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## Monsters Under the Bed: An Analysis of Torture Scenes in Three Pixar Films

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Monsters Under the Bed: An Analysis of Torture Scenes in Three Pixar Films

by

Heidi Tilney Kramer

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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## ABSTRACT

With background information on militarism, nationalism, and torture, this study analyzes *Monsters, Inc.*, *Toy Story 3*, and *The Incredibles*, three Pixar films released from 2001 through 2010, for the ways in which the torture scenes are framed. These frames, state control, prisons, and 60s spy thrillers, invite laughter through intertextuality, while deflecting attention from torture of central characters in the films. The implications of this analysis are: these films present torture as deserved and normative; the tortured characters stand outside the frames of recognition for humanness; and they redefine children as threats and dangers. This study concludes that these ideologies are just as potent as the themes of nationalism, militarism, and a violated sacrosanct homeland.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### Monsters Under the Bed in Post 9/11 America

*Monsters, Inc.*, a Pixar film released in 2001, is a film unlike any other I have seen. I became aware of its power while sitting in a darkened movie theatre with many other children and parents. Growing up with simplistic animation like “The Flintstones” made me cognizant of the technical expertise needed to make Sulley’s wisps of blue hair individually whirl as he moved. I was fascinated and made a mental note to study what it took – staff artists, computers, graphic capture, etc. – to produce such magnificent effects. Pixar, an off-shoot of Disney, would change animation forever. But then it happened. Boo, a toddler, was strapped into the torture chair, and her expression of torment and desperation drew me into this topic – images of torture in children’s animated films.

While “monsters under the bed” is a commonplace of childhood that frames the film *Monsters, Inc.*, I join a number of cultural scholars who are concerned that post 9/11 discourses of the “war on terror” in the U.S. have become a similar commonplace for Americans: that dangers lurk everywhere, that we must be ever-vigilant, that our world is both threatened and threatening. Joseph S. Tuman, in *Communicating Terror: The Rhetorical Dimensions of Terrorism*, argues that media institutions are participating in a new post-Cold War global threat: invasions of the homeland and a state of fear pervade popular discourses. For Tuman, “Terrorism is a conspiratorial style of violence calculated

to alter the attitudes and behavior of multiple audiences. It targets the few in a way that claims the attention of the many.”<sup>1</sup>

Henry Giroux writes in 2004 of specific changes—in American attitudes and behaviors—that fall under the umbrella of the “war on terror.”

Some consequences of the American response to the tragic terrorist attacks have been a general tolerance for the use of preemptive violence and coercion, control of the media, the rise of repressive state power, an expanding militarization, and a thriving surveillance and security industry that is now even welcomed in public schools. And these are only some of the *known* consequences: many of the effects of the Bush administration’s policies are still coming to light.<sup>2</sup>

Each of the consequences Giroux lists are central to the action in three Pixar films, released between 2001 and 2010: *Monsters, Inc.* (2001), *The Incredibles* (2004), and *Toy Story 3* (2010). All three films take cartoon violence to a new level organized around state control, military action, and surveillance; all three films characterize children as both threats and threatening while aimed at child audiences; and all three films contain scenes of torture.

### **Purpose of This Study**

The purpose of this study is to analyze images of torture in three Pixar films, *Monsters, Inc.*, *Toy Story 3*, and *The Incredibles*. In my analysis, I will argue that torture scenes are framed in three ways: by state controlled industry for profit, by prison motifs,

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph S. Tuman. *Communicating Terror: The Rhetorical Dimensions of Terrorism, 2nd edition* (Los Angeles CA: Sage, 2010), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Henry A. Giroux and Grace Pollock. *The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence* (Lanham and Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), 146.

and by 1960s spy thrillers. These frames, each referencing other iconic media images, direct attention away from the torture scene itself—pain, screams, victim, and victimizer—through the films’ invitations to enjoy the intertextuality, to laugh at the absurdity, and to excuse the violence as “only” cartoon slap-stick. Animated portraits of a state industry for profit, nationalism, and militarism that culminate in torture “naturalize” violent tactics—making them seem normal if not inevitable. On one hand, these representations of violence are simply computer-generated images flashing on the screen and are not “real” people enduring these atrocities; on the other hand, I argue that this animated torture amid profit, militarism, and surveillance, “condoned” in post 9/11 discourses, communicates that these ideologies are acceptable.

### **Exemplars of Torture Under the Critical Radar**

I chose these three films for several reasons. First, they are immensely popular. On Internet Movie Data Base, where users’ ratings are compiled to create a numerical list of the 250 top movies of all time, *Toy Story 3* is ranked 59<sup>th</sup>; *Monsters, Inc.* is rated 218. On Amazon.com, *Toy Story 3* ranks 29<sup>th</sup> among their best-selling children’s films, and *Monsters, Inc.*, ranks 72<sup>nd</sup>. Second, all three films generated substantial revenue at home and aboard. *Monsters, Inc.* grossed \$548,398,421 worldwide, earning 50.9% domestically and 49.1% in foreign sales; *Toy Story 3* grossed \$1,063,171,911 worldwide, and the breakdown is 39.0% domestically and 61.0% across the border; and *The Incredibles* earned \$631,442,092 worldwide, with domestic sales accounting for 41.4% and foreign sales making up 58.6%.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Box Office Mojo. <http://www.boxofficemojo.com>.

Third, all three films are produced by Pixar, perhaps offering a consistency in vision across the ten year span. In terms of critical reception, all three films were greeted with ringing endorsements—of their animation, their design, and their fun.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, both *Toy Story 3* and *Monsters, Inc.* won Academy Awards for Best Song (both written and performed by Randy Newman), and *The Incredibles* won the Academy Award for Best Achievement in Sound Editing.

While all three releases coincide with the time frame of the U.S. “war on terror,” no study isolates these three films for their torture scenes. Hubka, Hovdestad, and Tonmyr examine Disney animated films from 1937-2006 for “child maltreatment,” finding “a total of 26 of the 42 (62%) main child characters were maltreated at least once.”<sup>5</sup> Pixar films, however, have garnered no such attention. Marc G. Doucet analyzes the original *Toy Story*, *A Bug’s Life*, and *Rescue Heroes: The Movie* for the ways in which these films produce and sustain “power/knowledge that seeks to defend contemporary forms of world order . . . through the medium of children’s popular cinema.”<sup>6</sup> The final film in the *Toy Story* trilogy has garnered no attention for its world order. Only Henry Giroux and Grace Pollock offer a critique of *The Incredibles* for its construction of the American family post 9/11.<sup>7</sup> But they concentrate on the “specialness” of the superhero family as a metaphor for American power and might that justifies the use of force in the world.

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<sup>4</sup> Some of these popular reviews will be covered in Chapter Two to introduce the analysis of each film.

<sup>5</sup> David Hubka, Wendy Hovdestad, and Lil Tonmyr. "Child maltreatment in Disney animated feature films: 1937-2006." *The Social Science Journal* 46 (2009): 427.

<sup>6</sup> Marc G. Doucet. "Child's Play: The Political Imaginary of International Relations and Contemporary Popular Children's Films." *Global Society* 19, no. 3 (2005): 289.

<sup>7</sup> Henry A. Giroux and Grace Pollock. *The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence* (Lanham and Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), 145-156.



No popular reviews or critical commentary of the films mentioned the torture scenes. The torture scenes in these films, then, are “under the radar” of critical commentators; this lack of attention helps to justify my argument that torture is “naturalized” in these films targeted at children. This analysis will bring torture and its framing onto the radar screen. To best understand what’s at stake when torture goes unnoticed in these children’s films, I offer background on the concepts of militarism, nationalism, and torture to situate my claims about post 9/11 U.S. Then I offer selective background on the scholarship of media violence and children.

### **Militarism, Nationalism, and Torture**

Catherine Lutz defines militarism as “an intensification of the labor and resources allocated to military purposes, including the shaping of other institutions in synchrony with military goals . . . [as well as] the shaping of national histories in ways that glorify and legitimate military action.”<sup>8</sup> This exaltation of military virtues and ideals has crept into popular culture at multiple levels. Henry Giroux argues that video games, clothing, “Hummers,” popular film, military recruiting, even schools have become militarized zones with constant surveillance of student movement: “The not-so-hidden curriculum here is that kids cannot be trusted and that their rights are not worth protecting. At the same time, they are being educated to passively accept military sanctioned practices organized around maintaining control, surveillance, and unquestioned authority, all conditions central to a police state.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Catherine Lutz. “Making war at home in the United States: Militarization and the current crisis.” *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 723.

<sup>9</sup> Henry A Giroux, “War on Terror: The Militarizing of Public Space and Culture in the United States.” *Third Text* 18, no. 4 (2004): 213.

Hand in hand with militarism is nationalism, and the ways in which national identification, especially during the U.S. “war on terror,” encourages certain kinds of actions and sentiments that might not be tolerated in peaceful times. Qiong Li and Marilynn B. Brewer explain how these issues play out in post 9/11 America:

Of particular concern is the question of whether identification with one’s country – in the form of national attachment, pride, and loyalty – is or is not necessarily associated with derogation and contempt of nations and cultures other than one’s own. . . . On the downside, high levels of national identification (“hypernationalism”) have been associated with authoritarianism, intolerance, and warmongering. The differentiation between the positive and negative manifestations of national identification is represented in social psychology by drawing a distinction between ‘patriotism’ and ‘nationalism,’ with the former connoting pride and love for country and the latter referring to chauvinistic arrogance and desire for dominance in international relations.<sup>10</sup>

In understanding the internal struggles which make up a nation – economics and group dynamics, for example – and the external international component of interaction and diplomacy among nations, Li and Brewer find that the ways people are primed largely determines whether they engage in patriotism or nationalism when addressing homeland sentiment.

Homeland sentiments have come to a boiling point on the issue of torture, its use and promotion, by agencies of the U.S. The United Nations’ “Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment” uses the

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<sup>10</sup> Qiong Li and Marilynn B. Brewer. “What Does It Mean to Be an American? Patriotism, Nationalism, and American Identity After 9/11.” *Political Psychology* 25, no. 5 (2004), 728.

following definition: “Torture means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person.” Amy Zegart writes in “Torture Creep” that public support for torture in the “war on terror” has grown significantly in recent years. Over a five year period (from 2007 to 2012), support grew from 27 percent of Americans feeling that torture should be allowed on prisoners to a whopping 41 percent. More than that, Americans “like specific techniques” more as well, including waterboarding, transporting a terrorist to a country known for using torture, and forcing prisoners to remain naked and chained in uncomfortable positions in cold rooms.<sup>11</sup>

Crandall, Eidelman, Sitka and Morgan argue that spy-themed entertainment has skyrocketed over the past decade and may be linked to popular support for intelligence practices. These researchers have discovered that when torture is presented as a forty year old “longstanding practice,” it not only increased acceptance, but subjects found torture to be “effective and justifiable.” Conversely, when the same torture is presented as a new practice, public support wanes.<sup>12</sup> When torture or any heinous practice becomes naturalized – or is even suspected as a commonplace strategy in intelligence – people find it to be an important security measure. Ironically, some experts in the field of intelligence do not find such measures of interrogation acceptable, not simply because of ethical concerns, but because the information gathered may not be reliable since it was obtained under duress.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Amy Zegart. “Torture Creep: Why are more Americans accepting Bush-era policies than ever before?” Foreign Policy. September 25, 2012. [www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/09/25/torture\\_creep](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2012/09/25/torture_creep).

<sup>12</sup> Christian S. Crandall, Scott Eidelman, Linda J. Skitka, and G. Scott Morgan. “Status quo framing increases support for torture.” *Social Influence* 4 (1), (2009): 1.

<sup>13</sup> Steve Coll. “‘Disturbing’ and ‘Misleading.’” *The New York Times*. February 7, 2013. <http://www.nybooks.com.htm>.

Militarism, nationalism, and torture all center the plots in the three films in this analysis. If “torture creep” indicates a growing public endorsement of torture, then this endorsement cannot be separated from the larger rhetorical discourses of militarism and nationalism that have also “creeped” into post 9/11 American life. Militarism that practices surveillance, state control, and unquestioned authority partners with nationalism that justifies force and promotes warmongering. My analysis will show that these attitudes and rhetorical stances are central to these films and the torture scenes in them. When the use of torture in these films goes unnoticed, then the leap to torture as ordinary, justified, and effective is not a long one. These scenes of torture in three films aimed at children deserve attention and critique; they should also be part of the scholarly conversation about media violence and children.

### **Media Violence and Children**

While media scholars have debated for decades the effects of media violence on children (and I will not put any of this debate to rest here), this study does utilize the conclusions of the American Academy of Pediatrics as an advocacy and professional group that is especially invested in children’s well-being. According to the Committee on Public Education of the American Academy of Pediatrics, “of all featured films produced in the United States between 1937 and 1999, 100% portrayed violence, and the amount of violence *with intent to injure* has increased throughout the years” (emphasis added).<sup>14</sup> Fumie Yokota and Kimberly M. Thompson found that from 1940 through the year 2000,

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<sup>14</sup> “Media Violence.” American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Public Education. *Pediatrics*. 108, no. 5 (2001), 1222.

there was a dramatic surge in violent content in G-rated animated films.<sup>15</sup> Their study reviewed 74 animated G rated feature films: every film had at least one act of violence, and the average violent scene was 9.5 minutes. They warned about the false sense of security the G rating gives in signifying acceptability for all children.<sup>16</sup>

Richard Freed argues in *Pediatrics* that the industry rating system does not serve children well: Because “ratings developed by the media industry classify glamorized media violence as appropriate for young children – a position that is inconsistent with the scientific consensus about the negative effects of media violence and contradicts American Academy of Pediatrics media policy...media violence is glamorized by depicting it in a positive light, such as when it is rewarded or perpetrated by children’s role models.”<sup>17</sup> Common Sense Media, a public advocacy group, argues that, “media violence is especially damaging to children under 8 because they cannot easily tell the difference between real life and fantasy [and] when they are exposed to media violence, kids can become more aggressive, become insensitive to violence, have more nightmares, and develop a fear of being harmed.”<sup>18</sup>

The media violence camp is not the only voice in the conversation, and many critics and scholars discount that media violence has a negative effect on child viewers. Some suggest merely a correlation but not causation between the expansion of media and an increase of real-life violence.<sup>19</sup> Others find that cartoon violence’s influence on the

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<sup>15</sup> Fumie Yokota and Kimberly M. Thompson. “Violence in G-Rated Animated Films.” *JAMA* 283, no. 20 (2000): 2716.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 2720.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Freed. “Pulling the Plug on Entertainment Industry Ratings.” *Pediatrics* 119, no. 6 (2007): 1259.

<sup>18</sup> “The Facts: Kid’s TV Shows are Really Violent.” *Common Sense Media*. Nov. 19, 2010. <http://www.commonsensemedia.org>.

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan L. Freedman. *Media Violence and Its Effect on Aggression: Assessing the Scientific Evidence* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

behavior of children is less than previously thought.<sup>20</sup> Finally, Kirsch conducts a broad overview of multiple forms of media violence and the ways children and adolescents are influenced, delineating between developmental stages, consumptive patterns, and other risk factors.<sup>21</sup>

If most research agrees that there are negative effects on young viewers, but causality and “real world” effects are impossible to prove, then the safe bet on the relationship between media and violence is George Gerbner’s claim that children experience “Mean World Syndrome,” a condition which makes them suspicious and fearful of the world and of anything different from themselves.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), found that violent media “reinforces the . . . belief that most people are evil,” and contributes to a fascination with violence. Aggressive media heroes connote a threefold message: “aggression is a good means to solve conflicts; aggression offers status; [and] aggression can be fun.”<sup>23</sup>

For the purpose of this study, UNESCO’s conclusion is especially pertinent. When torture is presented in popular animated films as “natural,” ordinary, and effective, this aggression solves problems, confers status, and is fun. As my analysis will show, these films are so much fun that attention is deflected from torture to laughter.

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<sup>20</sup> Fran C. Blumberg, Kristen P. Bierworth, and Allison J. Schwartz. “Does Cartoon Violence Beget Aggressive Behavior in Real Life? An Opposing View.” *Early Childhood Education* (2008) 36: 101.

<sup>21</sup> Steven J. Kirsch. *Children, Adolescents, and Media Violence: A Critical Look at the Research* (Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> Scott Stossel. “The Man Who Counts the Killings.” May 1997.  
<http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/issues/97may/gerbner.html>.

<sup>23</sup> Jo Groebel. “The UNESCO global study on media violence.” *The Major Project of Education in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Bulletin 49 (Santiago Chile, 1999), 15.

This chapter has introduced my argument and provided background in militarism, nationalism, and torture which will be central to my analysis of three Pixar films. Chapter Two analyzes *Monsters, Inc.*, *Toy Story 3*, and *The Incredibles* for the ways in which the torture scenes are framed; these frames invite laughter and intertextuality, while deflecting attention from torture of central characters in the films. Chapter Three offers three implications of my analysis: these films present torture as deserved and normative; the tortured characters stand outside frames of recognition for humanness; and they redefine children as threats and dangers. These ideologies, I conclude, are just as potent as the themes of nationalism, militarism, and a violated sacrosanct homeland.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### Scenes of Torture in Three Pixar Films

#### **Monsters, Inc.**

*Monsters, Inc.* was released in the fall of 2001, just after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The film enjoyed large audiences and popular acclaim as the nation drew together against an enemy which came to be seen as omnipresent and foreign. Roger Ebert in his November 2, 2001 review of the film writes:

"Monsters, Inc." is cheerful, high-energy fun, and like the other Pixar movies, has a running supply of gags and references aimed at grownups (I liked the restaurant named Harryhausen's, after the animation pioneer). I also enjoyed the sly way that the monster world mirrors our own, right down to production quotas and sales slogans. "We Scare," they assure us, "Because We Care."<sup>24</sup>

While the creators of the film could not have anticipated the United States' growing crisis of distrust and xenophobia, the film is firmly rooted in an energy crisis, rhetoric familiar to Americans watching oil prices rise and oil sources dwindle amidst dread of further terrorist attacks in 2001.

Monstropolis is fueled not by oil but by children's screams which are then transformed into an energy source that powers the city. Their crisis stems from the fact that children are getting harder to scare. This notion of scaring children seems problematic; similarly, the idea that children are less scared than in past times seems to

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<sup>24</sup> Roger Ebert. "Monsters, Inc." *Chicago Sun Times*. November 2, 2001.  
<http://www.rogerebert.suntimes.com.htm>.



imply that today's children are not as sentimental or as needful of protection. At one point, a character in the film says: "The window of innocence is shrinking." The fact that authorities are trying to make children scream – no matter what the reason – is a frightening one; as *Monsters, Inc.* washed over the population, news video of New York City also washed over us—replete with screams of terror in scenes of panic and destruction.

*Monsters, Inc.* begins by introducing the innocent personas of the furry James P. Sullivan ("Sulley") and his round, one-eyed sidekick, Mike ("Mikey") Wazowski. Theirs is a peaceful life, two monsters happily working as scream collectors in the town power facility. Scaring children makes them scream; accordingly, Sulley and Mikey wait under human children's beds or hide in their closets until the moment is right to jump out, solicit a scream, and collect it for their company. The screams are then funneled into a clean energy source. Sulley and Mikey are perfect municipal employees until a human child is accidentally caught in their world; trying to protect her and get her back where she belongs, they become caught in an institutional barricade of fear-promotion whose sole purpose is to destroy any potential threat – embodied in the physicality of the human child – to their way of life.

Tranter and Sharpe analyze *Monsters, Inc.* as an allegorical tale which frames current issues involving children, lifestyle, and the future of energy acquisition. For them the film is an opportunity to expose current child-unfriendly cities and to propose potentially positive solutions to the energy crisis.<sup>25</sup> Links between children's films and world affairs is not new: Disney's *Aladdin* was criticized for representing the Arabic

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<sup>25</sup> Paul J. Tranter and Scott Sharpe. "Escaping Monstropolis: child-friendly cities, peak oil and *Monsters, Inc.*" *Children's Geographies* 6, no. 3 (2008): 295.

community unfavorably during the Gulf War. McQuillan and Byrne find *The Lion King*, *Aladdin*, and *Mulan* “parables for U.S. policy in South Africa, the Middle East, and China.”<sup>26</sup>

I argue that *Monsters, Inc.* moves beyond a parable of energy crisis, children as resources to be exploited, and institutional malfeasance to present a world of torture within a frame of militarism and its accompanying tropes of nationalism, surveillance, and security measures. This military frame echoes Judith Butler’s (2010) *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* Butler examines “the ways in which visual and discursive fields are part of war recruitment and war waging...[and] how popular ascent to war is cultivated and maintained...”<sup>27</sup> In framing war, rhetoric and the visual are employed across generations, media outlets, and even borders as the language and action of war enter into circulation and become part and parcel of the everyday and its vernacular.

It is the everyday and its vernacular that makes the torture and militarism of *Monsters, Inc.* particularly grievous as well as particularly veiled—if one isn’t looking for it. For those not looking, the film is full of wonderfully absurd characters, gargoyles of different monster pieces stuck together, that create visually fascinating, if not frightening, monsters. Celia has a head of Medusa snakes; Mikey is a Cyclops; Sulley is a huge, blue, bear-like monster; Waternoose is a five-eyed, crab-like horror. Together they all undergo the typical slapstick violence of animation, and the invitation to laugh at the absurd physicalities, as well as their everyday “humanity,” is a mainstay in the film’s action. Sulley flirts casually: “Did you lose weight – or a limb?” Instead of “The Globe”

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<sup>26</sup> Eleanor Byrne and Martin McQuillan. *Deconstructing Disney* (Sterling VA: 1999), quoted in Paul J. Tranter and Scott Sharpe. “Escaping Monstropolis: child-friendly cities, peak oil and *Monsters, Inc.*” *Children’s Geographies* 6, no. 3 (2008), 296.

<sup>27</sup> Judith Butler. *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2010), ix.

newspaper, the name is “The Glob.” The headline reads: “Baby born with five heads. Parents thrilled.” When Celia comments that she might cut her hair, her Medusa snake locks gasp in a faint squeal of fear.

On the other hand, the laughter gives way to shock when the action is viewed through the lens of contemporary warfare and war mongering – torture, military action, surveillance, and war making – especially in the name of energy acquisition and corporate profits. Torture scenes, the aftermath of torture, and beatings, are all presented as if characters deserve this punishment. Children are represented alternately as angels (innocents involved as casualties of a battle created by a child’s existence) and monsters (suspect enemies) themselves. The main child character, Boo, is consistently endangered, terrified, and seen in a war-like situation throughout the film. Below I offer examples of military tropes, nationalism, and surveillance that paint a threatening, sadistic, and violent world which echoes our own.

### *Militarism as a Response to Contamination*

While working-class factory life is a familiar scene, *Monsters, Inc.* takes the life and times of the factory line into a distinctly military direction, emulating the training and language of combat troops. During the morning training routine, Mikey coaches Sulley through a series of “scaring children” calisthenics: “Less talk, more pain, marshmallow boy!” He also sings the following to a military training cadence: “I don’t know but it’s been said, I love scaring kids in bed.” When the “scarers” enter the factory line to do their jobs, there is a slow-motion segment during which dramatic, musical brass fanfare plays as they walk in unison. During conditioning, and in other parts of the film, phrases

familiar in going-to-war movie scenes ensue: he's a "killing machine;" "We're sitting targets;" "Halt!" and "Move! Move! Move!"

If Sulley and Mikey are combat troops, they are also subjected to hazardous duty, threatened first by contamination and second by procedures for decontamination—familiar from films like the 1979 *The China Syndrome* and 1983 *Silkwood*. The monster George has emerged from a child's room with a sock on his back. The ensuing decontamination procedure is harrowing. "2319! We have a 2319!" Someone runs to the emergency button (red with a child symbol on it) and presses it. An alarm blares and a male computer voice over the P.A. announces "Red alert" repeatedly. A sign in the background reads: "WARNING – Contamination alert."

There is a close-up of a security camera as it moves and narrows in on the suspect. A female voice over the P.A. says, "George Sanderson. Please remain motionless." Behind him is a screen which shows his back and, through a weapon-like scope, the sock is targeted. The voice says, "Prepare for decontamination." George starts screaming, "Get it off! Get it off!" Jerry, another monster, says "Duck and cover, people!"

The SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics)-like team then rappels down ropes through the ceiling windows. C.D.A. (Child Detection Agency) helicopters are hovering near the building. An A.P.C. squad car pulls up, and a C.D.A. agent says, "Move! Move! Move!" as they jump from the vehicle and run to the building. They state, "Coming through, please. Stand aside." One of the C.D.A. agents says, "Clear the contaminated area." A monster screams. A C.D.A. agent, mimicking police radio talk, issues

instructions: “This is a 2319 in progress. Keep the area clear. Coming through. Watch yourself.”

George is surrounded and one of the squad members jumps on top of him, pins him to the floor, and holds him down while another squad member takes a large grabber device and pulls the sock off his back as George whimpers. The C.D.A. agent says: “Stand back. Careful.” The bomb exploding cover is placed over the sock and screwed down with a drill noise. Then a C.D.A. agent presses a button and a muffled explosion is heard. The lid is unscrewed and removed and another agent vacuums up the remains. An agent says: “All clear. Situation is niner-niner-zero. Ready for decon.”

George begins to thank them but – before he can continue – they surround him, and a rubber shower curtain is pulled up from the floor around him. George is presumably shaved and showered. The curtain is withdrawn, and he has a dog-cone-like device around his neck and is embarrassed because he is nude, so he covers his genital area. When the Band-Aid is loudly ripped off his back, he lets out a scream, and the wound from the procedure is apparent. In George’s appearance later in the film, he leans on a crutch. He still has on the cone collar and is terrified of going to work again. He is trembling, but his assistant is trying to talk him into how easy it will be. Post-traumatic stress syndrome rears its head.

Later, a different monster is attacked by the C.D.A. This scene is accompanied by the famous violins in the *Psycho* shower scene followed by intense screaming. As if this weren’t enough, off-camera voices insist, “Halt! Hold him down!” followed by the sound of a dentist drill noise and the monster’s screams. Original victim of the C.D.A. George is attacked a second time and nearly a third.

Clearly, decontamination is a terribly frightening experience, so the community is up in arms at the thought of a human child loose in their midst. A newspaper shows a blurry picture of Boo, the headline: “KID SIGHTING AT SUSHI BAR,” and a bottom caption that reads: “Square Mile Evacuated Around Toxic Site.” Other articles on the page include: “Child Feared Loose in City,” “‘Stay Calm’ Pleads Mayor,” “Child Detection Agency Investigating,” and “Monster Threat.” A TV news report is captioned by the words: “Kid-Tastrophe!” The newscaster says: “There has been a child security breach.” An expert on the news program says: “It is my professional opinion that now is the time to...panic!” He waves his arms wildly as he, himself, panics.

Human children are a source of contamination and any contact with a child in the factory is cause for alarm and military-style response. Five-eyed, crab-legged boss, Henry J. Waternoose, warns new recruits: “There is nothing more toxic, more deadly, than a human child. A single touch could kill you!” The tropes of hazardous combat duty and the emotional breakdowns of Grade B war movies also lace the daily life of *Monsters, Inc.* A monster comes back from a child’s room terrified because the child almost touched him. He screams, sobs, and says: “I could’ve been dead! I could have died!” Another monster slaps him and says: “Keep it together, man.” A similar scene finds another trainee saying, “I won’t go in a kid’s room! You can’t make me!” Mr. Waternoose responds, “You’re going in there because we need this.”

### *Torture as a Part of Interrogation: The Scream Extractor*

If military life is folded into the work of the factory, so too is torture folded into the company’s techniques for securing its safety and profits. As Mikey and Sulley

attempt to find the lost child Boo, Mikey is captured and strapped into a chair specifically designed to solicit screams and information. It is eerily reminiscent of electric chairs, complete with holes in the bottom for drainage of bodily fluids. Mikey knows where Boo is and his tormentors, Randall and Fungus, are ready to use any means to secure the information.

Randall laughs evilly as the clamp of the special torture chair closes around Mikey's chest, and Mikey is handcuffed with shackles onto the armrest of the chair. Randall says, "First, I need to know where the kid is and you're gonna tell me." Mikey says he doesn't know anything, and he begs. Randall nods to Fungus, who begins pressing buttons on a control panel.

There is a close-up shot of a big red light and machine parts moving as mechanical clanging and grinding begin. Mikey is protesting what's happening and says "no" repeatedly. A big gun-like device is pointing at him, and he says: "I don't like big moving things that are moving towards me." His feet are wiggling.

Randall says, "Say hello to the scream extractor," a clear reference to 1983 *Scarface*'s famous line, "Say hello to my little friend." Mike is begging. Randall joins Fungus at the control panel. Mike begs more. Electrical whirring starts, then it grows louder. The gun-like device moves toward Mikey as he says: "What's that thing? What is that thing?" As it gets closer to his face, he is saying: "Wait! Wait! Wait!" and "No! No! No!" and "Oh, no!" and "C'mon, hey!" There is a close-up of the mask-like part at the end of the device (which actually is meant to go into the mouth) – as it approaches Mikey's face, the viewer sees what this looks like from his perspective.

There is a deep, resonating whir. Mikey yells, “Help! Help! Help!” There is a side-shot of the device now inches from his face, and his mouth is forcibly drawn open. Echoes of 1976 *Marathon Man*’s dentist torture scene are hard to miss. The end of the device goes up to his face and nearly touches it as the noise dies away as the machine breaks. While Randall seeks the cause of the breakdown, Mikey tries to bribe Fungus. Fungus replies, “I’m sorry, Wazowski, but Randall said I’m not allowed to fraternize with victims of his evil plot.”

In *Monster’s Inc.*, Mikey is rescued before information or screams can be extracted, but the infamous chair appears again. This time, Fungus has ended up in the chair with the scream extractor device in his mouth. The victim is waving madly and is trying to push the mechanism away from him as his own screams are muffled. His eyes begin rolling back in his head as Randall asks where Wazowski is. When the machine is finally turned off and the device is removed, Randall is still asking where Wazowski is and shows no concern for Fungus and the difficulty he is having. Fungus’ lips are badly swollen upon removal, his eyes are bulging, he is gasping, and he falls back in the chair and then to the ground.

Perhaps the most frightening of all, Boo, the two year old toddler, also lands in the chair. Boo says, “NO!” as she is strapped in. She tries to cover her face with her arms, but Randall handcuffs her wrists with shackles to the chair arms. The same mechanical whirring is heard, this time with cuts to Randall smiling as he anticipates what is about to happen to Boo. Boo looks terrified as the device approaches. She yells out for “Kitty!” (her name for Sulley), then she is shaking her head “no” and screaming. There is a close-up of her terrified face as the device moves to within inches of her face.



These three chair scenes move through familiar media tropes of torture, especially when a special technological device serves no other purpose than to create pain and extract information. Textual references to other adult film torture and violence are completed in the dialogue of Mikey—begging, pleading, bribing—familiar in any interrogation scene. The second chair scene works on the trope of “just deserts,” as the torturer finds himself victim of his own device. The third chair scene, with a child victim, takes the military torture to a new level: with Boo as the enemy terrorist, her childlike “No!” and calling for her protector/parent “Kitty!”, is a particularly heinous portrait of torture at the hands of the “state,” especially because there is no information to extract from a toddler.

*State Beatings and Control: By Any Means Necessary*

Military tropes and training, torture and interrogation, are justified by the larger motive at work: to keep the factory running and profitable. At one point in the film, Waterhouse tells Sulley: “I’ll kidnap a thousand children before I let this company die, and I’ll silence anyone who gets in my way!” The factory’s nefarious techniques for keeping workers in line via combat rhetoric, for keeping the community safe from human children, and for making a profit are all papered over with the company motto: “We scare because we care.”

The twisted justification of “caring” also means that the company gets what it needs and wants “by any means necessary.” After what can be assumed was an interrogation, if not extended captivity, Celia shows up back at work wearing a dog-cone collar. Each of her Medusa snake hair shafts is also encased in a cone, implying that she

and all of her very alive locks of hair have been injured. Celia's face is badly bruised, one eye is blackened, and she wears a bandage on her arm and a Band-Aid on her chin.

As Sulley and Boo travel through the tunnels of the factory, they discover secret torture rooms complete with wrench and pincher-like tools hanging on the walls. These rooms have been prepared to avert the energy crisis and maintain profitability by forcibly extracting energy from children, Pandemonium sets in when Boo is spotted in the monster world, "There's a kid here – a human kid!" and more security forces arrive. Spotlights shine on the street, and monsters in the lights freeze; one raises his hands in a surrender position. The C.D.A. helicopter pilot says over the loudspeaker: "Please remain calm. This is not a drill."

Sirens wail and tires screech as the armored personnel carriers arrive. As agents come out of the back of the vehicle and down on ropes, Agent 1 announces: "We have an 835 in progress." There is a loud scream. A C.D.A. agent grabs Celia and says, "Please come with me" as he takes her away. She responds: "Ow, stop pushing!" which indicates he is handling her roughly. A C.D.A. agent says: "Building clear. Ready for decontamination." The entire area is surrounded by a blue-green, electrified-looking ball where Sulley and Mikey just were, and where Celia and others remain. There is an explosion sound and electrical buzzing.

C.D.A. agents are everywhere when Sulley and Mikey enter the factory. There are assorted police/spy conversations going on: "Number One wants this place dusted for prints." "Careful with that." "I got a good view from here." An agent on a rope says: "A little lower." They find the bag Sulley used to carry Boo: "This was recovered at the scene...could be contaminated."

The police state/industry are one in the same: training workers to act like combat troops, conducting torture in interrogation, and utilizing police tactics to protect their product and profits. Boo, in this turned around world, scares monsters, and she is simultaneously an innocent victim who must be protected by Sulley and an enemy of the state industry who must be destroyed. The contradictory stance has one commonality: both stances are justified in the name of a greater cause.

### *Monsters, Inc. and the War on Terror*

David Altheide's (2009) *Terror Post 9/11 and the Media* argues that "We have more media and less information today . . . Both the media and the information are increasingly complicit in promoting fear that has been nurtured by an expansive information technology as well as entertaining formats that draw users/audiences." <sup>28</sup>

*Monsters, Inc.* promotes, not fear, but laughter in its absurd, backward, and humorous presentations of toxic "spills," torture, and security breaches, all in the name of protecting the community/protecting the innocent. The danger, I argue, is that laughter naturalizes and makes acceptable these unacceptable practices. Militarism is justified in the name of profit, and torture is an acceptable company practice. Monstropolis and Monsters, Inc. are an inseparable state and industry apparatus with no regard for human life.

### **Toy Story 3**

*Toy Story 3*, released in 2010, is the third and final film in the *Toy Story* trilogy. For most reviewers, it was also deemed the best of the three for its heartwarming and heart pounding adventure. Three reviewers make passing reference to the primary subject

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<sup>28</sup> David L. Altheide. *Terror Post 9/11 and the Media* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009), 1.

of this analysis: the rhetoric and iconography of the prison and its brutality. When 18 year old Andy is preparing to leave for college, his toys are consigned to a local day care, supposedly an ideal place for toys. Eric Hynes writes in *The Village Voice*:

Alas, their utopia turns out to be a veritable penal colony, presided over by a despotic pink huggymonster called Lotso (Ned Beatty) and his two henchmen, a lumbering lazy-eyed baby doll and Barbie's swishy soul mate, Ken (Michael Keaton). After suffering the abuses of rough-housing toddlers, the group embarks on an extended, inspired prison break made possible by Buzz's daredevilry and Mr. Potato Head's reconstitution as a floppy tortilla. Yet danger persists beyond the bounds of day care.<sup>29</sup>

Claudia Puig, in *USA Today*, quotes Mr. Pricklepants who describes Sunnyside Day Care as "a place of ruin and despair."<sup>30</sup> For Roger Ebert, "Day care seems like a happy choice, until a dark underside of its toy society emerges in the person of an ominously hug-prone bear named Lotso."<sup>31</sup>

While *Monsters, Inc.* revolved around the iconography of the military, state control, and torture laminated on working class factory life, *Toy Story 3* thrives on tropes of prison life, surveillance, and punishment all enacted by and on toys in a school. Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* detailed the characteristics of Bentham's Panopticon:

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<sup>29</sup> Eric Hynes. "Toys Are Us in *Toy Story 3*." *The Village Voice*. June 15, 2010.

<http://www.villagevoice.com/2010-06-15/film/toys-are-us-in-toy-story-3/htm>.

<sup>30</sup> Claudia Puig. "You've never too old for funny, sweet toys in 'Toy Story 3.'" *USA TODAY*. 6/20/2010.

[http://www.usatoday30.usatoday.com/life/movies/reviews/2010-06-17-toystory17\\_ST\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday30.usatoday.com/life/movies/reviews/2010-06-17-toystory17_ST_N.htm).

<sup>31</sup> Roger Ebert. "Toy Story 3." *Chicago Sun-Times*. June 16, 2010.

<http://www.rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20100616/REVIEWS/100619990/1023.htm>.

It must be possible to hold the prisoner under permanent observation; every report that can be made about him must be recorded and computed. The theme of the Panopticon—at once surveillance and observation, security and knowledge, individualization and totalization, isolation and transparency—found in the prison its privileged locus of realization.<sup>32</sup>

The techniques of the prison, “regular chronologies, forced labour, its authorities of surveillance, registration, its experts in normality,” have also infiltrated other institutions: “factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons.”<sup>33</sup> Sunnyside Day Care, with its purported purpose of caring for children, has a “dark underside.” While Sunnyside “protects” children in their care, the toys also enact techniques of the prison—surveillance, indoctrination, brutality, and “soul” killing.

While Foucault may not have been in the minds of *Toy Story 3* creators, certainly the situations and words of popular media representations of prisons echo throughout the film. Laminating the films *Cool Hand Luke*, *The Great Escape*, *Shawshank Redemption*, and dozens of Grade B prison films onto *Toy Story 3* offers great opportunities to laugh at the intertextual references. Like *Monsters, Inc.*, that laughter turns to something else when viewed through the lens of prison torture and brutality. Below I offer scenes in *Toy Story 3* that paint iconic portraits of prison.

### *Prison Security and Surveillance*

Heavy security measures are shown in the film, beginning when Andy and Molly’s mom is buzzed in to the day care facility, carrying the box of toys being donated.

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<sup>32</sup> Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York NY: Random House, 1977), 249.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 227-228.

When Buzz Lightyear goes to talk with Lotso, all the doors are locked, so he has to escape through the transom above the door. When the toys discover the doors and windows are locked on another occasion, Hamm comments that they have locked the windows using the “Fenster-Schnecker 380, finest childproof lock in the world.” The toys are imprisoned and threatened with solitary confinement if they try to escape.

When Woody returns to save his friends, Chatter Telephone, an older toy, tells Woody: “You shouldn’t have come back, Cowboy. They’ve cracked down hard since you left. More guards, more patrols. You and your friends ain’t ever gettin’ outta here now.” Referring to Woody’s previous escape, he says: “You got lucky once. Want my advice? Keep your heads down. You’ll survive.” Woody interjects: “Yeah, for how long?” Chatter telephone replies, “I’ve been here years. They’ll never break me.”

When Woody nevertheless begs him to tell him what is involved in escaping, the old-timer explains what the group is in for if they attempt such a daring feat: All classroom doors are locked inside and out; keys are hung on a hook in the office; Lotso has trucks patrolling the hallways, lobby, and playground; there is an 8 ft. high cinderblock wall which makes it impossible to go through – someone trying to escape can only go over or under. As these difficulties are mentioned, there are shots of the locked doors, patrols, and wall.

He tells Woody, “Your real problem is the monkey.” There is a close-up shot of the scary-looking monkey with cymbals, then a shot of the screen with twelve camera angles he watches over. Chatter Telephone continues: “The monkey is the eye in the sky...he sees everything.” There is a several-second close-up shot of the monkey’s eyes looking all around at the TV monitors for activity, then shots of the classrooms with

cameras and speakers, and then Lotso and Big Baby looking menacing during three unsuccessful escapes. The monkey screams, bangs his cymbals, and presses an alarm button when a violator is caught. There are several shots of the monkey screaming and banging, eyes bulging, and teeth bared as he catches potential suspects.

The first violator is an adorable bunny who slips out of his jail cell – there is a close-up of the security camera narrowing in on it, then the monkey seeing this through the TV monitor. The second attempt is by a penguin, also caught. The third attempted escapees are three toys, one of whom resembles a child wearing a baseball cap – they are caught on the playground, the spotlight zooms toward them, and a shadow of Big Baby comes toward them. Chatter Telephone says: “You can unlock doors, sneak past guards, climb the wall, but if you don’t take out that monkey, you ain’t goin’ nowhere. Wanna get outta here? Get ridda that monkey!”

There are many shots of the heavy security measures: A guard stands atop the high point of the play set on the playground using a flashlight as a spotlight to monitor activity; there are close-ups of security cameras, some still shots and some with the camera moving. At one point during the escape, the toys are almost caught by a patrol unit whose lights shine on them momentarily; also, a spotlight just misses Jessie and others during the escape. Used as a signal, a security camera is shown moving back and forth; in addition, a bicycle mirror is used as a reflector signal.

Prison security, in the forms of technologies of surveillance, multiple boundaries, and ever vigilant guards, works in a doubled and layered fashion: protecting children from stranger intrusions in the daytime, nighttime security at the day care serves to keep

the toys imprisoned. Enduring the brutal “play” of daytime toddlers and realizing the severity of their plight, the cast of toys learns of prison realities.

*Indoctrination: Learning the Ropes*

All prison films include indoctrination scenes in which new prisoners learn the ropes, hear the rules, and come to understand how the system works. *Toy Story 3* delves into past cinematic representations of punishment for criminals by reenacting a scene from 1967 *Cool Hand Luke*. Lotso Bear informs new prisoners of what will occur should they not heed the jailer’s warning of following rules. Further, Lotso Bear comes complete with the southern accent of the Captain in charge of the prison camp and the cane - which seems to not be needed for any medical purpose – carried by the mysterious “man with no eyes” in charge of the chain gang.

The captain in *Cool Hand Luke* and Lotso each address prisoners by issuing a cautioning welcome. The captain warns against trying to escape and says: “For your own good, you’ll learn the rules. It’s all up to you.” Similarly, Lotso says: “Listen up, folks. We got a way of doin’ things here at Sunnyside. If you start at the bottom, pay your dues, life here can be a dream come true. But if you break our rules, step outta line, try to check out early, well, you’re just hurtin’ yourselves.”

Lotso tells Buzz: “Lightyear, explain our overnight accommodations.” Buzz says: “Sir, yes, sir.” He salutes Lotso and tells the inmates, similar to *Cool Hand Luke*: “Prisoners sleep in their cells. Any prisoner caught outside their cells spends the night in the Box. Roll call at dusk and dawn. Any prisoner misses roll call spends the night in the



Box. Any prisoner talks back spends the night in –” Jessie, who assumes the same role as Cool Hand Luke, says, “in the Box. We get it.”

Both scenes warn prisoners through dialogue of the penalty for not adhering to rules. While instructions are given in *Toy Story 3*, however, visual ramifications are also represented in action: Mr. Potato Head is being put “in the box” (a sandbox) with the lid slammed shut on him because his behavior was deemed not respectful enough toward his captors; Woody’s hat is then tossed in front of the prisoners as an ominous sign that Lotso has hurt him in some way.

This dialogue is clearly lifted from *Cool Hand Luke*. Intertextuality is the direct or indirect referencing of one text by another. Roland Barthes describes how this referencing works: “The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture... [and is] made up of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entertaining into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, and contestation.”<sup>34</sup> *Toy Story 3* and its referencing of *Cool Hand Luke* performs all three textual relations: clearly, the dialogue is lifted and repeated from the original film to *Toy Story 3*. The text invites laughter—as iconic toys replace the iconic *Cool Hand Luke* characters. And the parody stems from the insider knowledge required to understand the ways the two texts are in dialogue with one another. The contestation, however, takes *Toy Story 3* into the world of prisons with its harsh realities of torture.

#### *Prison Brutality: Conversion and The Box*

If learning the ropes is a common prison film motif, then so is the conversion of a major character to the side of the captors. *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), for

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<sup>34</sup> Roland Barthes. *The Semiotic Challenge* (Berkeley Press, 1988), 146-148.

example, includes protagonist Andy Dufresne's conversion to trustee as a way to solicit protection from fellow inmates' brutalities. While Dufresne suffered a violent gang rape and beating, Buzz Lightyear suffers a prison torture scene, reminiscent of images from Abu Ghraib and prisoners of war, that forces his conversion.

When Buzz Lightyear is captured by prison guards, a hood is placed over his head and removed roughly when interrogation begins. The hood is not black but a strange looking sock puppet; nonetheless, the images of covering a prisoner's head are familiar in abductions, executions, or – more recently, in interrogations. When Buzz insists that his friends be moved to the “nice” room at the day care, Lotso says, “I understand. Put him in the time-out chair.” He is tied in a Lego chair with his hands behind him and shackles on his ankles. A strong interrogation light is above him. He is panting and trying to escape to no avail. Big Baby grabs Buzz and forces him back into the chair. Lotso says, “Bring in the Bookworm.” The Bookworm gives Lotso the “Buzz Lightyear Instruction Manual,” and he starts reading how to put Buzz in “Demo Mode.” Buzz asks, “What are you doing?” He is pushed forward by Big Baby and another guard. A robot toy revs his drill and the electric screwdriver begins undoing the screws on Buzz's back-plate. Buzz says, “Ow!” and then, “Let go of me!” Lotso reads how to reset to factory settings as his back-plate is taken off and his batteries are exposed. Buzz says: “Stop! No! Noo! Nooo!” The switch is pushed to “Demo Mode,” resulting in a total personality change. Buzz is now converted to the enemy camp. Buzz Lightyear as a hooded prisoner, enduring physical restraint, and the now familiar technological devices of drills for pain infliction, ends with a new kind of normalcy, one of the “disciplined” prisoner turned docile body.

The infamous box of *Cool Hand Luke* also appears in *Toy Story 3*, a disciplinary measure used in both films against uncooperative prisoners. The Box as solitary confinement is used on Mr. Potato Head and as a warning to other inmates. Big Baby puts Mrs. Potato Head in a cell and Mr. Potato Head tells him to “Keep your paws off my wife.” Lotso says not to put Mr. Potato Head in with her because, “I think this potato needs to learn himself some manners.” Then he instructs: “Take him to the Box!” Mr. Potato Head says, “Put me down!” and “Bad baby.”

The next morning – while the toys are still in jail – Hamm plays the harmonica and Buzz bangs on the cage to make him stop. He says: “Quiet, musical hog. Knock it off!” Big Baby throws a sandy Mr. Potato Head on the floor, and he relates his terrible night in the Box: “It was cold and dark, nothing but sand and a couple of Lincoln Logs.” Hamm tells him he doesn’t think those were Lincoln Logs.

A second infraction leads Mr. Potato Head again to the Box. There is a close-up shot of Big Baby coming toward him (and the viewer) and a looming shadow of the captors appears before one grabs Mr. Potato Head and takes him away. Outside, Mr. Potato Head begs Big Baby: “Wait. I’ll do anything. I’ll change your diapers.” Big Baby throws him in the sandbox and slams the lid shut on him.

Psychological torture—conversion to the “other side” and solitary confinement—are brutal staples of the modern prison system that has moved away from public spectacle of bodily punishment to what Foucault calls punishment of “the soul”: “The expiation that once rained down upon the body must be replaced by a punishment that acts in depth on the heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations.”<sup>35</sup> Punishment should strike, not at

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<sup>35</sup> Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York NY: Random House, 1977), 16.

the body, but the soul. This soul-killing punishment of prison is the third kind of torture evidenced in *Toy Story 3*.

### *Throw-Away Lives*

Probably the most heart-wrenching moments in *Toy Story 3* are stories of toys deliberately thrown away, abandoned, or abused by their child owners. Indeed, Lotso Bear used to be a good toy, and he relates what a toy utopia looks like: “You’ll never be outgrown or neglected, never abandoned or forgotten. No owners means no heartbreak. . . Enough fresh batteries to choke a Hungry Hungry Hippo.”

The story of Lotso Bear and Big Baby emerges at Bonnie’s house, where Woody now resides while all of his toy friends are imprisoned at Sunnyside. While at Bonnie’s house, Woody mentions Sunnyside, and a toy asks, “You came from Sunnyside?” Another asks, “But how’d you escape?” A third toy says, “Sunnyside is a place of ruin and despair ruled by an evil bear who smells of strawberries.” Woody asks, “Lotso?” The unicorn toy, Buttercup, says, “The guy may seem plush and huggable on the outside but inside he’s a monster.” Woody: “But how do you know that?” A toy says: “Chuckles, he’ll tell you.”

The camera pans to a sad/mean-looking stuffed toy clown sitting on the window sill looking out away from the group. As Chuckles begins the tale, creepy accordion music plays. He tells the story of how he, Big Baby, and Lotso were accidentally abandoned, how they made it back to their house but, by that time, the child had a new Lotso. Chuckles tells the group, “Lotso changed that day,” and he snapped. The film offers a flashback to detail how it happened. Only Lotso was replaced, but he makes Big

Baby believe he was replaced as well. “She replaced us,” Lotso snaps. He does not allow Big Baby to look in Daisy’s window and says to him, “She don’t love you no more.” Big Baby cries. Then it is at night and raining. The three toys fall off the back of a truck and land on the ground in front of Sunnyside, which is how Big Baby damaged his eye. When the day care facility is shown, lightning flashes and ominous music plays. To sum up their fate, Chuckles says, “We were lost. Cast off. Unloved. Unwanted.”

The green army-men offer their own version of obsolescence. When the mission – meant to make their child, Andy, play with them again – fails, the sergeant and his platoon decide to leave, and they climb to the window sill of the bedroom. Buzz says, “Hey, Sarge. What are you doing?” Sarge replies, “War’s over. Me and the boys are movin’ on.” Buzz queries, “You’re going AWOL?” The sergeant says, “We done our duty. Andy’s grown up.” The soldier next to him says, “Let’s face it, when the garbage bags come out, we Army guys are the first to go.”

The film is littered with soul-killing punishment inflicted by the toys on the toys when they remind each other of their losses. Big Baby sees the heart tag his former owner, Daisy, put on him. He picks it up and says his only words in the film: “Mama.” Lotso grabs it and asks, “You want your Mommy back? She never loved you – don’t be such a baby!” Lotso tells the group, “Your kid don’t want you no more.” He tells Woody that he’s not special. “You’re a piece of plastic. You were made to be thrown away!” At another point in the film, Buzz overhears the conversation at the gambling table where Ken says, “What do you think of the new recruits – any keepers?” One of the guys responds, “Oh, please – landfill.” The others describe all the new toys as “disposable,” and one says, “We’ll be lucky if they last us a week.” As the cast of toys heads for the

furnace at the town dump – and a one-minute long impending death scene – Lotso asks, “Where’s your kid now?”

The premise that toys live real lives, behind the backs of humans, is central to the *Toy Story* trilogy. Indeed, it’s this premise that makes the films so haunting and so unforgettable. Eric Hynes writes, “Its irresistible conceit and snappy good humor remain largely intact, though now it also hauls a saltier and more anxious sensibility. Inanimate figurines don’t age, but they do get nicked up and discarded, and that tension between immortality and irrelevance remains the central conflict in Lee Unkrich’s *Toy Story 3*.”<sup>36</sup> The links between throw-away lives and the mechanisms of prison’s transformation to punishment of the “soul” are indeed an anxious sensibility.

### *Discipline and Punish and Toy Story 3*

The picture of prison in *Toy Story 3* borrows liberally from media depictions of prison life, whether the fictional box of *Cool Hand Luke* or the real photographs of black-hooded prisoners of war in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay. Judith Butler’s frames of war, the naturalization of violent images to foster war rhetoric and warring inclinations among publics, operates in *Toy Story 3* as well. When prison iconography is laminated on children’s animated film, the world of prison and its brutalities are made laughable, adorable, and easily dismissible.

So too the picture of prison in *Toy Story 3* conforms to Foucault’s portrait: “It gives almost total power over the prisoners; it has its internal mechanisms of repression

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<sup>36</sup> Eric Hynes. “Toys Are Us in *Toy Story 3*.” *The Village Voice*. June 15, 2010. <http://www.villagevoice.com/2010-06-15/film/toys-are-us-in-toy-story-3/htm>.

and punishment: a despotic discipline.”<sup>37</sup> As the prison developed, however, these mechanisms became internalized—we discipline ourselves; we wrap the mechanisms of surveillance into every institution—in schools and daycares; we no longer have to *be* watched, we are watching. So the toys enact these same mechanisms, watching each other with constant reminders of loss.

### **The Incredibles**

*The Incredibles* was released in 2004. While it falls second in the chronology of releases of *Monsters, Inc.* (2001) and *Toy Story 3* (2010), I offer it as the third film in this analysis for it brings together two of the themes introduced in the analysis of the first two films, working life and militarism, and adds the important dimension of the American family. *Monsters, Inc.* features two single, male, working class factory employees as accidental caregivers and protectors of a two year old toddler; *Toy Story 3* featured the “dark side” of suburban day care with a cast of “childless” toys facing their own doom. *The Incredibles* introduces the American family 60s-style: superheroes Mr. Incredible and Elastigirl have married, retired from superheroing, and started a family.

After fifteen years of retirement, Bob Parr works his soul-sucking job as an insurance claims agent; Helen Parr stays home with the kids (2.5 to be exact). Their endearing children, “tween” Violet, 8 year old Dash, and baby Jack-Jack, engage in typical sibling squabbles at the dinner table. But the film also comments in wonderful action and dialogue that laughs at icons of the “ideal” family: rushing to save the American city, dropping from a rocket in an RV suspended by Elastigirl’s arms and legs,

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<sup>37</sup> Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York NY: Random House, 1977), 236.

the son asks, "Are we there yet?" Dad answers angrily, "We'll get there when we get there!"

And the film involves torture. While *Monsters, Inc.* framed torture scenes in the guise of company profits and state military action, and *Toy Story 3* framed torture within a school-located prison system, *The Incredibles* wraps its torture in the 60s spy thriller, specifically the iconic James Bond films. While Agent 007 never needed a family to escape his villains' clutches, Mr. Incredible and Elastigirl need their children and each other to save the world. With its sleek repackaging of the James Bond iconography, the film harkens back to notions of the ideal nuclear family and introduces a bomb/plane headed for a U.S. city skyline.

The post 9/11 twist, however, is that this family now bears the responsibility of saving the world from a Bond-like villain who also utilizes terrorist tactics. Henry Giroux and Grace Pollock detail the similarities between Buddy, the Bond-like villain "Syndrome," and media portrayals of international terrorists:

The connections . . . are multiple: his fixation on demolishing a superpower, his development of high-tech weaponry, his narcissistic rage, his ideological purpose, and, what resonates most clearly, his plan to gain power over a fearful public by launching a plane at Manhattan. At one point, Buddy even tells Mr. Incredible, "Now you respect me, because I'm a threat. . . . It turns out there's a lot of people, whole countries, who want respect. And they will pay through the nose to get it." <sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Henry A. Giroux and Grace Pollock. *The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence* (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), 148.



I argue that the connection between the American family and the war on terror is “brought home” in *The Incredibles*. Terrorism targets not just U.S. cities, but American families, specially their children. Below I detail scenes from *The Incredibles* that feature this connection.

### *When Children are Threatened*

The children in *The Incredibles* are pitch-perfect. Dash, the 8 year old, desperately wants to run, to show off, and to enjoy his super speed. He is “all boy.” Violet, the “tween,” shrinks from attention and covers her face with her hair; ironically, her superpower is her ability to become invisible. She is “all girl.” But both children are chased, shot at, imprisoned, and repeatedly blown up. Their guards turn crowd panic into a drinking game (“Hey, every time they run, you take a shot!), and they actually strike the children at various points in the film. It is their spunkiness and their superpowers that save them, but the children are put at risk in this film—as both victims and perpetrators of violence.

When Elastigirl visits Edna, modeled after fashion designer of the stars Edith Head, Edna thinks she is there to see the superhero costumes she is designing for the family. In speaking highly of her own costume designs, she says: “Simple. Elegant. Yet bold. You will die.” E punches a code, puts her palm on a screen, allows a retinal eye scan, and says her name into a microphone to gain entry to her studio; a weapon drops from the ceiling aimed at Elastigirl, so E adds “and guest.”

Elastigirl and E are travelling on a 60s-style people-mover, similar to ones found in Disney theme parks. They pass in front of a screen with images of E’s costume

designs, modeled by animatronic figures, under attack. E says, “I started with the baby. I cut it a little roomy for the free movement. The fabric is comfortable for sensitive skin.” Flames fill the screen, engulfing the “baby,” and E continues “and can also withstand a temperature of over 1000 degrees.” The “baby” is crawling again as flames disappear. E continues the fashion show as four automatic weapons appear and begin shooting at the “baby.” E says: “Completely bullet proof.”

The animatronic fashion show soon gives way to real threats to the children. Elastigirl flies a jet to rescue her captured husband, Mr. Incredible, and Dash and Violet have stowed away on the plane. The villain Buddy/Syndrome launches ground to air missiles to bring down the plane. In a harrowing scene that lasts two and one-half minutes, Elastigirl performs air maneuvers to escape the missiles and continues to call on the radio for the air base to abort, “Disengage! Disengage!” Finally, “There are children aboard this aircraft!” As the missiles make contact, Elastigirl jumps out of the pilot seat and wraps her body around her children. The explosion is amazingly realistic, and three bodies free-fall, unconscious.

Elastigirl, of course, regains consciousness, turns into a parachute, and safely gathers in her children before they all hit the ocean. But the speech she gives the following morning is a haunting one: “Remember the bad guys on those shows you used to watch on Saturday mornings? Well, these guys are not like those guys. They won’t exercise restraint because you’re children.” She continues: “They will kill you if they get the chance. Do not give them that chance.”

These scenes of children under attack—whether to demonstrate their super costumes or as passengers on a plane under attack—are reminiscent of media images of

terrorism. Fire engulfing a child, planes exploding, a mother diving on her children to protect them are images of contemporary war brought “home.” Elastigirl’s speech, that the children are under real threat, reinforces the contemporary message that children are not immune from war but are direct targets. “Those guys,” the villains of Saturday mornings, “are not like these guys,” terrorists out to destroy America.

### *Bond-Like Torture with a Twist*

The likenesses to James Bond spy-thrillers are multiple in *The Incredibles*. The entire musical track is reminiscent of “The James Bond theme,” written by Monty Norman and first appearing in the 1962 film *Dr. No*. Saxophones, brass, and a solo guitar are the staples of the sexy sound.<sup>39</sup> Crescendos during action scenes match the physical action blow for blow. The closing graphics are a wonderful animated homage to the famous Bond film opening credits—complete with psychedelic colors, graphics, and moving bodies in shadows. Mr. Incredible drives a convertible sports car; he dresses in sleek, 60s suits and ties; he works for a mysterious company with its own secret entrances. Buddy aka Syndrome is also a Bond-like villain with his army of faceless soldiers, an island fortress home complete with 60 foot rocket, and a Bond “girl” named Mirage. Buddy even says, “I’m Syndrome, your nemesis.”

When Mr. Incredible is captured by Buddy/Syndrome, he is suspended by his arms, crucifix style, six feet off the ground.<sup>40</sup> Unbeknownst to Mr. Incredible, his new

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<sup>39</sup> Christoph Lindner. *The James Bond Phenomenon: A Critical Reader* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 124.

<sup>40</sup> James Rovira. “*Casino Royale*: Taking It in the Cojones for Her Majesty’s Secret Service.” *Metaphilm*. [http://www.metaphilm.com/index.php/detail/casino\\_royale/htm](http://www.metaphilm.com/index.php/detail/casino_royale/htm). No comparison to torture in Bond films is complete without relating *the* Bond torture scene—one that still makes audiences, especially audiences of men, squeamish. While the James Bond films are famous for 007’s cool under pressure, the 1962

costume has sent an electronic signal with his GPS location. Buddy/Syndrome knows that an electronic signal has been sent and asks whom he has contacted. When Mr. Incredible responds with confusion, Syndrome points to a guard sitting at a control panel who pushes a button. Mr. Incredible moans and screams in agony as he is electrocuted. The interrogation continues, and Syndrome points to the guard again. The guard turns the control dial up until it reads “danger.” Mr. Incredible screams loudly; a reverse bird’s eye view close up of his screaming face fills the screen.

The physical torture is complemented by psychological torture. While suspended, Mr. Incredible hears the radio calls of Elastigirl on the plane. Mr. Incredible says to Syndrome that he’ll do anything if he calls off the missiles. He hears his wife plead, “There are children aboard this aircraft!” and he shouts, “No!” A disembodied voice acknowledges, “Plane down. Target destroyed.” Mr. Incredible now believes his family is dead. Like the iconic Christ on the cross, Mr. Incredible hangs limply, head lolling. Syndrome says, “Ah, you’ll get over it.”

Later, as Mirage comes to rescue him, he asks, “Why are you here? How can you possibly bring me lower? What more can you take away from me?” Mr. Incredible is choking her, and she can barely get the words out: “Family survived the crash. They’re here on the island!” Mr. I asks, “They’re alive?” He drops her and she falls to the floor gasping and coughing. He picks her up and hugs her. Like other Bond girls, Mirage, too, comes to our superhero’s rescue.

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*Casino Royale* and its 2006 remake both include a torture scene from the Ian Fleming novel. Bond is strapped naked in a chair, his testicles protruding from a hole in the chair. His scrotum is whipped with leather thong knotted at the end. James Rovira argues that this torture scene is Fleming’s attempt to recover British masculinity during the Cold War. Rovira writes: “There’s much to be said about this, especially how much of it reflects upon contemporary America. What I want to point out here is that James Bond himself exemplifies masculinity by this definition. When he can’t win with his wits and cunning, he wins with his fists and gun.”

The second electronic rack torture scene involves the capture and suspension of Mr. Incredible, Elastigirl, and their children. Here the action turns to monologue as Buddy/Syndrome berates the entire family. “Monologue” is a wonderful intertextual reference; early in the film, retired hero Bob and his buddy Frozone relive their action days, commenting on how evil villains always “monologue” before their downfall. Buddy’s monologue, as he discovers the entire family suspended, is brilliant: “Whoa, whoa, whoa. Time out! What have we here? Matching uniforms? Oh, no! Elastigirl? (Laughs) You married Elastigirl? Whoa! (He looks at their children.) And got busy! It’s a whole family of supers. Looks like I’ve hit the jackpot. Oh, this is just too good!”

Mr. Incredible also monologues, his epiphany about the value of his family dawning on him in no uncertain terms: “I’m sorry. This is my fault. I’ve been a lousy father. Blind to what I have. So obsessed with being undervalued that I undervalued all of you...” While he is talking, Violet escapes by producing a force field. He fails to notice what she’s done: “So caught up in the past that I...you are my greatest adventure. And I almost missed it. I swear, I’m gonna get us out of this safely if I...” Violet releases the family while remarking that the father has made tremendous progress.

The torture with a twist in *The Incredibles* is placing the entire family in peril. While the knob is never turned by Syndrome or a henchman to electrocute the *Incredibles’* family, the earlier scene of a screaming man is a haunting one. Syndrome’s monologue, so funny by itself, is tinged with the horrific possibility that the entire family may be electrocuted, already suspended six feet in the air. The American family, so powerful, is in peril—suspended by forces beyond our control. Giroux and Pollock write,

Although hearkening back to the nuclear family as the source of America's security and strength, the film diverges from past narratives in its emphasis on a natural order in which authority and power belong in the hands of the few strong leaders left in America, while the rest of us must duly recognize our inevitable "mediocrity." This overall message is especially disturbing in light of the events following 9/11, when the United States witnessed a growing authoritarianism throughout the larger culture.<sup>41</sup>

Only when individuals take back control, use and show their "superpowers" against all aggressors, will America be dominant again. Indeed, after destroying Syndrome, a new villain appears, "Under-Miner." The pun is not to be missed: The American family will be undermined if individuals do not stand up and fight.

### *The American Way and The Incredibles*

"Truth, justice, and the American way," the slogan of the Superman comics, was a staple of World War II rhetoric. Post 9/11 rhetoric offers a different sentiment, "one that neither shies away from the use of force nor requires any justification for its display of blatant chauvinism when confronted by others."<sup>42</sup> In *The Incredibles*, Superman has been replaced by James Bond—with a wife and 2.5 children—all of whom are central to a "bombproof collectivity" that features physical strength, speed, and elasticity.

Women and children are not protected from violence in post 9/11 rhetoric, but are central to the image of the American family at its heart. As part of this tradition, when the family faces their final confrontation with Buddy/Syndrome, he threatens baby Jack-Jack:

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<sup>41</sup> Henry A. Giroux and Grace Pollock. *The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence* (Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), 146.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-150.

“This isn’t the end of it! I will get your son, eventually. I’ll get your son!” The authority of the father, the protectionism of the mother, and the gendered stability of the children all reinforce traditional roles of the nuclear family. Torture serves to secure these roles and this family, forcing all to realize that a future of the American Way hangs in the balance.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### Torture and Beyond

Three Pixar films released from 2001 to 2010 coincide with a growing militarism that has characterized American culture since 9/11. Catherine Lutz defines militarism as “an intensification of the labor and resources allocated to military purposes, including the shaping of other institutions in synchrony with military goals. . . [as well as] the shaping of national histories in ways that glorify and legitimate military action.”<sup>43</sup> Henry Giroux, in “War on Terror: The Militarizing of Public Space and Culture in the United States,” details the ways in which “popular culture is increasingly bombarded with militarized values, symbols, and images.” He adds, “The rampant combination of fear and insecurity that is so much a part of a permanent war culture in the United States seems to bear down particularly hard on children.”<sup>44</sup>

My work on this thesis is motivated by my intense concern for children and how the militarized nationalism of post 9/11 fear-based rhetoric is infiltrating film aimed at children’s audiences. This study analyzed scenes of torture in three Pixar films, *Monsters, Inc.*, *Toy Story 3*, and *The Incredibles*. In my analysis, I found torture scenes framed in three ways: by state controlled industry for profit, by prison motifs, and by 1960s spy thrillers. These frames, each referencing other iconic media images, direct attention away from the torture scene itself—pain, screams, victim, and victimizer—through the films’

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<sup>43</sup> Catherine Lutz. “Making war at home in the United States: Militarization and the current crisis.” *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 723.

<sup>44</sup> Henry A. Giroux. “War on Terror: The Militarizing of Public Space and Culture in the United States.” *Third Text* 18, no. 4 (2004), 211–221. <http://www.henryagroux.com>.



invitations to enjoy the intertextuality, to laugh at the absurdity, and to excuse the violence as “only” cartoon slap-stick.

*Monsters, Inc.* takes the viewer inside a world of state, corporate, and electrical power which will do anything to maintain the status quo. Several characters, including a toddler not yet old enough to talk, are subjected to the torture chair; one is not rescued, and the effects of torture are revealed. The child, Boo, lost in an unfamiliar world full of violence, threats, and sadism spends most of the film running, hiding, and crying. The militarization of the electric company and the town in which it is located exhibits a monstrous world not unlike our own.

*Toy Story 3*, whose familiar characters have entertained since the first film in 1995, shows the tropes of prison life: surveillance, routine, punishment, and death to the spirit. Despite heavy security measures, coercive methods are employed to subdue prisoners: torture, solitary confinement, and psychological torment of prisoners. As in *Monsters, Inc.*, the visible results of torture are displayed when an old character has been beaten for giving away escape secrets. *Toy Story 3*'s cruel dialogue from an evil overlord, remembrance of loss, and extended scene of prison camp life creates nightmarish visions of the ultimate police state.

*The Incredibles*, whose release in 2004 garnered rave reviews for design, has many of the same tropes as the other films, but this time an emissary father is on the torture rack, followed by a mother, their son, and their daughter. Language, which warns children of becoming victims of murder through the illusion of the perfect 1960s family, celebrates their accomplishments as killing machines and exploits contemporary images of international terrorism, includes that of a plane headed to destroy a city like

Manhattan. The frame of the 1960s James Bond thrillers invites us to enjoy gendered masculinities and femininities, while reassuring us that American might is justified.

All three films utilized torture and its accoutrements, and no one—in the popular press or in the academic literature—even noticed. This naturalization of torture in children’s films not only deserves attention, it deserves to be condemned.

### **Beyond Torture**

If scenes of violence have been a staple of cartoons—say Tom chasing Jerry or the Coyote lighting dynamite under the Roadrunner, then these Pixar offerings, I argue, are something different altogether. First, *all three of these films characterize suffering at the hands of others as deserved and normative*. Business as usual, framed as corporate profits, prison routines, or spy thrillers, shut down critical facilities; critical facilities and interventions that might ask, “When is suffering deserved?” Victor Nell, argues there is a contemporary preponderance of acceptance of violence. He examines the “cultural elaborations of cruelty in war, in sacrificial rites, and as entertainment...[showing] the historical and cross-cultural stability of the uses of cruelty for punishment, amusement, and social control.”<sup>45</sup> Such stability—across time and history—deserves to be questioned rather than sanctioned in films directed at children.

Or films directed at adults for that matter. Roger Luckhurst points out that “‘Torture porn’ films [created for adult audiences] such as *Saw* or *Hostel* franchises are often related by their makers to a critique of state torture or as mechanisms of release, but are themselves condemned as basely complicitous in this brutalization...this traumatic

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<sup>45</sup> Victor Nell. “Cruelty’s Rewards: The gratifications of perpetrators and spectators.” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 29, no. 3 (2006): 211.

imagery seems numbed and neurasthenic, and it is rather alarming that Eli Roth, director of *Hostel*, reported in 2007 that his film was ‘one of the most popular movies in the military bases of American soldiers in Iraq.’<sup>46</sup> If film for the adult audience is an accomplice to transmission of ruthless content, certainly motion pictures made for a child audience are guilty of the same charge.

Second, *all three of these films utilize characters—monsters, toys, superheroes—who are conveniently outside of Butler’s “frames of recognition.”* Despite the “humanity” laminated on the characters and their worlds which are eerily similar to our own, the human/not human/less than human dilemma is central to a view which denies agency and subjectivity to lives. “Certain humans are recognized as less than human, and that form of qualified recognition does not lead to a liveable life,” writes Butler.<sup>47</sup> While clearly Butler did not have Buzz Lightyear, Boo, or Elastigirl in mind when she made this claim, these characters at once stand inside and apart from conversations about what violence might mean; there is no time to process brutality in between the laughter; no invitations are made to track real-life equivalents.

Torture is not only committed to extract information or brutalize an enemy, it also acts as disciplining force in the same way prisons, cameras, and fear-based images and rhetoric impact a society. For Butler,

[There] are two distinct forms of normative power: one operates through a symbolic identification of the face with the inhuman, foreclosing our apprehension of the human in the scene; the other works through radical effacement, so that there never was a human, there never was a life, and no

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<sup>46</sup> Roger Luckhurst. “Beyond Trauma: Torturous Times.” *European Journal of English Studies* 14, no. 1 (2010), 15.

<sup>47</sup> Judith Butler. *Undoing Gender* (London: Routledge, 2004), 2.

murder [or other negative act] has, therefore, even taken place. When we consider the ordinary ways that we think about humanization and dehumanization, we find the assumption that those who gain representation, especially self-representation, have a better chance of being humanized, and those who have no chance to represent themselves run a greater risk of being treated as less than human, regarded as less than human, or indeed, not regarded at all.<sup>48</sup>

In these three films, human vulnerability is a step removed rather than a step exposed. Cruelty done to the characters and its consequences are outside these “frames of recognition.”

Third, *all three of these films present images of children as weak, pathetic pests; as problems to be dealt with; as “Other.”* Lawrence Grossberg’s *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* is not only review and analysis of the path cultural studies has taken, but is purview and predictor of what will develop in the field and especially in the world at large. Grossberg hints at what is of paramount importance: the ways in which United States’ political and media moguls have crossed the proverbial line by using children in a variety of ways, not least of which is as part of a greater militarism. He notes a change in how children are viewed: “as little more than a series of problems to be controlled and contained, and as a potential threat and danger to society itself,” and concludes “significant forces [are] redefining childhood, reshaping the lives of children, and restructuring the place of children in society. . . . these changes have been inscribed in

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<sup>48</sup> Butler, Judith. *Prekarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London UK: Verso, 2004), 147, 141.

rhetorics of children as criminals, aliens, predators, and monsters – rhetorics that ignore the rampant mistreatment of and violence directed at children.”<sup>49</sup>

So these films include much more than enactments of torture: they present torture as deserved and normative; their characters stand outside frames of recognition for humanness; and they redefine children as threats and dangers. These are ideologies just as potent as the themes of nationalism, militarism, and a violated sacrosanct homeland. I argue that another sacrosanct homeland has been violated: the lived space of imagination of adults and children.

While adults are invited to be amused by regulation and control through the familiar tropes of profit, prison, and spying, what does it say when children’s imaginary realms now include torture tools, jailer’s methods, and terrorist tactics? The post 9/11 generation of children is inheriting a vastly different world from that of their parents and teachers. For Judith Butler, this world is one of

Mourning, fear, anxiety, rage. In the United States after September 11, 2001, we have been everywhere surrounded with violence, of having perpetrated it, having suffered it, living in fear of it, planning more of it. Violence is surely a touch of the worst order, a way in which the human vulnerability to other humans is exposed in its most terrifying way. . . .<sup>50</sup>

Whether intentional or not, the rhetorical and visual imagery in some contemporary children’s films introduces a host of potentially problematic discourses which deserve critical attention and intervention.

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<sup>49</sup> Grossberg, Lawrence. *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 61.

<sup>50</sup> Judith Butler. *Undoing Gender* (London: Routledge, 2004), 22.

It is difficult to say where the line should be drawn, and this is debatable theoretically and practically, but it seems clear something is amiss when torture enters children's film unnoticed. Part of the responsibility of a society is guiding its youth toward being responsible and respectful citizenry, as well as citizens of the world; thus, a pedagogy which promotes cruelty, violence, and hate is counterproductive. If it is acceptable to introduce such ideologies to young viewers, society may pay a price we've yet to imagine. That cost could be much more than that of a movie ticket.

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