEM?” I think there is a definite difference.

11. In a recent interview with *thestar.com*, as it reads: “Asked whether he would depict the recent Boston Marathon bombings, Hobin said such events need time to play out in the culture before he can consider reflecting the stories visually.” Do you feel that, even with the distance of a full decade, the horrors of Abu Ghraib have already left our collective mindset? Are they no longer major concerns in the West?

Ans: I don't think the Abu Ghraib scandal has left our collective mindset because; I believe it is transitioning to represent torture as a concept rather than a specific instance. The main reason is because of the abuse photographs. For many people, this was the FIRST time they had visual confirmation that torture was being committed. Torture is not simply an abstract concept for contemporary western culture anymore but rather; we now have a iconic contemporary image of a black hooded figure burned in our minds that represents this idea. With respect to the Boston marathon bombing, I don't think it will have much cultural impact for most people, we have moved on. This is largely due to the fact that it already falls under the umbrella of “war on freedom” which as a concept is better represented by the events of 9/11. Human memory is a strange thing. I can remember my first kiss and my last kiss but none in between. Perhaps the same can be said when we experience trauma, you always remember your first.