PLAYING KILLBOX

DIDACTIC GAMING AND DRONE WARFARE

JENNA ANN ALTOMONTE

Who is remembered? Who is mourned? Who is responsible for remembering and mourning, and how can artists respond?

– Joseph DeLappe

In 2015, artist-activist Joseph DeLappe developed *Killbox,* a politically motivated online gaming experience. The premise for the game centered on the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs, also known as Drones) used in Northern Pakistan since the mid-2000s. Currently available for play, the game seeks to educate user-participants about *telepresent technology* used in both active and inactive warzones. Employed in the context of modern warfare, telepresent technology may be defined as a system used to connect actual users/operators to distant, geographical regions via telerobotic and/or telecommunication devices.[1] UAVs serve as an example of telepresent technology developed to reduce the presence of ground troops and decrease civilian casualties in war/conflict zones.

Recent projects by DeLappe and his collaborators investigate the execution and after-effects of UAV technology since the onset of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars of the 2000s. Throughout this chapter, *Killbox* will serve as the primary example of his collaborative work, supported by several other projects that examine the tension between telepresent technology and modern warfare. *Killbox* may be defined as a *didactic game,* a type of *serious game* that serves the primary purpose of educating and informing users about cultural, social and/or political issues. Originating from Clark C. Abt's influential text, *Serious Games,* and expanded by Ian Bogost in *Serious Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*, a *serious game* is defined as "a videogame created to support the existing and established interests of political, corporate, and social institutions."[2] However, Bogost also suggests that *serious games* are "not games in the service of governments, corporations, educational institutions, and their kindred but games that challenge such institutions, creating opportunities to question, change, or eliminate them.[3]

In *Killbox*, the game serves to educate the participant about UAV-initiated violence, challenging perceptions about telepresent technology. I apply the concept of didactic gaming as a tool for political activism centered on UAV criticism. This approach appears in other serious or politically-motived games like Miranda Zúñiga's *A Geography of Being,* a game that subverts that "purely ludic, pleasurable world" of virtual gaming space by exposing players to the fraught social climate occupied by undocumented immigrants in the United States.[4]

1. James Der Derian, "Global Swarming, Virtual Security, and Bosnia," *The Washington Quarterly* 19.3 (1996): 46.
2. Ian Bogost, *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames* (MIT Press, 2007), 55.
3. Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, 58.
4. Claire Taylor, "Serious Gaming: Critiques of Neoliberalism in the Works of Ricardo Miranda Zúñiga," in this anthology.

The didactic approach to *Killbox* centers on the gaming format used to instruct participants about the technology used in both active and inactive warzones. The game exposes users to the function, execution, and after-effects of UAV-initiated attacks, using basic interface that focuses on the *actions,* rather than visual effects. Rather than use human avatars, DeLappe opted for colored spheres without vocal or gestural signifiers. Thus, the game removes the visual identifiers of both operator and ground civilian, a trait offered by Phillip Penix-Tadsen that emphasizes the politics of play, rather then the visuality of game design.[5]

To further understand the premise/function of the piece for my research, I downloaded a version of the game and played the role of both a UAV operator and civilian on the ground. Included throughout this chapter, personal commentary on the effects of playing both operator and civilian explicate the function of the game as a critical evaluation of UAV technology. By playing the game, the participant is made aware about the process of engagement, issues of visibility, and the unpredictability of UAV strikes in both active and inactive warzones.

EARLY INFLUENCES

DeLappe's exposure to experimental and technology-based art practices originates from his youth and post-secondary education. Born in San Francisco, California in 1963, DeLappe grew up in a fertile atmosphere of political and social activism. After graduating high school, he contemplated joining the military, however a chance meeting with a Vietnam veteran recruiter changed his perspective:

> actually contacted a recruiter who had come to our school. I had a recruiter in my living room and the next step was to take this test in the Presidio, in San Francisco. There they classify where they would have you go. This guy actually talked me out of it. The recruiter—he was a Vietnam vet—probably just saw something in me; he said "You know, you really need to be sure there's something very specific you want to get out of this because it's not always for everybody." You may want to think about not doing this. It changed my life. This one person saying it maybe was not the right thing. And it wasn't the right thing.[6]

Instead of enlisting, DeLappe enrolled in San Jose State University (SJSU). At the time, San Jose stood at the intersection of the booming 1980s tech scene and the radical Bay Area punk movement. The tech/punk combination influenced his early creative process, namely through the anti-establishment lyrics of the musical scene and the interactive, collaborative approaches used in the digital arts milieu. With regards to his punk influence, DeLappe states, "I was, at the time, immersed in the hardcore punk rock scene in San Francisco: the Dead Kennedys, Flipper, DOA, Black Flag, etc.—these groups influenced my political stance in a rather radical way and at the same time they inspired me with their DIY sensibility."[7] While at SJSU, DeLappe enrolled in courses that challenged the relationship between technology and the visual arts. One of the more progressive programs offered by the university was the Computers in Art, Design, Research and Education, or CADRE.[8] The CADRE program, formed in 1984, still serves as a source for utilizing the "tech-heavy" resources in Silicon Valley. Their current mission statement emphasizes the following:

5. See Phillip Penix-Tadsen, "Introduction: Video Games and the Global South," in this anthology.
6. Stephen Duncombe and Steve Lambert, "Joseph DeLappe," *Center for Artistic Activism*, 28 January 2012, http://artisticactivism.org/2012/01/joseph-DeLappe/.
7. In a 2016 interview with DeLappe, the artist cites a famous quote by Dead Kennedys lead singer Jello Biafra that perfectly encapsulates many of his digital intervention pieces: "Don't fight the media. Become the media." As evident in works like *dead-in-iraq* and *Twitter Torture/MGandhi in Jail*, DeLappe chooses not to "fight" against the power of the media, instead choosing to use digital and online space as a didactic tool for educating users about war and the plight of civilians caught in spaces of violence. See Scott Beauchamp, "A Critique of Conscience in Joseph DeLappe's Video Games," *Pacific Standard*, 4 May 2016, https://psmag.com/a-critique-of-conscience-in-joseph-DeLappes-video-games-7b21fad381dc#.yquxcrw5v.
8. Beauchamp, "A Critique of Conscience."

> [CADRE] is dedicated to research and experimentation in a multitude of areas. It has branched out from the Art Department to become a truly interdisciplinary program that has included courses from Engineering, Computer Science, Theatre Arts, and Library Science. Topics of study include surveillance, digital media aesthetics, artificial life, robotics, mobile computing, and databases as art.[9]

During his undergraduate career, the curriculum focused on pushing the limits and definitions of art through technological interventions. For example, in an early digital art work titled *Computerized Confessional*, DeLappe examined the relationship between machine and human. In the piece, participants engaged an Apple IIe computer by kneeling in front of the screen and confessing their sins. As in *Killbox,* the premise for the piece required direct exchange between the digital interface and participant, detailing the role of technology as the "higher power." This encounter between a human and computer device remains a constant in many of DeLappe's projects, representing human dependence on technology.

During his MFA residency at SJSU, DeLappe was exposed to the performances of Linda Montano and Laurie Anderson. He recalls the following about his contact with feminist performance art from the 1970s and 1980s:

> It has been primarily women performance artists whom I find most interesting—excluded from the galleries and museums they took to the streets and to life to make their creative statements. I first engaged in performing in game spaces upon the realization that these online environments could be considered a new type of public space. I definitely consider my work to have a direct lineage to street theater/interventions, etc.

The link to intervention-based art serves as the main thematic drive for many of DeLappe's works. Since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, many of his performances and installations challenge online presence through virtual occupation/intervention. The works selected for this chapter utilize the performance-based intervention methods influenced by Montano and Anderson and furthered by the rise of gaming and gaming-based art in the early 2000s.

OCCUPYING ONLINE SPACE: *DEAD-IN-IRAQ*

In an example from 2002, DeLappe occupied the online MMORPG (massively multiplayer online role-playing game) site *Quake III: Arena*. In a performance titled *Quake/Friends*, DeLappe and a group of students created avatars based on the popular television series *Friends.* They used the online message box to recite, verbatim, lines from one of the episodes. Other users continuously shot and killed the avatars, causing each student to "respawn" and continue reading the lines from the episode. After three hours, the performance concluded. In 2006, DeLappe would build upon this MMORPG experience with the creation of *dead-in-iraq*, one of his more critical contributions to intervention art and digital performance.

Unlike the collaborative effort in *Quake/Friends*, *dead-in-Iraq* involved a single avatar created by DeLappe. The location of the digital performance took place over the course of five years within the online MMORPG space of *America's Army*, a virtual location which proved pivotal to DeLappe's performance. Produced under the direction of Col. Casey Wardynski, the *America's Army* series dates to 1999. Influenced by his son's interest in video games, Wardynski sought to develop a gaming platform that would appeal to America's youth. Used to influence younger generations of potential

9. "History," *CADRE Media Lab*, http://cadre.sjsu.edu/?page_id=59.

military recruits, the game provided participants access to simulated military campaigns combined with rules and regulations enforced in actual warzones. Per *America's Army* objective, the game:

> …provides civilians with an inside perspective and a virtual role in today's high-tech Army. The game reflects the bedrocks of Soldiering to include adherence to Army Values, the importance of training and individual development, as well as the necessity of teamwork and leadership for success in small unit actions and missions. In the *America's Army* game, players are bound by Rules of Engagement (ROE) as they take part in multiplayer force on force operations.[10]

Using commentary and testimony from actual soldiers and veterans, the game was advertised as an authentic experience within the online gaming environment. After several years of development and design, the game became active on July 4, 2002 and cost the U.S. Army $7.5 million to produce. Currently, over nine million online accounts are registered with 42.6 million downloads from 60 countries since the game's creation.

Users "play" numerous scenarios within the gaming space. As in actual military training, users must pass combat and rifle marksmanship courses before advancing to actual group gameplay.[11] After passing the courses, users may choose to lead a raid attack in Iraq or negotiate a domestic hostage exchange in the U.S.. In each case, users must work with other participants to problem solve the scenario and work together to successfully complete each task. To complement each scenario, users face a high-tech environment that mimics desert villages and urban city scenes. The sophisticated design of the game supersedes many top-game developing firms like Activision, Infinity Ward and Ubisoft. Seamless graphics add to the "realism" of the gaming environment, challenging users to traverse complex terrain and urban structures. Rules of engagement also apply and violating such rules can disqualify players from the game. If a player fails a mission or accidently shoots a fellow team member, consequences include imprisonment in the digital Ft. Leavenworth prison, arrest as a prisoner-of-war, or death of the user's avatar.

One of the key issues with the game centers on youth engagement. Although marketed as T for Teen, or available for children ages 13 and up, many critics view the game as inappropriate for young adolescents. Wardynski insists that the game "is definitely not" a recruiting device, but instead a "communication tool designed to show players that the army is a high tech, exciting organization with lots to do." James Paul Gee provides commentary on the function of *America's Army* and the methods of recruiting youth using the video game:

> I don't think they wanted it to be just a recruiting device, but to brand the Army. They wanted to say…a modern army is high-tech, collaborative. You have to be on a team, got to be a team player, and have to use pretty sophisticated technology. Games are very good to let the world know what your world looks like. If I want you to know- how does the world look to me? One way to do that is to put you in it. And the Army did it.

Gee and many critics of the game argue that *America's Army* lacks a certain level of "transparency." Many users are unaware that the U.S. Army tracks successful progress within the game, actively engaging participants that succeed within the MMO environment. This could be viewed as a type of youth recruiting device, using the video game platform to encourage children to "play" war games sanctioned by the U.S. government.

10. "America's Army PC Game Fact Sheet," *America's Army*, http://assets.americasarmy.com/americas_army_fact_sheet_sept_15_for_aapg_launch_final.doc.
11. Bogost, *Persuasive Games*, 75.

A consequence of playing *America's Army* centers on the disjuncture between the actual warzone in Iraq and the digital gaming space. Outlined in "Social Realism and Gaming," Alexander Galloway considers the method of play and the gaming environment in *America's Army.* He argues that the game fails his *congruence requirement*, a method of measuring the relationship between the virtual gaming environment to actual spaces:

> I suggest there must be some kind of congruence, some type of *fidelity of context* that transliterates itself from the social reality of the gamer, through one's thumbs, into the game environment and back again. This is what I call the "congruence requirement" and it is necessary for achieving realism in gaming. Without it there is no true realism.[12]

This disjuncture occurs due to the lack of realism produced by both the gaming environment and method of play. The game only presents one position, that of the American soldier. Thus, there is a fixed narrative that requires players to perform a single role without playing the "Other." In *Performance, Politics, and the War on Terror: 'Whatever it Takes,'* Sara Brady criticizes *America's Army* for forcing players to play the "good guys,"

> We, as US soldiers, as ourselves (and global players also playing US soldiers, playing "other"), fight an amorphous enemy. By doing so "we," the players, participate in cultural myths acquiescing to hegemonic US geopolitical force…the enemy of *America's Army* is unformed, "unreal," it was designed only to represent the *behavior* of the terrorist, void of ethnic or religious identity.[13]

In *dead-in-iraq*, DeLappe worked to fracture the single mode of play by making visible the actual consequences of war via textual intervention.

Many users play the game without understanding the after-effects of *actual* warfare. As a means of disrupting the space occupied by players, DeLappe created an account under the name *dead-in-iraq* with the intention of dismissing acts of violence in exchange for memorializing real American troops killed since the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The layout of the game permitted DeLappe the opportunity to chat with other users via a text box located in the upper left corner of the screen. On the lower portion, a health tab and ammunition gauge tracked the number of bullets left in the weapons cache. As DeLappe traversed the terrain, he sought to pacify the scene by dropping his weapon and typing the names of American soldiers killed in the Iraq war. The text included their date of death and branch of military service. The names of the deceased were copied from the online death count website, icasualties.org, a website that logs the number of Coalition Military deaths from both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. By using the names of actual troops killed in the Iraq War, DeLappe fractured the simulated warzone in *America's Army*. The inclusion of actual names removed the façade of gameplay, making visible the consequential after-effects of war.

One major component of the piece centered on how other users engaged DeLappe. Some users messaged DeLappe or asked questions about the performance, while others forced him off the site by killing his avatar or complaining to the site administrator. A typical screen transcript reads as follows:

[US Army] –hk-burritoman#1 messaged: i think they are dates of deaths of soldiers

[US Army] dead-in-iraq messaged: CEDRIC LAMONT LENNON 32 ARMY JUN 24 2003

[US Army] BgRobSmith messaged: are those real people??

12. Alexander R. Galloway, "Social Realism and Gaming," *Game Studies* 4.1 (2004).
13. Sara Brady, *Performance, Politics, and the War on Terror: 'Whatever It Takes'* (Palgrave, 2012), 88-89.

[US Army] dead-in-iraq messaged: JOHN ELI BROWN 21 ARMY APR 14 2003

[OpFor] bin-lad-e-nG.W.B messaged: I am srry

[US Army] dead-in-iraq messaged: JOSEPH ACEVEDO 46 NAVY APR 13 2003

[OpFor] bin-lad-e-nG.W.B messaged: I am srry

KICK NOTIFICATION: dead-in-iraq has been kicked by an Administrator

[US Army] dead-in-iraq messaged: JIMMY J ARROYAVE 30 MARINE APR 15 2004

[Admin] [BM]LoftyDog ADMIN MESSAGE: cause i dont need to sit through a list of over 1000 deaths

[Enemy] stepdown messaged: RIP, THIS IS A GAME

[US Army] dead-in-iraq messaged: HESLEY BOX JR 24 ARMY MAY 6 2004

[US Army] dead-in-iraq: ERICK J HODGES 21 MARINE NOV 10 2004

[US Army] –os-zelptic messaged: dead stfu you dumb **** {FUBAR}rtftd was shot by {-Boomer-}

[US Army] turkeybird messaged: who cares

[US Army] dead-in-iraq messaged: GEORGE T ALEXANDER JR 34 ARMY OCT 22 2005

[US Army] Pvt_Styx messaged: jeeez shut up already we get it people died

[US Army} ={UMD}=HairyJohnson messaged: hmmm so whats your point?

XSTALKERX89 was shot by {UMD}=MORE_BEER.

As evident in the transcript, some users verbally assaulted him by cursing, condemning his actions or shooting his avatar. The administrator of the gaming simulation even forcibly removed DeLappe several times from active game play.

While part of the performance of *dead-in-iraq* includes social intervention within online space, the piece also serves as a memorial to the nearly 4,500 American soldiers killed in the Iraq War (2003-2018). The appearance of victims' names is a trait common to several post-Vietnam memorials like Maya Lin's Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, the Oklahoma City National Memorial and several of the 9/11 Memorials, where names appear etched onto the surfaces of granite tablets or slabs. Through his avatar *dead-in-iraq*, DeLappe typed the names of each fallen soldier as a memorial to the deceased. Many of the users from *America's Army* reacted by complaining to administrators that DeLappe made the game *too real* and took away the joy of escapism within the online gaming environment. However, since the game serves to recruit users to join the armed forces, should users be aware of the real casualties of war? DeLappe responded with the following criticism:

> One of the things that has intrigued people about this work is that it is in this online context. It is essentially military territory online. It's a kind of base if you will. People who have…complained to me about this, like "this is not the place to protest go do this on the federal building steps." And I'll respond to them…and I said look I'm taking this to the source. There's a reason why in the '60s blacks went to lunch counters. They created meaning by actually going into that context. It's the same thing I'm doing here. I mean I could go to

> the federal building and stand there and read a list of these names but who's going to pay attention to that? This got your attention.

By finding an online location where young users convene, DeLappe used the site to memorialize, but to also expose players to the harmful possibilities of joining the U.S. military during an active war. By continuously performing the piece in *America's Army*, he served as a constant reminder to users about violent after-effects of warfare.

KILLBOX AND OTHER UAV-THEMED WORKS

Unlike the occupation of a pre-designed gaming site in *America's Army,* DeLappe and a group of collaborators created the online game *Killbox* as an independent digital intervention about UAV technology. *Killbox* serves as one of several other projects in a series by DeLappe that critically evaluates the use of UAVs in both active and inactive war zones. Other works in the series include *Project 929: Mapping the Solar* (2013), a 10-day performance in which DeLappe rode a bicycle around Nellis Air Force Base in Nevada, dragging a piece of chalk for 460 miles. The piece sought to highlight the amount of space needed to create a solar farm large enough to power the entire continental United States.[14] *Cowardly Drones* (2013) was an intervention piece where DeLappe added the word "Cowardly" to the body of General Atomic's MQ1-Predator and MQ9 Reaper Drones and uploaded the doctored images as searchable jpgs in Google and Bing. Created in 2014, *Me and My Predator* permitted participants to download schematics for a wearable art piece—still available at http://www.instructables.com/, users can create an exact 1/72 scale replica of a Predator Drone, fastened to a carbon-fiber rod measuring roughly three feet in length.[15] The rod attaches to a metal C-clamp head strap made of aluminum that rests on the posterior of the head. Once secured in place, the drone hovers above the participant's head. DeLappe states that "the Personal Drone System is designed for insecurity and comfort—to simulate using analog technologies and what it might be like to live under droned skies…." *Drone Strike Visualization* (2014-2015) mapped UAV-initiated bombing sites in Mir Ali, Pakistan, highlighting the number of deaths caused from aerial attacks. In each piece, the UAV objects serve to explicate locations of action and occupation, making visible places (and spaces) traversed by UAVs.

Killbox is the most recent piece in this series of UAV-inspired works. Building off the other pieces in the series, DeLappe teamed up with several artists and software engineers to create an interactive gaming site that focused on the implementation and after-effects of UAV strikes. Collaborators include: Malath Abbas, co-founder of Quartic Llama, Tom deMajo, head game designer and sound engineer, and Albert Elwin, a programmer and founder of Space Budgie.[16]

The title for the game originates from the military term: the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) defines a *kill box* as "a three-dimensional area reference that enables timely, effective coordination and controls and facilitates rapid attacks."[17] Put simply, a kill box space serves as an open-range kill zone where targets may be neutralized based on threat levels. With the onset of urban warfare, a kill box requires efficient data analysis, cartographic expertise and technological prowess. In "The Moral Cost of the Kill Box," Scott Beauchamp discusses how modern kill boxes are used:

14. Joseph DeLappe, "On the Making of Killbox…," *Killbox*, 29 March 2016, https://www.killbox.info/killbox/.
15. Joseph DeLappe, "Me and My Predator," *Joseph DeLappe*, http://www.DeLappe.net/sculptureinstallation/me-and-my-predator/.
16. Jo-Ann Green, "Turbulence.org Commission: 'Killbox' by Joseph DeLappe, et al.," *Networked Performance*, http://archive.turbulence.org/blog/2015/09/22/turbulenceorg-commission-kill-box-by-joseph-DeLappe-et-al/.
17. Scott Beauchamp, "The Moral Cost of the Kill Box," *The Atlantic*, 26 February 2016, http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/02/the-cost-of-the-kill-box/470751/.

> First, kill boxes have materialized in places the local population might not expect. And second, kill boxes have been used in conjunction with disposition matrices, or "kill lists." The DOD uses these to target people whose "pattern of life" fits the parameters of an algorithm, rather than specific individuals. For example: Say someone who owns a cellphone has been calling numbers that trigger a response from a computer at the Pentagon. Analysts will triangulate the cellphone's whereabouts, and military leaders might initiate a 'kill box' at that location, authorizing soldiers to kill everyone within the 'box.' Mission accomplished.[18]

For example, if a suspected ISIS cell in Iraq makes a series of references to terrorist attacks using cellphones or computers, surveillance teams can pinpoint the location of the suspected cell and decide to survey the region for possible threats. If the threat is imminent and the region is properly surveyed according to the "pattern of life" parameter, then the target is neutralized.

In the past, warfare required the actual visualization of hostile enemies by ground units, supplemented by aerial surveillance devices. Beginning with the Persian Gulf War and the weaponization of UAVs, the need for ground troops decreased, relying on telepresent technology and aerial surveillance devices. Beauchamp continues his critique of the UAV-kill box marriage by stating:

> The military began using kill boxes in the so-called war on terror as a technique to exert force in "ungoverned spaces," territories that are not controlled by a state and are populated by people who might not share American cultural values… The innocent people living in Afghanistan or Yemen, however, are apparently judged by a different standard. And this is the moral cost of the kill box: When used widely and indiscriminately, the tactic devalues human life.[19]

This facet of military UAV warfare deserves attention, specifically in the aftermath of several bombings on civilian hospitals run by Doctors without Borders (DWB) in Syria. In fact, several reports claim that DWB-sponsored facilities have been hit over 50 times in the past several years in Iraq and Syria alone, killing civilians, doctors and staff.[20] DeLappe's game serves to educate the public about the loss of innocent life with regards to UAVs and how operators risk civilian casualties in combat zones.

Unlike *America's Army*, *Killbox* focuses primarily on the objective/task of the designated avatar. Rather than inundate the player with a sophisticated, three-dimensional environment, the game's landscape is reduced to rudimentary, geometric shapes and basic terrain indicators. Instead of sharp, high-contrast shadows and detailed color graphics, buildings appear as square blocks. Monochrome colored dots replace the realistic bodies found in *America's Army.* Although the game's designers have the necessary credentials to create a highly sophisticated game, their decision to create a rudimentary design serves a strategic purpose: their reasoning is based on "the setting of cultural signifiers that may trigger a player's prejudices, and to show how artificial the world may feel when viewed through a circling camera." Without the distraction of realistic set designs, the user can focus on the *process* of playing, rather than the graphics or plethora of action options provided to players in *America's Army*.

Unlike *dead-in-iraq,* the premise of *Killbox* requires users to download the game from http://turbulence.org/commissions/Killbox/ and play one of two roles available (see Image 1.3.1, Image 1.3.3).[21] To fully understand the premise and objective behind the game for my research, I downloaded a version of *Killbox* from the website and documented my experience. The following details my movement through the space:

18. Beauchamp, "The Moral Cost of the Kill Box."
19. Ibid.
20. Rudaw, "'Syria Is a Kill Box' Says Medical NGO," *Rudaw,* 18 February 2016, http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/180220161.
21. Credit for all images belongs to Joseph DeLappe and the Biome Collective.

As a first-time user, I follow the link to turbulence.org, an online digital arts project. The link to Killbox leads me to a separate site that provides the basic premise for the piece, supplemented by two links to download the game (one for PC, the other MAC). Once the game is downloaded, the Killbox logo appears on a black screen, followed by two icons. On the left side of the screen, a green icon appears and the right, a red icon. When I guide the mouse over the icons, the green dot turns into a humanoid figure wearing a headset with the text "PLAYER 1" above the head. When the mouse hovers over the red dot, the icon rapidly changes from a child icon to a woman to a man. Above the flickering figures, a text box reads "PLAYER 2." I first venture into the PLAYER 1 scenario.

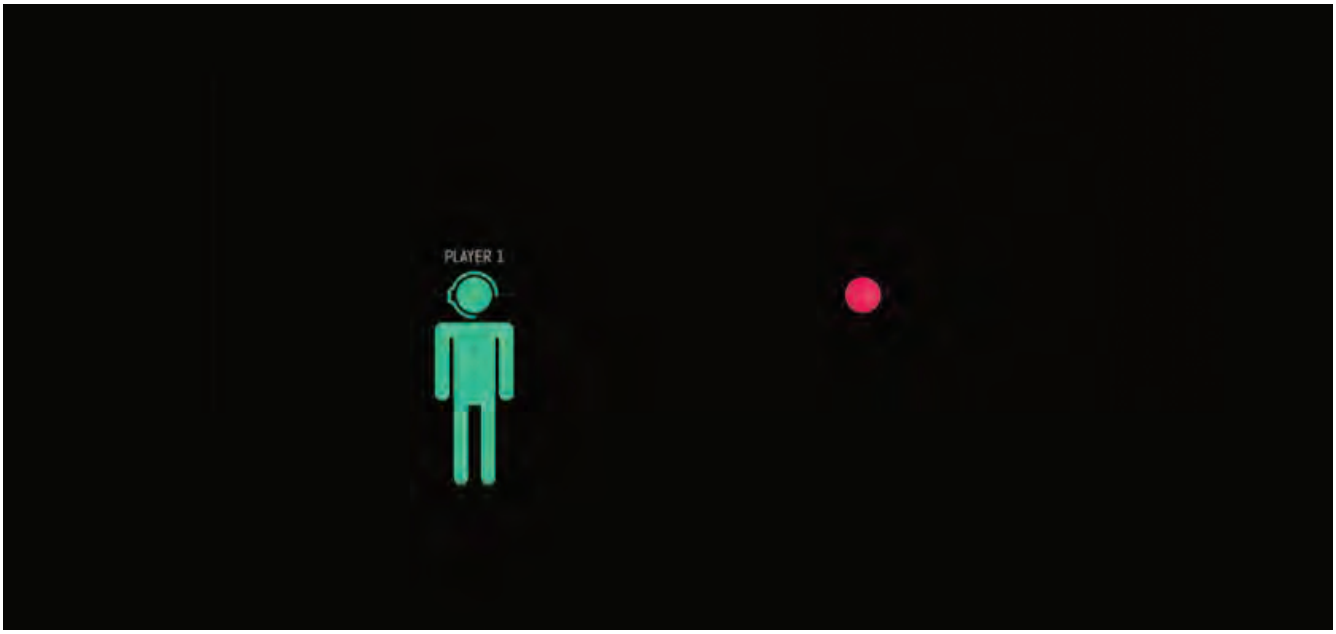

Image 1.3.1. Player 1 option, Killbox, 2016.

First, I type a username and password to start. Users must then press "L" to continue. The text line moves up. The name "CREECH AIRBASE 4320" appears, followed by a series of GPS coordinates. More numbers appear, seemingly arbitrarily in their sequence. The next action indicates that the drone is located over Waziristan, Pakistan. I continue through the space:

Next, the screen indicates a system check for a MQ-1 Predator. More numbers and coordinates appear. Slowly, the left 2/3 of the screen opens into a digital landscape. Rudimentary, white buildings, green grass, a beige walkway, and rows of green triangles appear in the scene. The lower right section displays actual instruments used by UAVs and military aircrafts, including the elevation and GPS coordinates while the left and upper portion displays distance measurements, the height above target, range, and bearings. The silence is interrupted by voices speaking over a radio. The voice over the radio is unclear, providing little to no information. I hear alphanumerical sequences. A command option tasks the player with testing camera keys to move the UAV camera left (A key), right (D key), up (W key), down (S key), zoom-in (I key), and zoom-out (O key) (see Image 1.3.2)*. Once the keys are pressed, the text box reads "All Systems Operational." Next, I confirm the target by pressing the T key. The ground target is then locked. After several seconds, I press the M key in order to launch the missile. Upon closer inspection, small dots move around the space, some in clusters, others alone. A red square appears around one of the dots. Once the missile makes contact, two black spheres appear on the target site as the buildings crumble and the surviving dots cluster away from the target zone. The user can then shoot another missile at the target. The screen fades to black.*

A small red dot appears on the black screen (see Image 1.3.3)*. I am now in the role of Player 2. The occasional bird chirp breaks the silence of the gaming space. Waziristan, Pakistan is written on the side of a low building, coupled with the command keys: MOVE: W/A/S/D LOOK: MOUSE JUMP: SPACE. As I traverse the terrain,*

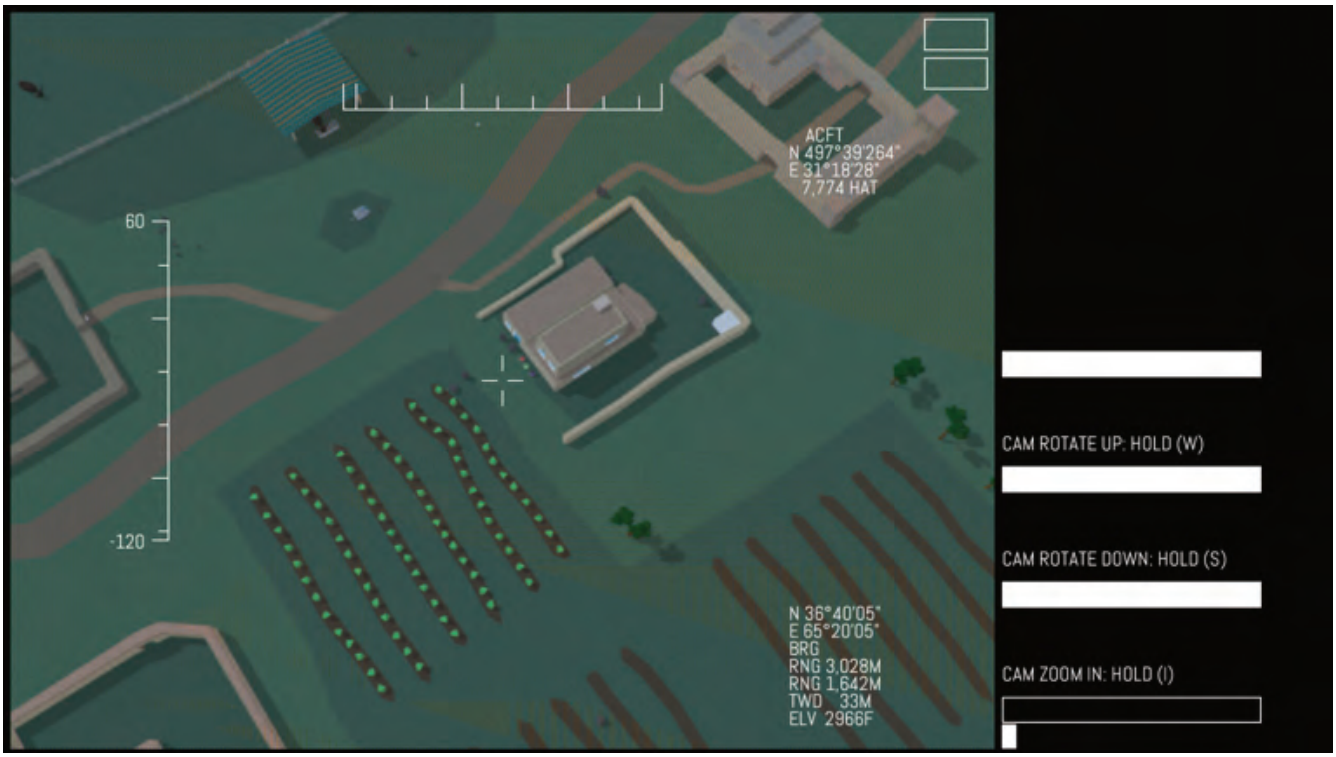

Image 1.3.2. Command key test, Killbox, 2016.

the dots disappear when the player 2 sphere runs over them. Gelatinous, multi-colored forms move through the space.

Image 1.3.3. Player 2 point-of-view, Killbox, 2016.

A loud explosion followed by a black scene interrupts my movement (see Image 1.3.4). *The scene turns to a grey overlay and then fades to black. The screen remains black for several seconds.*

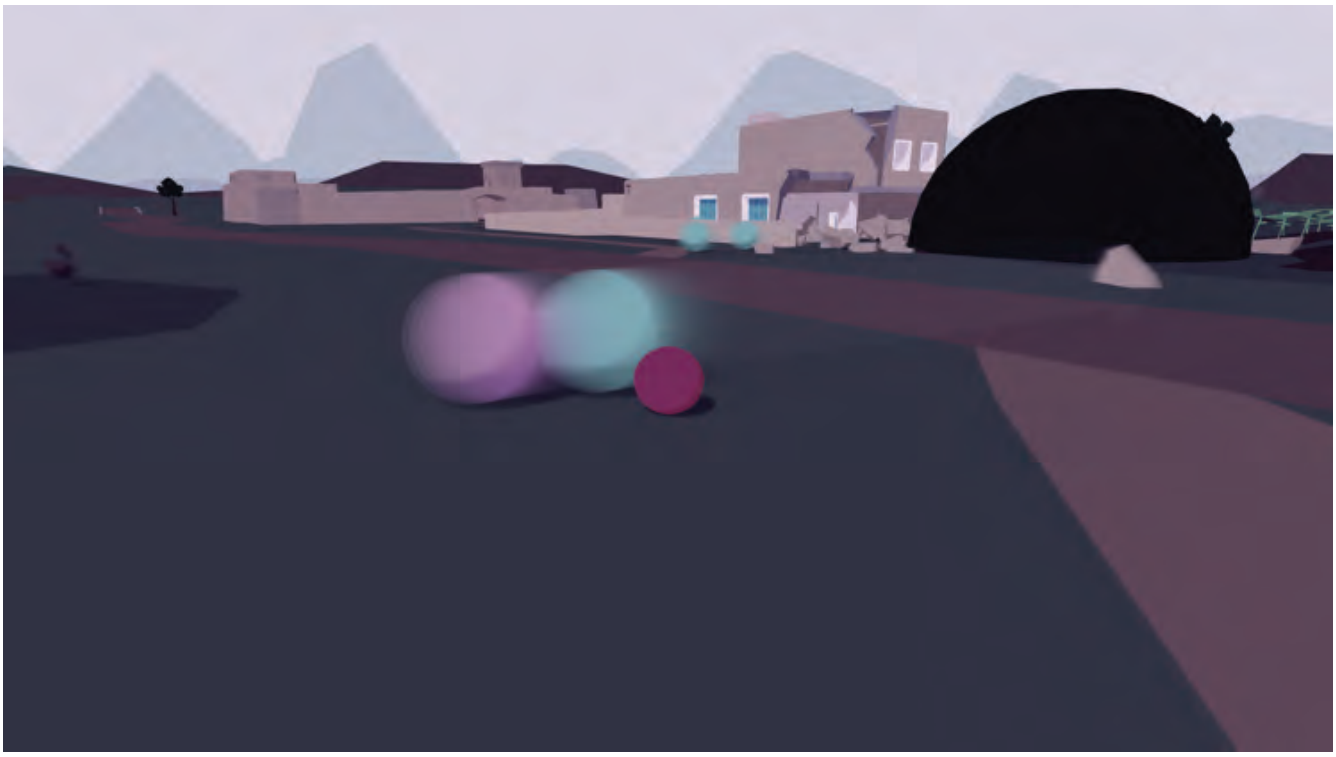

Image 1.3.4. Aerial UAV hit, moment of impact, Killbox, 2016.

An information box appears (see Image 1.3.5).

The text reads:

In 2004 the first Unmanned Aerial Vehicle missile strike in an unofficial war zone was carried out in North Pakistan, killing four people including two children.

Since then over three thousand people have been killed by UAV-or Drone- strikes piloted from screens in cubicles thousands of miles away. Press any key to continue.

CONCLUSION: DIDACTIC GAMING

Killbox serves as a didactic tool for educating gamers about the accessibility of violent technology used in modern warfare. One issue with telepresent technology centers on the sanitized nature of UAV use. Building on cruise missile technology from the 1970s, the UAV was created to reduce both military and civilian casualties. Operators guiding UAVs could use the devices to reduce collateral damage, decrease ground troop presence and provide long-range support to remote regions. However, the main concern from UAV critics centers on the idea that "drones make killing too easy" and may blur geopolitical borders by major military powers. Reputable data on UAV collateral and civilian damage remains an issue, however, as cited in a report from 2012 by the Human Rights Clinic at Columbia Law School. Due to media bias and source tampering, there are issues gathering reliable information about civilian casualty rates associated with UAV-related strikes.[22] This issue is parlayed by Larry Lewis in *Rethinking the Drone War: National Security, Legitimacy, and Civilian Casualties in*

22. Chantal Grut, et. al. *Counting Drone Strike Deaths* (Human Rights Clinic, Columbia Law School, 2012), 5-6.

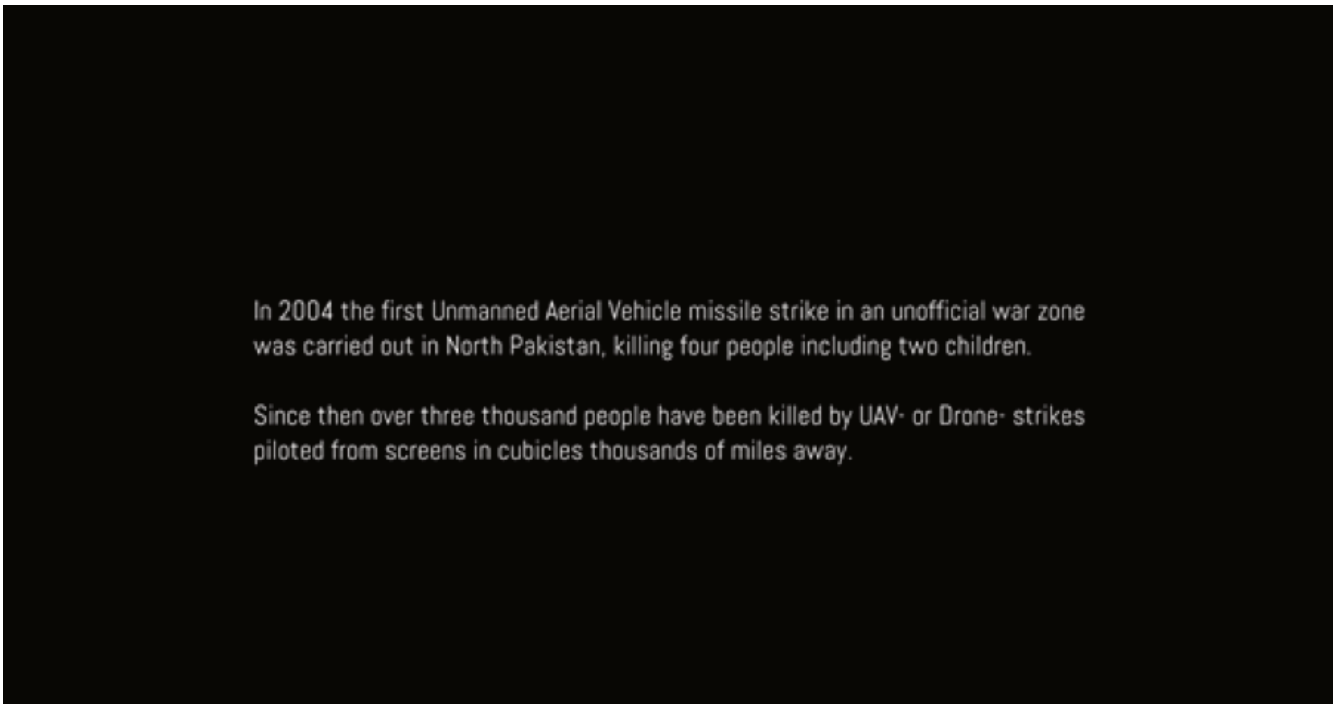

Image 1.3.5. Information screen, Killbox, 2016.

U.S. Counterterrorism Operations, where he extrapolates on how NGOs and government organizations gather data used to collect collateral and casualty statistics. Lewis estimates that UAV-related fatalities occur due to the "misidentification [of] civilians as enemy combatants [and] inaccurate assessments based on aerial surveillance." From this position, suspected terrorists often "co-locate" with civilians, obfuscating their identity.[23]

From a geopolitical standpoint, Tom deMajo, one of the collaborators on *Killbox*, explains that drones "bend legal boundaries, definitely territorial boundaries, but also psychological boundaries as well," asking "[h]ow do you reconcile yourself with killing on a screen, when you're used to doing it for fun?" In *Killbox,* the choice to use colored dots, rather than realistic bodies or avatars, serves a strategic purpose. For many UAV pilots and sensor operators, ground targets resemble small dots, making it very difficult to distinguish enemy combatants from civilians, especially in co-location scenarios. In the game, the user bombs these targets without consideration for what they may or may not represent. The same issue remains present for many UAV pilots when confronted with targets in regions where visibility may be low or targets undefined.

Killbox is not just a "video game" or form of entertainment, but a tool used to educate users about the power of violence produced by telepresent technology. The problem with the statement "killing made easy" derives from out-of-date research involving UAV crew and operator data. Cases of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for UAV pilots and sensor operators has increased exponentially, suggesting that "killing too easy" may be correct in terms of technological intervention, but not with regards to the humans operating the devices.

In 2014, 1,064 UAV pilots and operators were included in a United States Air Force study that

23. Larry Lewis and Diane Vavrichek, eds., *Rethinking the Drone War: National Security, Legitimacy, and Civilian Casualties in U.S. Counterterrorism Operations* (Marine Corps University Press, 2016), 12-13.

focused on the relationship between PTSD and indirect exposure to combat scenarios. Many UAV pilots and operators suffered from extreme exhaustion from working in isolation for 12 hours per day, up to six days a week. Others experienced depressive disorders after witnessing the deaths of civilians, combatants and fellow soldiers via the screen within their operator units. By using the monochrome figures in *Killbox,* DeLappe and his collaborators showed the difficulty of identifying figures as combatants or non-combatants from the position of the operator. Thus, *Killbox* provides users the opportunity to experience, albeit on a minimal scale, the issues many operators face when having to strike targets on the ground.

Currently, the deployment of UAV and other telepresent devices serves to prevent acts of terrorism and neutralize potential threats in both active and inactive warzones. Using the game to inform participants about the various complications involved in the deployment of UAV devices, *Killbox* continues to operate as a downloadable game for play. The game functions not only as a video game or form of entertainment, but a didactic tool used to educate participants about the visibility issues affecting operators, the violent after-effects of UAV strikes, and the rise of civilian casualties in both declared and undeclare warzones.

WORKS CITED

"America's Army PC Game Fact Sheet." *America's Army*, http://assets.americasarmy.com/americas_army_fact_sheet_sept_15_for_aapg_launch_final.doc.

Beauchamp, Scott. "A Critique of Conscience in Joseph DeLappe's Video Games." *Pacific Standard. 4* May 2016. https://psmag.com/a-critique-of-conscience-in-joseph-DeLappes-video-games-7b21fad381dc#.yquxcrw5v.

—."The Moral Cost of the Kill Box." 26 February 2016. http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/02/the-cost-of-the-kill-box/470751/.

Bittanti, Matthew. "Interview: Joseph DeLappe, Pioneer of Online Game Performance Art." *Game Scenes: Art in the Age of Videogames*, 20 March 2010, http://artisticactivism.org/2012/01/joseph-DeLappe/.

Bogost, Ian. *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames.* MIT Press, 2007.

Brady, Sara. *Performance, Politics, and the War on Terror: "Whatever It Takes."* Palgrave, 2012.

Bumiller, Elisabeth. "Defense Chief Lifts Ban on Pictures of Coffins." *The New York Times*, 26 February 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/27/washington/27coffins.html?_r=0.

Chappelle, Wayne, Tanya Goodman, Laura Reardon and William Thompson. "An Analysis of Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms in United States Air Force Drone Operators." *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* 28 (2014): 480-487.

Coll, Steve. "The Unblinking Stare: The drone war in Pakistan." *The New Yorker*, 24 November 2014, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/11/24/unblinking-stare.

Der Derian, James. "Global Swarming, Virtual Security, and Bosnia." *The Washington Quarterly* 19.3 (1996): 45-56.

DeLappe, Joseph. "Drone Strike Visualization." *Joseph DeLappe*. http://www.DeLappe.net/installation/drone-strike-installation-prototype/.

—. "Me and My Predator." *Joseph DeLappe*, http://www.DeLappe.net/sculptureinstallation/me-and-my-predator/.

—. "On the Making of Killbox…." *Killbox*, 29 March 2016, http://www.killbox.info/killbox/

—. "Quake/Friends.1." *Joseph DeLappe*, http://www.DeLappe.net/game-art/quakefriends/.

—. "Virtual Commemoration: The Iraqi Memorial Project." Last modified 2011, http://www.iraqimemorial.org.

Duncombe, Stephen and Steve Lambert. "*Joseph DeLappe*." The Center for Artistic Activism, 28 January 2012, http://artisticactivism.org/2012/01/joseph-DeLappe/.

Galloway, Alexander R. "Social Realism and Gaming." *Games Studies* 4.1 (2004).

Grut, Chantal, et. al. *Counting Drone Strike Deaths*. Human Rights Clinic, Columbia Law School, 2012.

"History." *CADRE Media Lab*, http://cadre.sjsu.edu/?page_id=59.

Lewis, Larry and Diane Vavrichek, eds. *Rethinking the Drone War: National Security, Legitimacy, and Civilian Casualties in U.S. Counterterrorism Operations*. Marine Corps University Press, 2016.

"MQ-1B Predator." *U.S. Air Force*, 23 September 2015, http://www.af.mil/AboutUs/FactSheets/Display/tabid/224/Article/104469/mq-1b-predator.aspx.

"Playing America's Army." *PBS Frontline*. Last modified 2010, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/digitalnation/waging-war/a-new-generation/playing-americas-army.html.

Rudaw. "'Syria Is a Kill Box' Says Medical NGO," *Rudaw*, 28 February 2016, http://rudaw.net/english/middleeast/syria/180220161.

Stahl, Roger. *Militainment, Inc.: War, Media, and Popular Culture.* Routledge, 2010.

Wetzel, TSgt. Greg and MSgt. Ryan Wollenberg (Air Force In-flight Refuelers). Interview by Jenna Altomonte. 1 August 2016 and 15 July 2017.