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**Guilty Pleasures: Torture Porn and the George
W. Bush Administration**

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation considers that the lighting and color methods used in torture porn movies are used as a source of horror and enhance a critical vision of an “omnipotent” government working in the shadows that trivialized and tried to hide the tortures in the post 9/11 reality. The first decade of the 21st century in the USA was marked by the infamous terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the “war on terror” led by George W. Bush, events that shifted the world into an unheard perspective never seen before. The social anxieties and fears resulting due to post-9/11 trauma are visually represented in a cycle of vivid non-mainstream horror movies commonly labeled as torture porn, a term firstly introduced by the chief film critic for the *New York Magazine*, David Edelstein. Paramount instances of this movement in which captivity and depiction of torture are the central aspects are *Saw* (James Wan, 2004) and *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005). Lighting and color are essential to the aesthetics of these movies and have a specific communication purpose, the way we perceive and react to the scenes has a lot to do with the culture and the context in which they are presented. Through the control and manipulation of features such as color grading the emotions of the viewers can change from one scene to another and help the filmmakers to set the mood for their works. The manipulation of light and color in a scene can relate with the anxieties and fears of the viewers in a specific period. This dissertation will be divided in three different parts, in the introduction I will explain the two main measures taken by the Bush Administration that heavily influence in the philosophy of torture porn movies; these are the patriot act and the torture memos. Following the introduction, I will define the term torture porn and I will differentiate it from other horror genres. Finally, in the

core section of the paper I will analyze lighting and color patterns used in *Saw* and *Hostel* that help to enhance a critical vision of the Bush Administration.

RESUMEN

Esta tesis considera que las técnicas de iluminación y color usadas en las películas pertenecientes al subgénero de terror denominado “torture porn”, se usan para realzar una visión crítica de un gobierno “omnipotente” que trabajó en las sombras y que banalizó y trató de ocultar las torturas cometidas en el periodo posterior al 11-S. La primera década del siglo veintiuno en los Estados Unidos estuvo marcada por los infames atentados en el World Trade Center y la Guerra contra el terror llevada a cabo por George W. Bush, eventos que cambiaron el mundo como lo conocíamos hasta entonces. Los miedos y ansiedades que afloraron en la sociedad están representados en un ciclo de películas de terror no convencionales, denominado torture porn. El término fue introducido por el jefe de la sección de críticas de la revista *New York Magazine*, David Edelstein. Ejemplos primordiales de este movimiento, que tienen como temas primordiales el cautiverio y la tortura, son *Saw* (James Wan, 2004) y *Hostel* (Eli Roth, 2005). La luz y el color son esenciales para la estética de estas películas y tienen un propósito comunicativo específico. La manera en la que percibimos y reaccionamos a las escenas de las películas tiene mucho que ver con el contexto histórico y sociocultural cuando estas se representan. Mediante el control y manipulación de características como la escala de colores, las emociones del espectador pueden cambiar de una escena a otra y ayudar al director a crear un ambiente determinado a su obra. La manipulación de luz y color puede relacionarse con las ansiedades y miedos de los espectadores de ese periodo. Esta tesis estará dividida en tres partes diferentes, en la introducción explicaré

las dos medidas tomadas por la Administración Bush que influyeron considerablemente en la filosofía del “torture porn”, estas medidas son la Ley Patriota y los memorandos sobre la tortura. Después definiré el término “torture porn” diferenciándolo de otros géneros de terror. Finalmente, en la sección central del trabajo, analizaré la luz y el color usadas en dos escenas de *Saw* y *Hostel* que ayuda a realzar la visión crítica de la Administración Bush.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction – Patriot act and Torture memos	5
2. Torture Porn	10
3. The Aestheticization of Horror: Lighting and Color in Torture Porn	13
3.1 Saw	14
3.2 Hostel	17
4. Conclusion	23
5. Works Cited	28

1 INTRODUCTION: PATRIOT ACT AND TORTURE MEMOS

After the 9/11 terrorist attack on the Twin Towers, the Bush Administration managed to take advantage of the situation of fear to trample on civil liberties by passing draconian measures to improve surveillance methods and gave military forces a legal frame to obtain information at any cost. By means of exposing the diverse methods, often tortures, from which information to fight terrorism was extracted, people all across the world were stunned and shocked. It was then, only after images of prisoners being tortured by US soldiers leaked, that a national debate regarding morality and human rights sparked. Media, already under the control of the Bush Administration, tried and somehow managed to fool and justify such atrocities, as something done to prevent future attacks in pursuit of national safeguard. The message struck deep in a great part of the population, who dreaded the possibility of potential brand new serial killers and their weapons of mass destruction.

George W. Bush became the 43rd President of the United States in January 2001 and from the very beginning he was surrounded by a clique of people led by vice-president Dick Cheney, a man who possessed considerably greater powers than any other previous American vice-president. As Frank Rick notes, another figure of central importance was Karl Rove, a political consultant who was widely recognized as being the principal political strategist for President George W. Bush (16). Whether you were a US citizen or not, that morning of 11th September, changed the world as we knew it forever. When American Airlines flight 11 crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Center, panic, anguish and bafflement took hold of the population only to give way to a deep desire to find those who had committed such monstrous acts. The press

worked round the clock to show us pictures of that tragedy, people jumping from windows, an image epitomized by “the falling man”, a photograph took by Richard Drew that lingers in our consciousness to this day. Indeed, it was a national trauma that scarred the US psyche. A traumatized society needed a leader, someone who would guide them through the darkness. After all, the heart of what stood for American economic power had been shattered. For many people, Bush, the man who captained a rudderless vessel, suddenly found his political voice. With a microphone in his hand he promised all that he would rescue all those rescue workers who had been trapped inside the rubble and that soon those who had committed these acts would hear from America (Frank Rich 26). As the cultural critical Douglas Kellner has pointed out in his book *Cinema Wars*, shortly after the 9/11 attacks the political adviser and the President’s brain Karl Rove, met with Hollywood producers and told them to make patriotic films (1). Movies are social barometers of the reality of a period, however in this era less mainstream movies were more socially revealing and presented some issues which were not acceptable in mainstream movies, as the extreme violence or torture that characterized this period. As well as cinema, the Government tried to control the media. Television channels broadcast press conferences with soldiers who had minor injuries and with the families of prisoners of war (POWs). Not a drop of American blood appeared on US screens. Quite simply, US viewers were fed an antiseptic war. Indeed, if the US population had seen the ghastly reality on its television screens, there would have been, in the words of the Senator Robert C. Byrd “more shock and less awe” (143). As it was, the harsh reality of the war was muffled in American homes as families went on with their flag waving, patriotic singing and naively swallowing the

hawkish views put forward all day long on television chat shows. The spectacle created an image that the world could be destroyed by the US without risking United States troops on the ground. But, at the end of the day war leads to death and bloodshed. Thousands of people are killed including women and children while many others return home not only with physical scars but also with post-traumatic stress disorder. These were the psychological scars of war. However, very little was said about the hard nature of the conflict. In this post-9/11 period the Bush Administration tried to control the information and the visual content that appeared on the screen and some images were not allowed in mainstream movies. However a cycle of extreme horror movies articulated a critical vision of this period and fed the audience extreme violent images. As noted above, the Government managed to take advantage of the situation of fear to trample on civil liberties by passing draconian measures such as the Patriot Act and the torture memos that articulated the reality of this era. These measures allowed federal agents spying on the citizens, hold them detained, and the military forces were given free access to obtain information through the use of torture. This hidden reality of torture and surveillance is reflected in torture porn movies. This sub-genre of horror movies, initiated with *Saw* in 2004, center on abducted characters that are tortured and constantly monitored and controlled by their captors. The Patriot Act or the USA Patriot Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act) lent greater authority to federal agents to tap private telephone conversations and indeed investigate any type of activity carried out by citizens without these agents needing to apply for a judicial order to do so. They became omnipotent figures that could hear you and know where you were at any time.

Many constitutional rights were limited, as thanks to the Patriot Act it was much simpler for the Government to spy on its own citizens. Moreover, the Patriot Act enabled non-citizens to be detained without probable cause, public disclosure or judicial review (Byrd 51). Quite simply, the Act enabled the state to hold suspects indefinitely to get information, without a judicial review as they were viewed as enemy combatants. In torture porn movies characters are kidnapped and held captive, to be later tortured physically and psychologically for pleasure as in *Hostel* and to give them a “moral lesson” as in *Saw*. The feeling of being free in your own home was quickly eroded. In *Saw* the viewer has the same feeling at Dr. Gordon’s house where his daughter feels the presence of someone in her closet. The defense of individual human rights went up in smoke when the Patriot Act was passed. The reaction of the Government in the face of terrorist attacks was quite simply to curtail individual rights and the right to privacy.

George W. Bush was reelected in November 2004, however, no sooner had the champagne been uncorked that his demented behavior over the previous four years came to light. A huge can of worms had been opened and just as in the case of Pandora’s Box all those secrets so carefully guarded, spread like wildfire to allies and enemies alike. Pictures of prisoners of war, or as the Bush Administration renamed them “enemy combatants”, were leaked to the press. These pictures showed prisoners being tortured and humiliated in the Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq. While many US citizens condoned the use of torture in Iraq, others were horrified at the sight of the obvious pleasure on the faces of the torturers. Behind the spectacle of war there was a hidden reality supported by the Bush Administration (Byrd 234). These cases of torture were banned under International Law. Given this, the US Government needed a legal

framework that permitted the use of “improved” interrogatory techniques. In simple terms, they redefined the concept of torture to prevent leading US officials from being charged with war crimes. The torture memo was issued by the Department of Justice and approved in August 2002, it was clear from the various pictures leaked to the press that the main aim was not only to torture the prisoners of war physically but also to subject them to psychological suffering. No sooner had the pictures of the Abu Ghraib torture seen the light of day than there was immediate reaction. This reaction was twofold. On the one hand there were many in the Arab world who were horrified at the sight of these indecent photographs which showed no respect for the human beings. On the other hand, there were many Americans who lauded the actions of their military, feeling that if torture works, information would be more easily forthcoming, which would save US lives. What is clear is that these photographs not surprisingly led to an anti-American backlash in the international arena.

Captivity is central in torture porn movies, and it is undeniable that the depiction of torture in this post-9/11 arena was what made *Saw* or *Hostel* a global success. The media sold an antiseptic war and torture porn movies fed the hunger for human interest and gave the audience the representation of suffering bodies being tortured, and the audience found in these brutal images a certain pleasure. Images of prisoners of war being tortured spread into the world in 2004, these tortures were not possible without the legal framework orchestrated in the shadows by the Bush Administration. Torture porn movies, help construct a critical vision of an “omnipotent” government working in the shadows that trivialized and tried to hide torture. I will argue that it is in particular the lighting and color patterns found in *Saw* and *Hostel* that prompt this reaction

2 TORTURE PORN

As noted above, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks Karl Rove approached Hollywood producers in order to ensure that any movie made would have a heavily pro-American slant. He wanted producers to make patriotic movies which would be appreciated by cinemagoers. Thus, as Douglas Kellner observes, with mainstream cinema geared to the demands of the White House, less mainstream movies, apart from presenting certain ideological problematics are socially revealing, also show images of certain topics which are not allowed in commercial cinemas, such as extreme violence, deviant sexuality or torture (4). Given the influence of the Government on all aspects of life, including culture, marginal films were undoubtedly more representative of the fears, fantasies and hopes of this era. The national trauma experienced after the attack on the Twin Towers, in addition to the demented illusions, frightful violence, not to mention the apparent paranoia of the Bush-Cheney Administration, are epitomized in a cycle of movies that dominated the box office in this post 9/11 era. The term torture porn was coined by the chief film critic David Edelstein in a review for the prestigious *New York Magazine*. The leaked images of prisoners being tortured by soldiers in Abu Ghraib increased the appetite for torture in America and in the article written by Edelstein in 2006 he asks himself why America seemed no nuts those days about torture.

Horror appeared in the beginning of cinema itself when the pioneer filmmaker George Méliès released *Le Manoir du Diable* in 1896 a three-minute short silent film which is a depiction of the supernatural, an encounter with the Devil. On the other hand, the origin of splatter movies, which is a subgenre of horror movies has its origin in 1800s French *Gran Guignol* theater (Piatti 214) a genre that had the depiction of torture

as their main theme. Torture has appeared both in literature – *The Pit and the Pendulum* by Edgar Allan Poe is a striking example – and in cinema – as in *Poster Art for Blood Feast* (Herschell Gordon, 1964). However, while horror movies are almost as old as cinema itself, it is important to highlight the fact that torture porn, unlike other splatter movies that had been made before, refers to a specific cycle of extremely violent horror movies made during the Bush Presidency. While in classic horror movies we expected the monster to emerge from the shadows, an element that helped to organize the narrative structure, we now appreciate villains that instead of plunging out of darkness, seek to remain hidden from the audience’s sight. In *Hostel* we do not have a villain *per se*, what we have is a secret organization that is already undercover and tries to remain incognito from common people. This group of occult, wicked and rich individuals that find delight in torture is easily relatable to the different organizations the US Government employed at off-the-record prisons and that eluded public knowledge. Thus, obscure villains that choose to disguise and deceive his victims in order to imprison them, become the go-to type of nemesis for torture porn movies and it becomes one of the main features that differentiate them from mainstream horror movies.

The term torture porn often leads to confusion as it stresses the word “porn”, which tends to be associated with sex. However, the label refers to obtaining a certain type of pleasure with the images shown on the screen. In the case of *Saw* and *Hostel* (although *Hostel* has certain scenes of a sexual nature e. g. when Paxton and Josh go into a brothel in Amsterdam) the pleasure that the viewer gets is from the spectacle of torture and extreme violence portrayed onscreen. These movies showed images that neither television nor mainstream movies dared to show. News concerning American

troops torturing prisoners in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo coincided with the release of these movies that had torture as their subject. *Saw* was made on a shoestring budget by Lions Gate and directed by James Wan. This marked the launch of what we consider nowadays torture porn movies. The following year Eli Roth was to follow in the steps of a young James Wan by making an even more explicit movie that truly portrayed the cruelty of this era and the horror in the black-sites. The context and the sociopolitical framework both led to the success of this genre, which portrayed sanguinary images and torture scenes which somehow gave the viewers certain pleasure while reclining in their cinema seats. It is important to distinguish torture porn from earlier horror cinema. Dean Lockwood has made the distinction by stressing that the difference lies “in explicitness and in a wider, more mainstream appetite for graphic and increasingly realistic spectacles of suffering bodies”(38). In this regard, movies belonging to this cycle respond to those fears and fantasies of the United States of the early 21st century. Torture porn movies gave many cinema-goers the opportunity to scream in a safe place.

Other movies that belong to this cycle are *Captivity* (Roland Joffé, 2007) and *The Collector* (Marcus Dunstan, 2009), which was intended to be a prequel of *Saw*. Moreover, when the cycle of torture porn was coming to its end, Michael Haneke directed a shot-for-shot of his 1997 Austrian psychological thriller *Funny Games*. This movie, with American characters, also comments on the violence of the era. There is complicity with the torturers that, at some points, break the fourth wall and let the viewer be part of the torture and enjoy it with them. The way we see Haneke’s remake is different from the original, since the context changed and the brutality of the era heavily influenced the way we interpret the images portrayed on the screen.

3 THE AESTHETICIZATION OF HORROR: LIGHTING AND COLOR IN TORTURE PORN

Lighting and color have always been essential to the aesthetics of a movie and have a specific communicative purpose, the way we perceive and react to a set of colors has a lot to do with our culture and the context in which the colors are presented (Fu 30). Through the control and manipulation of such features as color grading, the perspective and the emotions of the viewers can change from one scene to another and help the filmmakers set the mood of their works. By manipulating lighting, a movie can also establish an aesthetic context that taps on the anxieties and fears of the viewers. The lighting and color patterns guide us through the narrative and prompt a series of feelings in us. For example, in classic horror movies like *Nosferatu, a Symphony of Horror* (Fiedrich Wilhelm Murnau, 1922) (Figure 1) or *The Wolf Man* (George Wagner, 1941), filmmakers used cast shadows to reinforce the evilness of the character and make scenes more dramatic. The absence of light is also relevant since it takes us to our primal fears; the fear to the unknown and the revelation of what is hiding in the darkness is a major component of horror. A key feature in torture porn movies is the use of sudden changes from total darkness to extreme light, which is very annoying both for the characters and the viewers.

Last, but not least, color is another fundamental element in cinema. Many horror movies use specific palettes and combinations of color to convey horror. One of the best examples of color manipulation is the 1977 horror cult classic *Suspiria* (Luciano Tovoli), which has since become a source of inspiration and influence for future generations. *Suspiria* displays a wide spectrum of flamboyant and saturated colors that

immediately detach the audience from the mundane world, and transport them into a discordant reality (see figure 2). In the words of its director, “You say to yourself, this will never happen to me because I have never seen such intense colors in my life. This makes you feel reassured and, at the same time, strangely attracted to proceed deeper and deeper”. Other horror masterpieces that build on color modification include John Carpenter’s *The Thing* (1982), Wes Craven’s *A Nightmare on Elm’s Street* (1984) or Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining* (1980) (figures 3, 4, and 5). Filmmakers tend to use combinations of color and light to influence audiences’ feelings and their perception of the scenes. The combination of so-called Rembrandt lighting that only reveals the upper body of Jigsaw at the end of the movie *Saw* combined with a green filter help to set the tone of the scene, convey the evilness of Jigsaw and the desperation of Adam. Nevertheless, the main difference between a classic movie like *Suspiria* and contemporary torture porn movies is that *Suspiria* is solely based on a fictional story, whereas *Hostel* and *Saw* has a background story. These movies reflected and gave cinematic expression to the fears and anxieties generated by the gruesome reality of the 9/11 aftermath. Lighting and color methods used in *Saw* and *Hostel* help enhance a critical vision of an “omnipotent” and “lunatic” government working in the shadows that trivialized and tried to hid the tortures.

3.1 SAW

The depiction of torture in *Saw* was the first example of this cycle of extreme violent movies that have torture and captivity as their main themes. In post-9/11 America, *Saw* caused a total shock within the US population and became a national blockbuster. The

color modification and the use of complementary colors condition heavily the spectators' feelings and their interpretation of the scenes and have a specific communicative purpose. The uses of specific colors and lighting methods can be said to denounce the demented illusions of a Government working in the shadows that had no respect for human beings, even though they tried to sell that they were doing it for moral purposes and to protect population from further attacks.

The opening scene of *Saw* helps set the tone of the movie and presents the claustrophobic mise-en-scène. *Saw* starts in a chamber in which Dr. Gordon (Cary Elwes) and Adam (Leight Wannell) are confined and chained. The dark light of the scene contrasts with the electric blue light of a key that sinks in the water illuminating Adam's face. That light is the key to set him free, so from the very beginning he is condemned. The hue used in this bathroom is blue, which has a horrific effect. From the very beginning, in *Saw*, we see Dr. Gordon and Adam chained in that unknown location, that loneliness and lack of information is key to begin a journey into the abnormal ambiance of this movie. The tone of the film is reinforced from the start with color modifications that affect the feelings of the spectator. The first scene is entirely modified to look blue with shades of purple, which conveys a distressing and unnerving mood for the story (figure 6). The dark light makes us feel that something terrible is happening and that someone is trying to keep it in secret. Dr. Gordon turns on the fluorescent lights blinding them both, and the audience too, who have been in complete darkness for more than two minutes (Figure 7). The audience can relate with the characters since they have also been blinded. This is pivotal to the movie, from this moment we are also part of the game. This sudden change at the beginning of the movie has a major significance, since the characters move from a hidden reality to the

consciousness of the real situation. By means of startling us with such lighting shocks, torture porn movies make us participants of the abuses in the so-called black sites in unknown locations and open the audience's eyes to the harsh and gruesome hidden reality of this post-9/11 period. Through this technique, *Saw* offers a critical vision of the reality that the Bush Administration was trying to hide in Iraq that came to light in 2004. Then the suffocating mise-en-scène is presented: an industrial bathroom, bathed in blue, with two characters chained on each side of the room and a death corpse in the middle covered in blood (Jigsaw playing possum).

The color palette of the movie is important. In order to emphasize such sense of distorted reality, Dr. Gordon, by narrating his suspicions, takes us back in time through a flashback that dissolves into green (see figure 8). The narration ends up taking the audience into a room where the corpse of a dead man resides. Flashbacks of intense green that suddenly stop showing us the agony the victim went through until he died (see figure 9). This green filter connotes the idea of gore and it gives a touch of a dystopian reality that is too eccentric and terrible to exist. Nevertheless, it did exist, as we could see in some of the interrogations that took place in Abu Ghraib. Again, another green scene where a man stands naked reminds us of other leaked pictures of Abu Ghraib, where, as I have already mention, prisoners were physically and psychologically tortured (Figure 10). Such intense green is not a lighting or a color often found in everyday life, therefore, it is James Wan's artistic choice made to intensify the feeling of anxiety the victim went through in a dirty place that contrasts with the complementary red color on the wall that can be related to the red color of the victim's blood. The co red-green combination is constant throughout the whole movie. Such

tortures, again, can be traced back to the ones inflicted in Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib or in the “black sites”, and are rarely portrayed in cinema outside the torture porn niche.

James Wan uses three main colors along the movie to set the tone in different scenes and influence on the audience feelings. The blue tone is used mainly in the bathroom where most of the narrative of the movie is developed, the green color is used in the torture process, and the red color, that appears on the clothes of Jigsaw, the blood of the victims, but also when Adam is developing the film roll in his flat, a scene that is heavily saturated with a red color, which creates a horrific atmosphere. The combination of this three primary colors create the black color, the darkness can be related to the reality that the Bush Administration was trying to hide.

3.2 *HOSTEL*

David Edelstein used this movie to explain the term torture porn in his article for the *New York Magazine*. This film caused a great impact on part of the population. In the film the terror is caused not by spirits or monsters but by real people, business men that pay big money to torture people. We understand the success of this film in a context marked by the War on Terror and the Patriot Act, but, above all, we understand its success in a period when there was a national debate about torture.

Hostel was released in 2005 and it is set in a world of latent serial killers, a small village in Eastern Europe where an underground torture society torture and murder people. The movie tells the story of a group of American college students traveling across Europe. A careless group of victims indifferent to other countries and cultures.

Then in Amsterdam they are seduced by the idea of finding beautiful women in Eastern Europe to have sex with. Finally, they decide to travel to a small village in Slovakia. While *Saw* has a pseudo-philosophical villain in *Hostel* the tortures are for pleasure and entertainment. The narrative of this movie is very linear, the events happen in chronological order, so the plot is much easier to follow than that of *Saw*. However, what took people to watch this movie was not the plot but the explicit representation of torture. *Hostel* presents a not-so-dystopian society in which powerful people have such power that they can entertain themselves by torturing other people. In an interview, Eli Roth commented that these violent films were more horrific than scary, real people doing real things, a common fear in the wake of 9/11. However the audience knows that this is a representation of torture, not real torture, and that is what allow them to enjoy the movie. What really scare them were the marines dying in Iraq and, as Eli Roth says, a group of chimpanzees running a country that looks like an asylum. He also points out that George Bush and Dick Cheney killed people for real. It is a reaction to the world context what desensitized people. The use of lighting methods when Paxton gets abducted helps enhance a critical vision of a government working in the shadows that tried to hide the tortures in the so-called black sites.

The scene I wish to explore starts when Natalya takes Paxton to the factory where Josh has been tortured. The low-key lighting sets the tone of the whole movie and it is perfectly combined with the color palette and the mise-en-scène. These three elements help enhance the torture process at the end of this scene. A side light is used on Natalya and the practical lighting at the back provides drama and helps set the mood; there is a dark side and a hidden reality that Paxton is about to discover. Paxton is grabbed by two military-looking men and Natalya goes into the shadows. The scene

makes you feel that you are inside of that narrow corridor with constant flashes of light bulbs which are part of the decor. As the scene advances the viewers through the hallway they feel the horror and anguish of Paxton, who is watching people being tortured. The use of top lighting on the military-looking men distorts their faces (Figure 11); it looks unnatural because this never happens in the real world. This technique makes the scene more dramatic. The viewer can only see their silhouettes, and this element is a commentary on the Government that tried to hide tortures committed by others. The escape is impossible and the viewer inevitably goes along with Paxton to the torture room. The combination of light bulbs and dark lighting lights the corridor and creates the image of a hidden place as if it were not on the maps, like the black sites used by the CIA around the world for unacknowledged black operations. The film corridor is dark and grim and poorly lit, that low lighting is a key element of the horror genre. Such absence of light aims to convey and represent some of the darkest of human feelings, such as pain or fear for instance. Classical horror movies such as *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960) or *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973) happen mostly in settings with little to no lighting, and following the lines of this genre, this scene also portrays a very dark setting. However, there are crucial rooms to the sides of the corridor that are prominently lit for a very different purpose. Along the way to the chamber where Paxton is about to be tortured, it is appreciated that there are other people being tortured as well. Nevertheless, each person's suffering comes from a very different approach than the previous one. These methods include for example: electrocution, castration, blade lacerations or the beating of prisoners. However, showing these different torture iterations, not only connects fiction with reality, but also foreshadows the characters imminent fate, advancing the plot, and serving the purpose

of enhancing his fear and anxiety, and consequently the one of the audience as well. By means of fiction, the hard reality of the torture prisons is here shown and horror is no longer hinted at, but explicitly shown. As stated above, the Bush Administration worked to hide the horrors of the war and tortures and this movie helps us become aware of it. We as spectators share the same destiny as Paxton and we share his fear and angst, but we also see him from the perspective of the torturer, which makes the audience want to see Paxton's fatal destiny. How this is achieved by means of immersing the audience and giving them the chance to experience themselves the way that process runs through. This immersion is achieved by different means and each of them has a specific purpose to add to the scene and make us feel sorry, yet intrigued, for the prisoners' situation.

The color palette used in this scene contrasts with the colors used when Paxton is in Amsterdam. In the first part of the movie, when the characters are in Amsterdam, the bright and heavily saturated colors set the mood of the movie, the neon lights are related with enjoyment and also with sex. The analogous colors used when they are in the flat of Alexi make things more relaxed. However, in the torture scene, the colors used are totally different, dim colors with low brightness that set the dark tone of the scene. The only color that contrasts with others is the red color that appears not only on the clothes but also in the blood of Paxton when the torturer cuts off his fingers and the blood of the torturer when he accidentally cuts himself. However, this red color is not bright or saturated and it looks dark; the use of dark colors and low brightness help enhance a critical vision of the tortures that took place during the war on terror and that were concealed. It is not the first time we see this scene, when images of Iraqi men being tortured in Abu Ghraib prison spread across the world we saw prisoners in narrow corridors being treated even worse than Paxton. Everybody saw these infamous images,

even Eli Roth and cinematographer Milan Chadima who portrayed these “black sites” onscreen (figure 12). Paxton is tied up in a room and then his captors turn off the lights. The main objective in this scene is the depiction of torture in an accurate way and to make us feel part of the scene. We see the scene from two perspectives, from the point of view of the victim and from the point of view of the torturer. Eli Roth put these images on the screen and even though they are a representation of torture, it is difficult to differentiate them from the hidden reality of this period – however, tortures in Iraq or the kidnapping and beheading of Daniel Pearl are more horrific than *Hostel* since that happened for real. From now on the audience is totally on board and wants to know what happens next. Paradoxically, for forty seconds, which is a very extended period of time for a film, nothing happens. In words of Isaac Asimov, “fear to the unknown is the greatest of human fears”. The prisoner desperately sits in total darkness crying out loud for help and suffering from a different kind of torture, a psychological torture. We move from a heavily saturated visual narrative, to a total empty one. That nothingness, that calmness, that simple, yet effective blackness in consonance with the characters pleas, is the source of horror. This scene enhances a critical vision of an “omnipotent” government working in the shadows that trivialized and tried to hide the torture. As we now know, American soldiers covered the heads of some prisoners as part of their torture. However, the audience does know what is going to happen: torture. Nevertheless, what they ignore, which is the way that torture is going to occur and the identity of the perpetrator, is what provides the horror now. Finally, the crucial moment arrives when the torturer appears and light returns. That abrupt light change is part of the torture itself and it can be linked with the moment when that post-9/11 hidden reality spread to the world.

The mise-en-scène is particularly important. The torturer's aspect is one of a mentally unstable person, the set design recreates a torture chamber that amplifies the character's emotion, the dark light combined with the light of the lamp creates the feeling that this torture will never be discovered (Figure 13). Paxton is forced to speak, the fact that he is American is what interests the torturer and make the American viewers feel as potential victims too. At last, torture begins. At this moment, it is evident that what moves the torturer is not a military purpose but a sexual one. It is obvious that the torturer is getting sexually aroused by the very thought of being able to torture a person. His sexual enjoyment comes from a torturing fetishism that stimulates him. Same as in a sexual encounter, there is foreplay in his way of torturing. He does not directly start torturing him, but torments the character uplifting his sexual appetite. He threatens him with the scissors scaring him and even goes as far as cutting some hair and keeping it as a memento. His attitude towards torture has some sadistic implications and sexual excitement, as the viewers may also get some kind of pleasure watching the representation of extreme violence onscreen. Cutting some hair is part of the torture, in the same way taking pictures with Iraqi prisoners was also an integral part of the torture to be remembered later. Like the real soldiers in Abu Graib, the torturer enjoys torture and comes to show what the government and the press failed to show or did not want to show. That some people, and especially those soldiers working in the prisons where tortures took place, enjoyed torturing the so-called "enemy combatants" and taking images of them. As Marquis of Sade said: "with an audience torture becomes an art". Even further, soldiers do it not only with the connivance of the government, but instructed by it.

To sum up, the scene's purpose is to immerse the audience in the torture process and to feed their hunger for human interest in a period when tortures were supported by the elites. The combination of dark light and the light bulbs in the corridors helps to set the tone and make us feel that nothing of what happens inside the factory will see the light. Yet again, reality manages to overtake and surpass fiction, as there is no doubt it is horrible to think that someone can enjoy torture, but it even is more horrible ~~is~~ to know soldiers were commanded to do so and willingly did it.

4 CONCLUSION

Social anxieties and fears due to post-9/11 trauma are visually represented in torture porn movies. This sub-genre of horror movies refers to a specific cycle of extreme violent movies that fed the hunger for human interest that increased within the American population in the first decade of the 21st century. The obscure settings of these movies combined with the color patterns helped articulate the critique against the Government of George W. Bush that trivialized and tried to hide the tortures committed by American soldiers during the invasion of Iraq. These movies also recreated the atmosphere of the period and their success derives mainly from the viewer's identification with on-screen themes, that perfectly aligns with their anxieties and fears that run rampant at the time and their appetite for torture. The villain was no longer a monster, but a human being with a depraved mind. The period that begun with the 9/11 terrorist attacks shifted people's fear from the unknown and turned directed it to humans with wicked intentions.

Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3, 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12

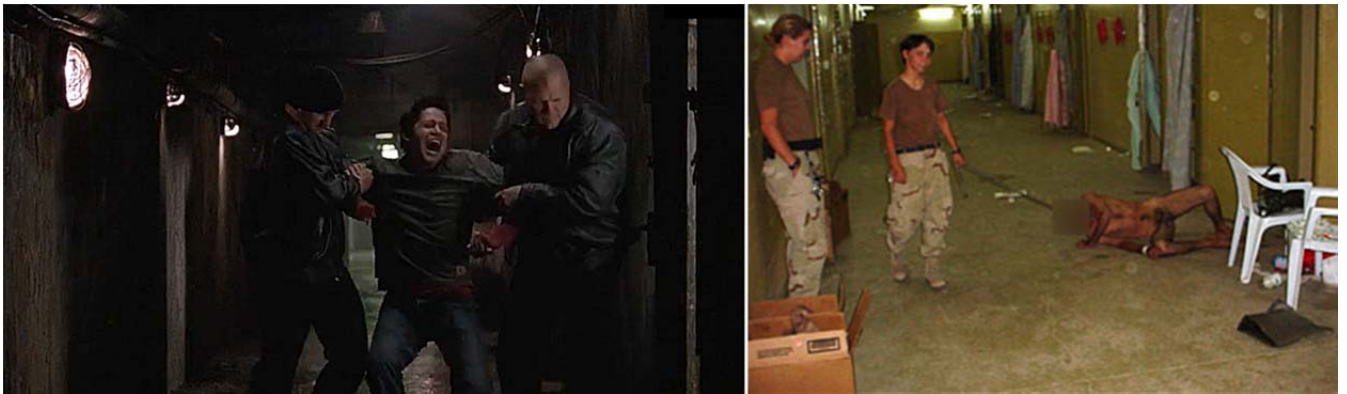


Figure 13



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