"States of Exception"

The Paradox of Virtual Documentary Representation

Shortly after his inauguration in January of 2009, President Barack Obama made headlines by signing an executive order that pledged to close the prison camp at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, and revise US policies for questioning and detaining terror suspects. These moves sought to signal his administration's shift in waging the "war on terror" declared by his predecessor. He stated at the time: "The message that we are sending around the world is that the United States intends to prosecute the ongoing struggle against violence and terrorism" but will do so "in a manner consistent with our values and our ideals." In language intended to signify his rejection of the Bush-era binaries that drew stark contrasts between opposing sides, Obama added, "We continue to reject the false choice between our safety and our ideals."[1] After several attempts at closing the base failed within that time frame due to concerns over where to move prisoners, the administration admitted that finding a solution would take longer than expected and would contain provisions for extrajudicial trial and "indefinite detention." In spite of what may have been a sincere and honest attempt to undo the ethical and political damage created by Guantánamo, once established, such a place proves rather unyielding to the changing political tides that surround it.[2]

In the early months of his second term in office, long after the issue of Guantánamo had moved to the political and national back burner, Obama once again faced questions relating to his administration's policies on trying and prosecuting perceived enemies in the war on terror. This time, however, the issue at stake was the use of unmanned aerial vehicles to track and kill enemies of the United States without trial or official oversight. Rather than detain and imprison terror suspects, it seemed that the so-called kill policy

simply eliminated them outright. Attempting to draw attention to the issue, Senator Rand Paul took the extraordinary step of filibustering the Senate for thirteen hours, questioning the legality of using drones to kill US citizens on American soil without any congressional or judicial oversight.[3] Citing the need for national security and the authority to act quickly, the Obama administration, in its defense of its policy, sounded reminiscent of many of the rationalizations of its predecessor's. Many began to wonder if the "regime change" of 2008 had delivered much change at all.

The legal and ethical complexity of both the Guantánamo prison camp and the drone policy demonstrate the bizarre political and legal limbo entailed in waging the ongoing war on terror. Faced with a nonconventional enemy, one free of state identification and capable of blending in with existing populations, the US government eliminated any pretense of upholding long-standing ethical and legal norms around individual privacy, state transparency, and international human rights and political sovereignty. Starting with the passage of the Patriot Act, and extending through an ad hoc series of memos, policy declarations, and public and covert actions, the government began tracking, detaining, torturing, and killing those it suspected of further terrorist acts against the United States. In the process of justifying and carrying out these actions, it created a patch-work assemblage of legal and logistical anomalies—"vanishing points" that enabled the US government to execute and expand its war on terror.[4] Outside of the legal and ethical questions they present, drones and other forms of weapon-ized technology further sit at the heart of an increasingly technological arsenal that utilizes video-game and virtual technologies to recruit, train, and equip the soldiers fighting in and across the various "battlefields" that make up the war on terror.[5]

For those opposing the war and the way it is/was being fought, these same tools and technologies offer a means of exposing and opposing these policies. This chapter will contrast two radically opposed approaches that use virtual technology to simulate, document, and engage the bizarre battlefields of the war on terror: the US military's integration of networked technology and virtual en-vironments as exemplified by the *America's Army* video game and its expansive drone program, and the *Gone Gitmo* project created on the Second Life plat-form. *Gone Gitmo* was an early attempt to use the sandbox of a virtual world to expose one of the vanishing points in the military's arsenal of off-scene spaces: the Guantánamo prison complex, which had become ground zero for the gov-ernment's unprecedented and unlawful imprisonment of terror suspects after 9/11. Created on the virtual platform Second Life, *Gone Gitmo* demonstrates the problematic power of pushing documentary reality into a space of fantasy and play, challenging the easy distinctions between real and virtual spaces. *America's Army* and its drone program travel these same boundaries. Shortly after 9/11,

the military utilized the extensive assets it had invested in training simulators and virtual combat technologies over the previous decade to launch a free, multiplayer first-person-shooter video game to the public. Dubbed *America's Army,* the game was a clever tool for training and recruiting a new generation of soldiers to fight the war on terror.[6] Even as the game achieved these aims with a blockbuster degree of success, its prominence and purpose also attracted the attention of artists and activists seeking to complicate and critique the easy exchange it afforded between real and virtual conflict—a relationship further complicated by the military's increased reliance on drone technology to project power even farther from the soldiers tasked with fighting these battles.

Though the landscapes of the war on terror have become inaccessible to the type of optical recording technology traditionally used to wage and oppose war, both of these projects attempt to relay players back to reality in a way consistent with traditional documentary film. And yet, the military's massive recruiting and training efforts in *America's Army* end up distorting the reality of warfare, whereas the activist exposé *Gone Gitmo* skillfully plays on the realities of virtual representation to critique the military's policy of torture and indefinite detention. This difference enables one to offer a critique of the other, and together both demonstrate the possibility of maintaining a documentary impulse in the absence of the traditional documentary image.

TRAVELING FROM GUANTÁNAMO TO *GONE GITMO*

The question that Obama faced when he took office—how to handle Guantánamo—was also one that faced the myriad of political activists who opposed Guantánamo's existence, a group that included civil rights attorneys and human rights groups as well as journalists and documentary filmmakers. The military had repeatedly blocked requests for media access to the base and adequate legal representation for the men imprisoned there. This left such groups struggling to find a way, legally and visually, to represent Guantánamo in order to draw public attention to the issue and the individuals involved. Some of the unique tactics these groups utilized to "represent" Guantánamo offer insight into the complicated political issues surrounding it.[7] One such solution—the *Gone Gitmo* project on the virtual platform Second Life—demonstrates that the nature of such environments uniquely mirrors the paradoxical political nature of the physical place that they re-create.

Gone Gitmo, the product of a collaboration between University of Southern California (USC) graduate student Nonny de la Peña and USC visiting professor Peggy Weil, was created in 2007 during a residency of theirs at the Bay Area Video Coalition.[8] The guiding idea behind the project was to allow users of the Second Life platform to experience the Guantánamo Bay prison camp "firsthand" by virtually re-creating the prison in exacting detail. As the pair explained at an American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) event featuring the work:

> Our purpose is to raise awareness, initiate discussion and educate on habeas corpus issues by making a virtual but accessible Guantánamo Bay Prison in contrast to the real, but inaccessible, U.S. prison camp. We are using Second Life to expose a substantially new audience to these issues by extending the methods and images from documentary filmmaking into new online, participatory environments. . . . Our overriding philosophical challenge is to communicate a gravely serious matter in a medium known for games and entertainment. . . . As artists, we confront how to portray the practices in Guantánamo effectively and design an experience that does not trivialize torture (we will not torture your avatar) but will provoke thought and insight into the complicated issues surrounding detainees' rights.[9]

When users of Second Life typed in the project's address, their on-screen character (or avatar) was immediately hooded and transported, with the screen darkened, to a holding cell in the prison simulation on the project's space. Once there, they were free to explore the virtual space, which included links to numerous articles about the prison as well as a video feed running testimony by the few detainees who had been allowed to speak on camera about their experiences in the real prison. In order to leave the prison, visitors could simply enter the address of another Second Life location, whereupon their avatar would "fly away" from the prison—a form of individual autonomy many of its real-life inhabitants did not and do not experience. This description and the statement given by the project's creators demonstrate that *Gone Gitmo* is something of a paradox, a hybrid space that blends different media together to access each term through its opposite: the real by way of the virtual, the inaccessible via the open, the gravely serious in the space of play. In short, it answers a paradox with a paradox.

Second Life presented a provocative opportunity for this type of project. When it first came online in 2002–3, the platform puzzled many people because it wasn't necessarily clear what one was supposed to "do" there. A cross between an open-world or sandbox-style game (where users are allowed to freely explore the virtual-game world rather than play through with a specific goal in mind) and a collaboratively constructed environment, the platform offers users an enormous degree of freedom to decide how they will spend their time and to discover what sorts of spaces and events it might contain. At the height of its popularity, it commanded an enormous amount of creative, critical, and commercial attention, attracting major brands, universities, and artists alike.[10] Many imagined it as a sort idealized utopia—a space one could inhabit without the limitations that time, space, and resources place on us in our offline worlds. A virtual prison, in other words, may have been within the bounds of what one *could* create, but it fell well outside the interpretation that many had for the blank canvas that the platform presented to users.

The documentary tendency at work in *Gone Gitmo* is immediately apparent in its attempt to point us toward the real, historical world—in opposition to the imagined, fictional world typically on offer in Hollywood cinema. Fundamentally, we

FIGURE 4.1. The screenshot depicts the *Gone Gitmo* space in Second Life. The other image shows the actual space. Nonny de la Peña and Peggy Weil relied on satellite imagery of the prison to re-create scale and layout, and rare press photographs like this one to fill in the detail about construction materials. Photo credit: Petty Officer 1st Class Shane T. McCoy, U.S. Navy.

think of this connection to reality as a product of film's ability to faithfully record reality (its cinematic indexicality) and documentary's visual representation of historical events. But other formal methodologies have also been used to achieve this same end, including reenactment, interview, testimony, and even animation. Moreover, many of the cinematic conventions that foreground the expressive constructedness of the medium—like montage, subtitling, and frame composition—are components of documentary. Hence, the reality that appears in documentary arrives via many fictional routes. While it lacks the optical photographic indexicality of a film, *Gone Gitmo* seeks to represent reality as faithfully as possible. It re-creates the physical materiality of Guantánamo in precise detail, from the size and layout of the prison cells, to the details and building materials that are used in each of the spaces, to the orange jumpsuits worn by detainees.

Though one might convincingly argue that certain historical epics seek this same degree of material precision in order to open onto the most fictional of fantasies (James Cameron's *Titanic* [1997] comes stubbornly to mind), comparing *Gone Gitmo* with the rest of Second Life throws the distinction into greater relief. If we take the proponents of Second Life's ability to fulfill one's physical, material, and sexual desires and fantasies at their word, then many of its locations seem to mirror the purpose of mainstream fiction film. This starkly contrasts with a space like *Gone Gitmo.* One allows users to escape or alter reality; the other seeks to remind them of it.[11] If Second Life is a Hollywood-esque space of fantasy and play, *Gone Gitmo* is its "discourse of sobriety."[12]

Gone Gitmo further manifests a documentary impulse or tendency through its attempt to intervene in issues of social justice. To be sure, plenty of documentary films speak to issues other than those in the political arena, but documentary's attempt to inform, persuade, and advocate on this front certainly represents one of the genre's major categories.[13] Like a traditional political documentary, *Gone Gitmo* offers us both a specific political position (that Guantánamo should be closed) and a defined call to action (with links to write one's senator and specific interest groups to support.)[14] Beyond its connection to the real and its political sympathies, *Gone Gitmo* further shares several formal similarities with documentary form. The first is its ability to pull in multiple forms of media in order to marshal its argument and achieve its aims. Similar to a documentary that utilizes archival footage, interviews, newspapers, still photographs, sound recordings, and reenactment, *Gone Gitmo* contains elements of all of these things, including poetry written by detainees, newspaper headlines (with links to the stories), fragments of footage from traditional documentary film (taken from Nonny de la Peña's 2004 *Unconstitutional*), and reenactment (the hooding of the avatar and its placement in a C-17 transport plane when teleporting to the *Gone Gitmo* site). While the question of perspective, point-of-view, and omniscience in relation to virtual environments is complex, suffice it to say that Second Life contains its

own version of camera angle, depth-of-field, and so on—all roughly analogous to the role these qualities play in film language.[15]

But if *Gone Gitmo* exhibits these similarities to documentary film, there are also a number of points where it expands the limits of documentary. The first is the project's ability to stay current. As mentioned, the project includes a number of places where news feeds and other media sources are pulled in, similar to a Ken Burns–style pan and scan of these materials in a documentary. Unlike a film, however, which remains tied to a given historical point upon its completion, *Gone Gitmo* was both updatable and auto-updating. News feeds enabled visitors to be up-to-the-minute on the information they receive. The space itself was constructed and reconstructed several times to reflect changes in the physical layout of the Guantánamo camp itself, lending its representation a temporal mutability that would be impossible in film.[16] This gives it a sense of temporal currency that mimics the sense of time on the Internet more broadly (a quality that also has drawbacks that I'll discuss below).

The second advantage that *Gone Gitmo* offers over traditional film lies in its predominantly nonindexical form of representation. In spite of the best efforts of Linden Labs to make Second Life as photorealistic as possible, one would never confuse it with a photographic representation, much less reality itself.[17] On one hand, this extreme mediation removes us from the real that documentary always seeks, and yet it also reminds us of the limits of the experience we are given. We never confuse the representation with reality—a clarity that keeps visitors from overindulging in a potentially delusional empathy for the victims and focuses debate on the issue itself. One might come away feeling as though one better understood the issues involved, but it seems unlikely that anyone would feel as though he or she had experienced what the detainees in Guantánamo have experienced. In discussion boards populated by people who have been to the site, it is amazing to find very little of the cynicism regarding source material and omission that seems to haunt a filmmaker like Michael Moore.[18] Instead of debating the accuracy of the representation, participants turned to the ethics or efficacy of Guantánamo itself. Users seem to have no problem making the jump from the project itself to the issue involved, despite the mediated form the representation takes. While this doesn't necessarily promote a more civilized debate (something message boards rarely seem to achieve), it does enable the discussion to avoid getting mired in the form of the representation and instead engage the substance of the issues that it is raising.

The third advantage of *Gone Gitmo* over a traditional documentary film is the spatial access that it offers its users to the space of the camp. Under the veil of security, Guantánamo has been notoriously off-limits to outside observers from the United Nations, human rights groups, and the media.[19] In the absence of the ability to record the location itself, virtual environments offer an excellent opportunity

to open up otherwise invisible spaces. Furthermore, the user control and three-dimensional rendering offered in such an environment enables visitors to experience the project at their own pace, allowing them to linger or skip past different elements in a nonlinear, undirected order. Moreover, once one becomes used to moving around in Second Life, the particular sense of space it offers surpasses what we experience through two-dimensional images. An image of something like a prison cell can *look* small; trying to move an avatar inside of one begins to *feel* small. This clearly doesn't replicate the experience of actually being in the cell (with little to no hope of release), but neither does a film.[20]

As a form of representation, *Gone Gitmo* is thus a hybrid gesture that extends documentary's activist impulse into a medium that transcends some of its traditional limits. There are, however, some very clear limitations to working within Second Life as a platform, and in virtual environments more broadly. The primary drawback concerns the availability and accessibility of the project as compared to a film. Any user who wanted to experience *Gone Gitmo* as it was intended needs to have a fairly robust computer, a broadband Internet connection, and enough storage space and permission to download and install the Second Life application. After this, the user must register for an account (sharing personal data) and spend time learning the environment and its navigation tools. Weil and de la Peña were able to mitigate some of these factors in museum exhibitions and other venues by providing machines or projecting a recorded machinima of another user navigating the space.[21] While these workarounds opened the project to a wider audience, they obviously compromised something of the intended experience. Film and video certainly suffer from their own accessibility issues, but given their age, many of these issues have been addressed.

The availability of the project is, however, another matter. Since it was created on a commercial platform, the project had to be actively hosted in order to remain available to users. This required ongoing funding to cover the cost of the Second Life server space, whatever Linden Labs decided that cost would be. While the project received several development grants as well as donated space on different "islands" within Second Life (commercial accounts purchased by other groups), eventually the project ran out of options and disappeared off of the platform. Thankfully, a good deal of documentation remains due to the efforts of journalists like Draxtor Despres, but nonetheless the project no longer exists in its original format. This of course is a problem with any experimental technology, and certainly one that has confronted artists and curators working in digital forms like net art or CD-ROMs.[22] The interdependent framework of a website, dependent upon multiple layers of hardware and software from multiple commercial companies, has an abundance of failure points that can doom a project to obsolescence. This is compounded for projects dependent on a private, closed platform like Second Life, where the fate of the work is tied to the success or failure of the company

that hosts it. These obsolescence and availability factors make digital art delivered through platforms to individual computers at once more available but also more fleeting than a traditional film text. Ironically, the virtual Guantánamo closed before the real one that it was protesting.

Considering the advantages and disadvantages of virtual platforms like Second Life, we might wonder why Weil and de la Peña chose it over a more traditional, established medium. After all, both had extensive experience in film, photography, and video, de la Peña as a producer and director of feature-length documentary and Weil in different gallery and installation projects. A more straightforward documentary would have been well within their grasp. So why choose Second Life? Notable in the artists' statement quoted earlier is the reassurance that they will not "torture your avatar," and in light of the forms of mobility discussed above, it is clear that they do not imprison or detain it, either. This is a striking absence, given that torture and unlawful detention were the primary purpose of the real Guantánamo and the key point of its political controversy. But the reassurance speaks to the potentially strong identification that many users have with their avatars. For many, Second Life is manifestly about exploring different identities and social positions other than their own—a possibility that was a prominent part of the discussion surrounding it in the height of its popularity. And this remains the case well into Second Life's second decade on the Internet.[23] For the avid enthusiasts on the platform, *Gone Gitmo* offered a way to understand something of the situation confronting the Guantánamo detainees.

We can further see the appropriateness of building a virtual Guantánamo by delving into the more perplexing aspects of the real Guantánamo—a place I earlier described as a legal and political paradox. Prior to 9/11, many people considered state-sanctioned torture and uncharged imprisonment legal, if not logical, impossibilities. And yet, as Giorgio Agamben has argued, such "states of exception" lie at the very foundation of political sovereignty in every state, including Western democracy.[24] Drawing on Carl Schmitt's formulation in *Political Theology,* Agamben argues that the "state of exception" is the political and legal framework, present in all democracies, whereby the leaders of the state can nullify the existing constitution by declaring a form of martial law. This allows them to selectively and capriciously apply existing law and consign any specific group of individuals to whatever legal designation they deem politically expedient. (His designation for this is the "force of law.")[25] Far from being a simple clause in the constitution that may be amended, it is this exception that enables the rule of law itself to exist. Hence the paradox. Much of what followed 9/11, from the Patriot Act to Guantánamo and its detainees, has provided a textbook example for Agamben of the manner in which sovereignty exists simultaneously both inside and outside the law.

Where Agamben's work takes on a specific significance for the kinds of virtual spaces that *Gone Gitmo* and the other projects utilize is through his concept of

"bare life" and the particular biopolitical turn that he sees at the root of twentieth-century sovereignty. The "homo sacer" is the figure that emerges within those populations that sovereignty has excluded from the polis, but over whom it continues to exercise political power. Such people, reduced to a form of "bare life," vulnerable and exposed to violence and injury, exist within, and are subject to, this barest bodily materiality. Torture, imprisonment, and execution within an extrajuridical framework are all legitimated through this particular form of sovereign power, which reaches its zenith in spaces like Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib, and the other vanishing points of the war on terror. The bodily, material reduction to bare life of such spaces presents a provocative, and potentially problematic, counterpoint in the virtual worlds and disembodied spaces that both *Gone Gitmo* and *America's Army* utilize.

Much of Guantánamo's paradoxical state rests on extending the political/legal incongruity imposed on the bodies of individuals to the geographical spatiality Guantánamo occupies. Even its various labels ("prison camp." "detention facility," etc.) point to the indeterminacy of its exact nature. The space this defines has been further elaborated by geographers such as Derek Gregory, who draws out the particular colonial roots of both spaces like Guantánamo and the production of "homo sacer." For Gregory, such spaces are constituted and legitimated through the same tradition that justified settler colonialism and slavery. The "state of exception" (as well as the "space of exception" that it produces) is the flip side of the logic of Euro-American exceptionalism that surfaces when one of these sovereign powers decides to overstep or ignore the norms of international law that it would otherwise enforce on its neighbors. Rather than a kind of lawless black hole, Gregory maintains that these spaces are highly circumscribed and quite closely confined by the "ligatures between colonialism, violence and the law."[26]

It is tempting to dismiss the euphemistic labels applied to these spaces as further examples of the extreme limits to which political rhetoric was driven under the Bush administration. But as Judith Butler points out in *Precarious Life,* each of these terms is carefully crafted to perform significant political and legal legwork, stripping these individuals of not simply their rights but even their status as human beings.[27] The refusal to mourn the 9/11 attacks in a way that included a consideration of what caused them forced us to deny any consideration of the position of the Other, a refusal that opened the door for such future actions as denying detainees any claim to fundamental legal and human rights. Interestingly, Butler ties self/Other together in a way that locates responsibility and morality with both sides simultaneously, a move that places it in the same sort of liminal position that I'm claiming both Guantánamo and the *Gone Gitmo* project occupy. Part of shaping the discourse after 9/11 in a legal and media framework was deciding whose voice would be excluded from the conversation, an exclusion that *Gone Gitmo* and other activist representations seek to redress. The irony of the Bush administration's

ability to place things rhetorically into simple either/or terms ("You're either with us or against us") is that its policies proliferated in places and populations that are neither/nor any of the established positions. As the case of the Uighurs demonstrated, every case in relation to Guantánamo offers an exception to the rule, and exceptions in turn make the rules themselves entirely untenable and meaningless.[28] In short, as Agamben says, the exception becomes the rule.

Beyond simply exemplifying the paradoxical nature of political sovereignty, Guantánamo's very existence embodies legal and logical contradictions of its own. Consider, for example, that the US military even occupies a base on one of the few remaining Communist countries in the world, one that it has virtually locked out of any diplomatic connections for much of the last half century. Even as the Obama administration began to reestablish diplomatic ties and normalize relations with Cuba after Fidel Castro (moves the Trump administration has since largely reversed), there was very little question that the base would remain in US hands, regardless of what its primary purpose was. While the arrangement predates the Cuban revolution in the 1950s and the political enmity the Castro regime brought with it, the original lease on the land was a product of what Larry Birns calls the "19th century gunboat diplomacy practiced by Washington" in the wake of the Spanish-American War. Even then debates swirled as to whether the base would be covered under US or Cuban constitutional law.[29] With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the transfer of the Panama Canal in 1999, the base seemed to have lost any strategic benefit to the United States and was looked at for closure several times during Defense Department budget cuts in the 1990s. And then came September 11, 2001.

The very same aspects of the base that made Guantánamo such a perplexing place before the war on terror in both legal and political terms made it an ideal place afterward. This irony was already obvious as early 2003, when feminist scholar Amy Kaplan described Guantánamo in a *New York Times* op-ed piece as "a territory outside U.S sovereignty, held in perpetuity, where the U.S. military rules[.] Guantánamo is a chillingly appropriate place for the indefinite detention of unnamed enemies in a perpetual war against terror."[30] Kaplan later demonstrated that this same logic of uncertainty suffused the various US Supreme Court opinions that dealt with questions around the legal jurisdiction of Guantánamo due to its uncertain geopolitical location.[31] The only political entity with any claim to sovereignty over the base, the Cuban government, was the only one completely lacking the political or military resources to exercise it. The precedent for detention facilities there had been in place since the early 1990s, when the base was used to house both Haitian immigrants fleeing the fall of Jean-Bertrand Aristide's government in 1991 and the influx of Cuban refugees captured on the open sea between the United States and Cuba seeking asylum. The notorious Camp X-Ray, in fact, had been used during this time to house HIV-infected Haitian immigrants who were denied asylum in the United States. When the first detainees from the invasion

of Afghanistan began arriving there in 2002, their designation as illegal enemy combatants rather than as prisoners of war consequently denied them their rights under the Geneva Convention. These detainees fell into the same legal limbo that the base itself existed under for the last century. In Guantánamo, the US military had essentially secured the perfect place to settle the equally legally dubious individuals who would be brought there.[32]

The dark genius of Guantánamo's creation lies in its nature as a hybrid space of sorts, one that exclusively fits none of the existing categories and hence one that can't be dealt with according to any of the established laws or guidelines. Such hybrid spaces—those that elude a clear classification and are therefore impervious to shifting political climates and overt political action—are only increasingly common in the "state of exception." It is this relative political uncertainty and physical inaccessibility that makes Guantánamo the perfect subject to represent with immersive virtual technology. If the strength of *Gone Gitmo* is that it responds to a paradox with a paradox, then to a large extent the uncanny uncertainty of the virtual world that exists in Second Life provides the appropriate analogue. Depending on the source, Second Life is either an experimentally (dis)embodied utopia or yesterday's next big thing. Either way, after exponential growth through mid-2007, the online world peaked at about one million regular visitors. In late 2011, the last period in which traffic was reported for the site, it had approximately one million repeat visitors who spent a total of 124 million hours a month collectively exploring it.[33] While the figure has declined since, the site still attracts a dedicated user base of about eight hundred thousand people every month.

Descriptions of Second Life tend to characterize the environment in two seemingly contradictory fashions. On one hand, its similarities with the real world are stressed: people do all of the things "there" that they do "here," from working and shopping to socializing and traveling. On the other hand, it is characterized as being nothing like real life: physical constraints such as gravity, hunger, fatigue, aging, and illness are all optional indulgences. In short, virtual environments like Second Life are paradoxically hybrid places. Similarly, discussions of the "experience" of Second Life are equally vexed. The philosopher Hubert Dreyfus points out that the fundamental deficit in platforms like Second Life is their lack of embodied finitude.[34] For Dreyfus, virtual environments predicated on a user consciously controlling the gestures, emotions, and reactions of an avatar treat users as mind-centered subjects capable of exchanging one container for another. Thus, they succumb to the fallacy of Cartesian mind-body dualism. The technological promise of a body without limits is precisely what prevents virtual environments like Second Life from delivering much of the physical, emotional, and social sensation that we draw from embodied experience in real life.[35]

Taking the opposite tack, many users of Second Life utilize the environment it provides to achieve physical experiences that they are prevented from encountering in their offline lives. The anthropologist Tom Boellstorff readily admits that virtual

embodiment is concomitantly different from real embodiment, but he maintains that it nonetheless offers certain users experiences absent from real life.[36] Focusing on the sociality involved in group interaction, Boellstorff's study outlines several instances in which the users' ability to change their bodily appearance in Second Life allowed them to experience an identity different from their own based on the reactions of others. For Boellstorff, the ability to explore different facets of oneself in persona play offered users forms of fantasy, empathy, and self/other exploration denied to them in real life, occasionally with lasting results for the physically embodied person at the keyboard.[37] The extensive reporting done on Second Life by journalists (at its peak the site produced a staggering five hundred news stories a day) almost ritually compares the differences between the limitations of users and the experiences they play out through their avatars, including basic activities ranging from walking and pregnancy to extensive body modifications.[38] Even users who don't engage in these activities feel that their virtual bodies are truer to some aspect of their self-perceived selves than their physical bodies.

Neither fully embodied nor disembodied, virtual worlds can place users in a zone of indeterminacy that forecloses some experiences while enabling others. For the users of these worlds, this is not a drawback. It is precisely this neither/nor status that makes Second Life an intriguing medium through which to explore the politics of a place like Guantánamo—one that can also extend the limits of a medium like documentary film. While virtual environments sever ties with film in multiple ways, their remediation ensures that some cinematic aspects remain, including point of view, camera angle, depth of field, and so on.[39] Moreover, projects like *Gone Gitmo* demonstrate that a documentary impulse not only survives on such new media but also is essential to the impact they achieve. Several qualities of *Gone Gitmo* manifest what I am calling the documentary impulse, and in many of these ways the project even transcends the limits of documentary.

But beyond offering just some form of empathy and experience in relation to Guantánamo, *Gone Gitmo* is, I claim, perfect for the task, and this is because its complexities and contradictions replicate the peculiar political complexities and contradictions of the camp itself. Neither fully embodied nor disembodied, neither real nor fantasy, its users neither empowered agent nor passive spectator, *Gone Gitmo* utilizes this platform to translate the paradoxical limbo that Guantánamo inflicts upon its detainees. Returning to the issue that Obama faced throughout his presidency—what to do with Guantánamo—we unfortunately find that *Gone Gitmo* offers nothing in the way of a solution, nor perhaps will it be any better at convincing those on the opposing side of the merits of its case than the dozens of films that have been made on the issue. It offers no technological utopia. But even if Guantánamo were closed and bulldozed as Abu Ghraib was before it, the issues and victims it contains would simply migrate to new places like Bagram Air Base, the "Salt Pit," or any other of the "black sites" that exist away from the scrutiny of

the public. When Gitmo itself is gone, the relevance of a project like *Gone Gitmo* will remain, even if we have to teleport to a new platform in order to see it.[40]

WAR GAMES

While activists like Weil and de la Peña were utilizing virtual platforms to expose the inherent injustice of US government policies around torture and detainment, the government began adopting these same technologies to make the detention of enemies in the war on terror an irrelevant issue. Almost from the moment of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the military began developing and utilizing video games and other virtual simulation technologies to recruit and train soldiers, and even more advanced robotic technologies to track and kill its enemies on the battlefield. Many of these were of course already in various stages of development within the military and its various research agencies before 9/11. But as with so many other programs and policies, the attacks provided an occasion to accelerate the integration of these tools into mainstream military practice.[41] If the complexity of battling a stateless terrorist enemy legitimated (in the minds of some) the creation of surreal legal and territorial spaces like Guantánamo, these places and policies found an intriguing counterpart in the virtual spaces and tools the military used in the process.

The military's new virtual weapons systems challenged easy distinctions between real and virtual, carving out a complex space of new nonfiction media in the process. As the *Gone Gitmo* project had done, these tools pushed the boundaries around embodiment and representation in new ways, creating challenging new ethical, physical, and experiential zones for the human bodies on these new battlefields. Where *Gone Gitmo* focused on using the complexity of virtual embodiment to approximate the physical and legal precarity of the people subject to US policies around detention and interrogation, both *America's Army* and its drone program used similar technologies to recruit and train the soldiers carrying out these policies. And, as their forerunners had done with Weil and de la Peña, these new hybrid, virtual spaces attracted the attention of activists and artists seeking to counter and call out the military's use of these same tools. In the course of modernizing its arsenal, the military created a set of paradoxical policies and experiences for the soldiers tasked with utilizing these new weapons, as well as a new terrain that would allow activists and artists to respond and intervene to disrupt these policies.

The entrance of this new breed of weapons into mainstream military practice arrived on a wave of popular culture and entertainment that normalized their presence in civilian life.[42] This played out as a sort of ubiquity for everyday civilians of both military hardware like drones and military practice in visual and digital culture across the news, on film and television, and of course in video games. Even as they normalize the presence of what Caren Kaplan and Derrick Gregory refer

to as "everywhere war" and push these modes of engagement from battlefront to home front via policing and the securitizations of everyday life, such forms of "militainment" also expose the complexity and contradiction inherent in their logic.[43] The opening the sequence of the 2012 blockbuster *The Bourne Legacy,* for example, provides an apt illustration of how the types of paradoxical engagement that I am exploring played out for ordinary soldiers. The latest installment of the series and its most clear attempt to turn the original trilogy into a full-fledged franchise, the film introduces Alex Cross, the successor to Matt Damon's Jason Bourne character, via a series of super- or even suprahuman achievements as he traverses the Alaskan wilderness. As he fords glacial streams naked, scales craggy peaks, and fights off hungry wolves, the sequence sets up a classic man-versus-nature conflict only to demonstrate repeatedly the inherent superiority of man, or at least this particular man.

We eventually discover that this series of trials is a training mission designed to test the capabilities of the US government's newest weapons system: a line of chemically and genetically engineered soldiers. When a series of leaks threatens to reveal the program's existence, the CIA is forced to eliminate it by killing off the various members of the program. Given Cross's remote location, a drone strike is ordered to take out the final member of the arsenal. Demonstrating once again his cognitive and physical superiority, however, Cross manages to hack the tracking-chip technology embedded in his thigh by cutting it out and feeding it to the aforementioned wolves, one of whom becomes the unwitting decoy eventually executed by the drone. The scene offers a series of engaging role reversals in the hunter/hunted binary as Cross manages to turn both "predators" against one another by playing on their desires and limitations. With the introduction of the drone, a third term is inserted into the man/nature binary already established. As Cross fends off the instinctive, energetic desire of the animal with superior rational planning, he finds himself hunted on the opposite end of the spectrum by the calculated, quantitatively precise designs of the machine. Through a uniquely human combination of both tendencies, Cross is able to play animal and machine against one another.

This scene from an otherwise forgettable movie sets out an apparent conflict at the heart of the US military's application of virtual training and robotic weapons systems—one replicated in popular and scholarly discussions on the use of games and game technology in the military. On one hand, the military uses gaming and simulation technology extensively to train and recruit soldiers, hoping to channel the instinctive drives around popular first-person shooters into better-prepared soldiers. On the other, it deploys robotic weapons systems like drones that utilize telepresence to project force from the cool, rational space of the screen to the battlefield. But are these two forms of screen warfare actually connected? While a number of material connections and superficial resemblances present themselves,

many soldiers and scholars have argued against simply equating them, a warning I echo in the discussion that follows.[44]

My goal in connecting them here lies in examining the range of nonfiction screen technologies deployed in the military's efforts during this period. While video games would seem to fall outside of the realm of nonfiction, I argue that their use in training and recruitment places them in a long history of military cinema. This placement aligns the cutting-edge efforts in *America's Army* with the more sedate and straightforward moving images the military produced as far back as 1898 and has continued to produce in vast quantities since the Second World War.[45] Drones, meanwhile, turn on the similar issues of embodied conflict and projected force, mediating the point of engagement to the degree that it creates a similar paradoxical relationship between the humans at the screen and the humans "on the ground." Though not identical, both present an iteration of the body/technology/space concern that *Gone Gitmo* manifests, an iteration that demonstrates bizarre hybrid forms that nonfiction media take on in the war on terror.

The military's use of games and other virtual technologies is a well-documented and discussed topic in game studies scholarship—from landmark texts by lay authors, like Ed Halter's *From Sun Tzu to Xbox,* to more-focused articles and chapters by leading scholars in the field such as Ian Bogost and Alex Galloway, not to mention anthologies of essays such as *Joystick Soldiers.*[46] As Halter convincingly argues, there have been game versions of war like chess for as long as there have been both games and war. The interconnections between the two take a significant turn in the 1980s when the military begins to express an interest in the nascent market of consumer video game technology and its possible use for training and recruiting. The starting point for what James Der Derian and Roger Stahl call the "military industrial media entertainment" complex or the "militainment" complex extends back over thirty years to the US Army's commission of Atari to modify its popular 1980 3-D vector game *Battlezone* into a training tool for future tank commanders.[47] The project produced *Bradley Trainer,* a stand-alone console game similar to the commercial version that was also produced, but modified to match the equipment profile of Soviet tanks. Though there is no evidence the project was ever used, it set an important precedent for the possibility of future collaboration between the commercial game industry and the military.[48] The military went on to sponsor adaptations of other popular games, including a customized modification of the game *Doom,* a popular online multiplayer game that allowed users to create custom environments. The military version, *Marine Doom,* could be unlocked by users with a special cheat code. In the late 1990s, the army entered into a partnership with the University of Southern California to form the Institute for Creative Technology (ICT). Intended to bring university-level research together with Hollywood creativity and military funding, the group produced *Full Spectrum Warrior,* a training tool that was also eventually released as a standalone console game.

The logic behind the military's use of commercial games technology appears synergistic on multiple levels. As Tim Lenoir and Luke Caldwell demonstrate, the combined efforts of the military and the game industry represented more of a fluid pool of collaboration and personnel as the institutions jointly conceptualized and argued for a radical reworking of the military's utilization of digital technology known as the "revolution in military affairs," or RMA.[49] The RMA was part dream, part blueprint, but with the impetus of 9/11 it began to move quickly off of the drawing board and into production. Collaboration before and after this transition offered a level of market-driven efficiency where none previously existed. The military could share the research and development cost of games with private companies seeking to outdo their competitors and directly monetize their investments. Second, collaboration enabled the military to benefit from the widespread popularity of games. On one hand, this had the effect of normalizing warfare on a larger cultural level, but it also lent the military a level of cultural cachet that it sorely needed in an era of all-volunteer soldiers. On a final level, the collaboration seems to have worked because industry and military interests often align. Both were interested in pursuing the most "realistic" simulations possible from both a visual and a mechanical perspective: the military, in order to prepare its soldiers for combat; and industry, in order to outdo its competitors in the technological arms race that defines the medium.

The military's use of game technology accords with Ian Bogost's influential argument about the procedural rhetoric of the game medium.[50] By invoking proscribed choices and actions on the part of players, games can procedurally persuade players that a certain idea, ideology, argument, or course of action is the preferred method for achieving a specific end. As Bogost demonstrates, the apotheosis of the military's use of game technology is perhaps the army's enormously successful and widely discussed title *America's Army,* which debuted as a free download in 2002 and has generated millions of downloads worldwide. Widely praised at the time for its high-resolution graphics and realistic simulation of battle, *America's Army* went through several other iterations, including the $12 million Army Experience Center and a stand-alone arcade game. Unlike the PC version, both of these versions allowed users to utilize gun-shaped controllers and other props to engage in combat.[51] The Army Experience Center in particular offered the general public a look at the more advanced technology the military had developed to prepare soldiers, including resources like the Infantry Immersion Trainer at Camp Pendleton, a thirty-two-hundred-square-foot facility that replicates "the sights, sounds and smells" of urban combat using a combination of physical settings and virtual avatars.[52] In this sense, *America's Army* is the tip of the spear, so to speak, in the military's strategy to enlist and equip soldiers for the realities of war. It's the first point of contact that many will have with what will eventually be a series of experiences using virtual immersive technology.

FIGURE 4.2. *America's Army* everywhere. The success of *America's Army* after its debut as a downloadable PC game persuaded the military to offer access to the game in public places and arcades. This enabled recruiters to approach players of the games directly, rather than waiting for them to enter their personal information on the website. It is worth noting that the arcade game (left) displayed signage that claimed the game was "Suitable for all ages." Photo credit: Carrie McLeroy (SMC—Army News Service).

It is worth noting that the military's extensive investment in and utilization of games and virtual environments to recruit, train, and indoctrinate soldiers into the ideology and procedures of military life was not its first interaction with media. For much of its history, the military used nonfiction film as its primary media technology for achieving many of these same ends. As Noah Tsika demonstrates, the military during and after World War II innovatively utilized documentary in a broad array of domains, pushing it formally and conceptually into service as a form of "useful cinema" capable of recruiting and training soldiers, documenting practices and tactics, and justifying military expansion.[53] Douglas Cunningham's work further elaborates the extent to which nonfiction training films within the United States Army Air Forces helped establish an esprit de corps within this new branch of the military and push the bounds of masculinity within the military more generally.[54] Even the treatment of psychiatric disorders and battle-related trauma or PTSD for returning soldiers fell under the purview of nonfiction film, becoming a tool to "recognize, diagnose, and treat the psychological effects of war," as Kaia Scott so brilliantly demonstrates in her history of World War II trauma.[55] As it would with *America's Army* during the war on terror, the military during previous wars utilized the medium of nonfiction film to round out its soldiers' "circuit" of service: enticing them to enlist, training them to fight, and dealing with the traumatic effects after they returned home.

Unlike previous efforts to meld games and military procedure, *America's Army* was engaging enough to attract a wide audience, while at the same time faithful enough to the nature of military conduct to constitute a valid training tool. All players have to adhere to the military code of conduct or risk being locked out of further play. Moreover, success depends upon cooperating with other players on group missions against enemy forces using the stock military equipment the game offers—all efforts to make the game as true to the army experience as possible. The game also includes a number of other nods toward the real army, including profiles of soldiers and stories of their time in combat that are featured on the game's loading screens.[56] The game faithfully reflects the larger ideological aims of American unilateralism and militarism, in that player/soldiers are constantly being deployed around the globe in an endless series of missions—a further level of verisimilitude between the real army and its virtual representation in the game.[57]

But even beyond these connections and references to the military, the game's training function further closely resembles the military's historical use of film to prepare its soldiers. A closer look at the format of the training sections of *America's Army* forcefully demonstrates the game's resonance with documentary practice. From its earliest iterations, *America's Army* always featured a notorious, or at the very least, onerous, training component. While most games are content to provide the basics of the controls or keyboard commands and assume that players will improve as they play, *America's Army* treats this instructional work as part of the end in itself. Throughout all of its versions, the game requires

players to complete various exercises prior to being eligible to join in the more popular, team-based, multiplayer missions. In *America's Army 2: Special Forces,* for example, the training section includes five different levels. These stretch from "Basic Training" through various sections for weapons training, medic training, sniper training, and airborne training. In order to access the more advanced features of the game (including special weapons, access to certain maps, etc.), players are required to complete each of these exercises. At each stage, the game imposes a skill threshold that prevents players from progressing until they have achieved a specific score or level of competency.

For example, the "Medic Training" section presents several different subsections, including modules on controlling bleeding, airway management, treating shock, and so on. In each, the player appears in a hospital setting, complete with a reception counter and two medical staff people chatting about military life. The player proceeds to different classrooms that branch off of a central hallway, finding in each a classroom setting, an open seat, and a handout on the table. At the front of the room, an instructor stands near a projected PowerPoint presentation that leads the class through the given topic. Each lasts between five and ten minutes, concluding with a written, multiple-choice test contained in the handout. The slides that are used to deliver the content in these courses use photos, illustrations, titles, and bullet-pointed lists; in other words, they have all of the trappings of a typical slide show. In some of these, photographs of injured soldiers on the screen provide a pointed connection with (and contrast to) the forms of violence and physical injury that the game enables players to experience virtually. The appearance here of real bodies alongside the virtual or animated bodies of the avatars underscores the extent to which these sections of the game push closer to a level of reality than the other sections of the game.

While not alone in allowing players the ability to "practice" in order to advance their skills or in offering "tutorials" that introduce them to the mechanics of a specific game, the training sections of *America's Army* clearly exceed the practical requirements of game play. This is borne out in the falloff between the level of detail provided in the training sections and the practical execution and utilization of these skills in the mission sections of the game. Players who have passed medic training gain the ability to treat injured team members in order to bring them back into active play. But after learning in some detail how to treat basic wounds and manage a variety of common injuries, the game reduces these skills to a single command or click to put them to use. On the PC version of *America's Army: Special Forces,* players face the injured solider and press "E" for a specified period of time. In later iterations of the game, this is augmented with an on-screen representation of the avatar pulling out and applying what appears to be a roll of gauze. In essence, players are required to sit through nearly thirty minutes of training on basic first aid in order to gain the ability to press a single key on their keyboards.

FIGURE 4.3. The "Medic Training" section in *America's Army,* version 2.5. The training segments, which last up 10 minutes each, replicate the experience of attending a lecture in a hospital, complete with an exam at the end.

Part of the explanation for the deeper level of engagement in this part of the game is of course ideological. The game's overarching goal is to portray the US military in an appealing light to the players who populate its servers. The end-game for a portion of these players is enlistment in the military, and for the rest it is presumably a positive opinion of the American armed forces. Greater detail here feeds into the larger world of the military that the game is introducing (or perhaps building), allowing players to immerse themselves in multiple dimensions of military life.[58] Thus, the idle chatter of the two staffers in the hospital hallway, the posters on the walls of the classroom, and ultimately the detailed instruction of the training tutorials themselves all further enhance what Galloway refers to as the game's "realistic-ness," if not its realism.[59]

Nonetheless, the level of information provided exceeds even this ideological, world-building demand. Instead, these sections seem intent on actually training players in, or at least introducing them to, the topics they present. As Lenoir and Caldwell note, the game's creators were insistent on its capacity to deliver a fun experience while at the same faithfully representing the military's structure, rules, and so forth.[60] This representation is gestured to throughout the game, but it appears most clearly at certain moments like those in the training sections. Here the game occasionally achieves something closer to nonfiction than its more action-driven components. While the embodied and affective experience of players during one of the game's combat missions surely departs radically from the experience of facing these situations in real life, the same cannot be

said of the game's classroom-based training scenarios. I would argue that the experience of sitting in front of a computer and watching a lecture on a screen in preparation for a test is far closer to the experience one might have in real life doing these same things. This is certainly borne out in the complaints that the game generated for requiring players to endure these exercises. In this sense it would seem that the game is using the training sections to introduce players not only to the types of things they will be trained in should they choose to enlist, but also to the discipline of training itself.

The game's faithful simulation and enactment of a high degree of procedural and graphical realism for players does not, of course, obscure its more obvious distortions of reality. Some critics point out that the game's hyperrealistic images and soundtrack don't extend to the less palatable aspects of war, while others such as Galloway point out the extent to which the game exists in a sort of apolitical realm completely divorced from the social realities in which modern warfare is executed.[61] Indeed, at a most basic level, the game engages in the same "save-die-restart" logic that Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter call the "big lie of the video game as war" model.[62]

But there is an even bigger lie at work in the game, or at least a comparable one. To what extent does the game actually prepare its players for what is arguably the defining psychological reality of warfare: a kill-or-be-killed confrontation with another person? Of course, nothing entirely prepares one for that particular reality, which is the prime reason for training and simulation in the first place. Practicing "procedure" repeatedly prepares one to act on instinct when the time comes. This same logic also justifies the drive toward increasingly immersive environments and ever more realistic graphics that seems to characterize the game industry in general and its "militainment" branch in particular. It is certainly at work in the outsize investment the military makes in creating simulators for high-risk duties like flying a plane. The more time one can spend proximally adjacent to war without actually facing its mortal realities, the better. This is why the army apparently claimed at the outset of its participation in the ICT, "We want a Holodeck."[63]

And yet, as the military continues to modernize its arsenal with the type of digitized, networked technologies that brought *America's Army* to computers everywhere and further decreased the distance between simulation and reality, its simultaneous deployment of robotic technologies works to erase that distance entirely. The connections between games that simulate war and the robots actually used to fight it are both real and imaginary. On a cultural level, popular fictional texts that experimented with the possibility of playing a game while actually fighting a war began appearing shortly after the army and Atari teamed up on *Battlezone.* These included books like Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* and films like *The Last Starfighter, War Games,* and *Cloak & Dagger.*[64] In all of these texts, characters pursuing mastery of a game eventually learn that they are actually fighting a battle,

thereby playing out the possibility that simulators like *Bradley Trainer* might eventually be linked to remote robotic tanks. Ronald Reagan himself prophesied that video games would eventually train a generation of soldiers to fight in war in "ways that many of us who are older [couldn't] fully comprehend."[65] As these technologies have become a reality, drones in particular and games like *America's Army* are routinely linked in press coverage about the emergence of "virtual war." And beyond these cultural expressions, Peter Singer notes that many of the controls for future robotic weapons are prototyped and eventually designed using hacked versions of the physical controllers and graphical user interfaces from console systems like the Xbox and PlayStation. This consistency is intended to limit the learning curve for the generation of soldiers who grew up playing games, but it also contributes to the slippage that exists in the minds of many between the games that recruit and train soldiers for war and the weaponized drones that are used to fight them.[66]

Outside of these connections, there is of course one important difference between the game's simulation and the drone: one is not real and the other is. Simulations prepare the player for a potential face-to-face violent encounter in their future; drones allow the operator to kill another human from a hitherto unimaginable distance. The expansion of this distance, as Gregoire Chamayou argues, is in fact the defining feature of the weaponized drone, one that turns it from fighting into hunting.[67] If games and training simulations are the cinematic equivalent of the blockbuster fiction film, then remote robotic warfare like the drone is its documentary equivalent. The parallels between the two are more than metaphoric. Like watching a big-budget action film, part of the pleasure involved in playing a typical action game is precisely the fact that it's not real, allowing one to engage in experiences and behaviors one would avoid in one's everyday life. This is what the "media effects" argument about the priming possibility of violent video games seems to miss.[68] Most people who avidly play first-person shooters do so because they *aren't* actually killing people. This is perhaps why so many soldiers, including drone operators, report playing these types of games in their free time to relax, as Peter Asaro notes.[69] Fictional games, like fiction films, allow us to experience realities that are thankfully not our own.

But like a documentary, drone warfare bears a necessary, mediated connection to reality. As Lisa Parks argues, the drone itself is a mediating technology that "exceeds the screen and involves the capacity to register the dynamism of occurrences within, on, or in relation to myriad materials, objects, sites, surfaces, or bodies on Earth."[70] I am even tempted to say an indexical connection to reality, if we bear in mind that one of C. S. Peirce's original examples of the indexical sign was the scar—evidence that signifies a prior wound due to some trauma imparted by the real. This index-as-scar is a connection more than borne out by the asymmetrical wounds experienced by both the operators and the targets of drone technology. Or

perhaps more temporally and spatially accurate, his example of smoke to signify a distant fire.[71] To paraphrase Bill Nichols, no matter how realistic, games and fiction films will offer us only "a world"—as opposed to the world.[72] In the same way that viewers of a documentary are constantly aware that what took place before the camera bears a connection with the real, historical world, so the pilot of the aerial drone knows that when he pulls the trigger, an action and effect are carried out in the world.

Beyond the presence or absence of a direct connection to reality, there are other parallels between these forms of media. Like state-of-the-art special effects in fiction films, games and simulations utilize cutting-edge technology to achieve photorealistic visual imagery. By comparison, the typical camera image available to the drone pilot can have the feel of a low-res, low-budget documentary shot on consumer-grade home video. Even as camera technology and bandwidth have expanded to include infrared, higher-resolution imagery and multiple simultaneous angles (the "gorgon stare" model can track twelve independent locations and quilt these together in a single, unified field of view), these tools are aimed at revealing rather than simulating reality.[73] As opposed to the constant action of a game or simulation that allows one to skip to the "good parts" of the text, one of the prime problems confronting drone pilots is the boredom induced by extended hours of inactive screen time—a fear not uncommon to film majors taking their mandatory documentary course.[74]

Considering drone warfare in the context of documentary further alerts us to the heavily mediated nature of the reality experienced by the drone pilot, as well as the clear benefits and drawbacks of experiencing reality from a "safe" distance. As has been well publicized, drone pilots often act on less-than-sufficient information, resulting in tragic civilian deaths.[75] Derek Gregory's description of the "kill chain" demonstrates that pilots and sensor operators are just two of the dozens of people involved in a typical mission. This group communicates across a variety of locations and through multiple channels including voice, IRC (internet relay chat), and in person—a sociotechnical assemblage of humans, information, and communication channels that presents multiple failure points.[76] Many estimates put the number of civilian deaths as compared to combatant deaths well into the double digits, meaning dozens of innocent people die for each individual targeted by this class of "precision" weapons.[77]

Even the pilot and sensor operator, though admittedly removed from the direct encounter of the battlefield, are hardly out of harm's way entirely. Making life-and-death decisions from an air base thousands of miles away in northern Nevada or Virginia and then driving home to the suburbs when a shift is over has been blamed for causing PTSD in drone pilots at a rate comparable to that of front-line soldiers. Even soldiers who don't experience the acute symptoms of PTSD suffer from a high rate of burnout, owing to an overwhelming set of labor conditions.[78]

While higher-resolution optics and more-precise strike capabilities are being planned to alleviate the problem of mistakes, such measures would seem only to exacerbate the circumstances that give rise to the psychological conflict associated with PTSD. Pilots and sensor operators report that watching the same person for an extended period of time only increases the guilt and anxiety that arise when they eventually kill him or her.[79] As in documentary film, no particular optic or recording technology can reconcile one to the larger moral and ethical "truth" of what one is seeing or doing.

Most importantly, however, comparing the military use of virtual and robotic technologies to fiction and nonfiction films throws into relief the connected but different nature of these mediated forms of fighting. Like fiction and documentary, games and robotic warfare exist on the same spectrum of representation but cannot be conflated. Moreover, comparing the experience of drone pilots with the promise offered by something like *America's Army* clarifies the bait-and-switch effect at work in the military's deployment of virtual technology to recruit and train soldiers to fight its wars. Whereas the game offers players an enhanced sense of agency, excitement, and immortality, war as experienced by drone pilots seems to entail guilt and boredom—experiences that are absolutely anathema to the feelings that commercial gaming, and by extension *America's Army,* are supposed to evoke. It is war fought from the safety of one's home, but it turns that home into a battlefield where the "combatants" have to balance soccer practice and family dinner with killing people. Indeed, such distinctions (between civilian and soldier, battlefield and home front), always tenuous at best, are only increasingly difficult to separate in the particular conflation of space that drone warfare invites. To return to the example of Alex Cross in *The Bourne Legacy,* the military wants to place modern soldiers somewhere between the instinctive, hedonistic experience it uses to entice and train them and the sanitized, strategic space of surgical, robotic combat. And just as Cross's superiors do in the film, it has forgotten to take account of the human in the middle.

But if the military has opened up a curious new "front" in combat through drones and the bending of space that they enable and has further sought to colonize virtual technologies and the spaces they create in order to recruit and train the bodies it sends to fight the war on terror, it has also opened up a space of resistance that artists and activists have worked to engage. While my focus here has been on considering the military's use of both drones and games vis-à-vis the soldiers it engages through each, I would like to briefly consider a few of the particular interventions that have sought to counter the military's particular applications of both technologies. The artist Joe DeLappe in particular has worked across many of these same spaces with projects that, as the curator Christiane Paul puts it, "expanded, challenged, or even redefined concepts of what constitutes public space, the public domain and public art."[80] In Second Life, DeLappe adapted a tread-

mill to work as an interface control and modified his avatar to resemble Mahatma Gandhi, walking across the virtual landscape as a reenactment of Gandhi's "Salt March."[81] In 2006, DeLappe decided to engage the *America's Army* platform by utilizing the game space as a site through which to memorialize the real soldiers who had died fighting in the war in Iraq. The *Dead in Iraq* project consisted of logging in via his screen name ("dead-in-iraq") and then dropping his weapon once the game commenced and using the game's chat function to manually type the name, age, service branch, and date of death of each service person who had died to date. Eventually, often quickly, his character would be killed, and the other players would respond to the intervention. Over the course of five years, DeLappe logged in hundreds of times, finally completing the list of all 4,484 names in 2011 after the US Army had officially withdrawn from Iraq. Many of the chat transcripts from these sessions reveal a mixture of reactions, ranging from sympathy and sadness for the soldiers who passed away to anger and annoyance that he was confusing a game with reality, or spoiling the fun.[82] Conceived of as a "fleeting memorial" for these deaths, their names populate the fictional space that was created in order to recruit and train their successors.

In 2014 DeLappe began a series of projects intended to challenge the space that drones occupy within spatial imaginaries of the countries that most often deploy them. DeLappe's drone work ran across a heterogeneous array of spaces and interventions, stretching from the "personal drones" that he created for individuals to wear as headbands to the "In Drones We Trust" stamp that he created for users to stamp the back of US currency with a small image of an MQ-1 Predator, thereby placing the drone's silhouette over some of the most celebrated American landmarks. Other interventions include placing scale-model drones in public spaces and modifying existing paintings with a drone image similar to the one that now populates an unknown number of bills. Connecting the projects is an impulse to counter the drone's tendency to populate the periphery of our minds, drawing it from the extraterritorial "borderlands" where it terrorizes people in our names and allowing its shadow to be cast on the minds of a population all too willing and all too able to forget about it.

CONCLUSION

Side by side, little separates the form and methodology of *America's Army* from *Gone Gitmo*. Aesthetically, they operate within the same register: a virtual landscape or object on one platform looks as "real" as a similar object or landscape on the other. While both trail behind the most cutting-edge virtual representations available, they both nonetheless achieve sufficient verisimilitude that we recognize objects and places for those they are supposed to represent. A fence is quite obviously a fence. Both also utilize these virtual environments to offer users a sense

of what it would be like to inhabit a real space quite different from their own. Where *Gone Gitmo* seeks to offer visitors to the virtual Guantánamo a sense of the physical environment and the political and legal issues facing the detainees, *America's Army* wants to prepare future recruits for possible events they might face as soldiers engaged in combat. Both also draw upon traditional photographs and video footage as ancillary materials to point users back to this reality in a similar fashion—*Gone Gitmo* through the video testimony that it includes from detainees and *America's Army* through its "Real Heroes in Action" profiles, segments on the game site that feature profiles of decorated soldiers.[83] Following from these formal similarities, both have recourse to one of the defining features of persuasive rhetorical media, documentary film included: the presence of a clearly defined call to action that structures the text. *Gone Gitmo* aims to stimulate debate and protest around the ongoing imprisonment of the individuals detained at Guantánamo. *America's Army,* on the other hand, primarily hopes to persuade young people to enlist in the US armed services and, more indirectly, to shift general opinions of the military more broadly.

And yet in spite of these similarities, the above reading demonstrates that one sits closer to activist documentary while the other lies closer to fiction film. The spatial metaphor is important here, as distinctions between fiction and nonfiction, real and virtual, are better understood by degrees of separation and resemblance than by categorical distinctions. The comparison between these forms of media illuminates the importance of holding on to the (admittedly slippery) categories of fiction and nonfiction even as the technological ground shifts away from optical recording technology. Just as optical indexicality never guaranteed documentary film's relationship to truth, nothing in the graphical resolution or three-dimensional rendering technology itself guarantees any closer or more complete relationship with the events that each seeks to represent.

Nor does the distinction between the two texts rest on their differing political orientations (one apparently opposing the official status quo of military policy, the other supporting it). While *America's Army* has been dismissed by its detractors as propaganda for the military, the designation mischaracterizes the relationship between a politically persuasive text and a propagandistic one. This is of course a vexed issue, and any working hierarchy between the two reveals more about a given value system than it does about either form's relationship to reality. We tend to believe in truth claims that support our individual ideological frame and dismiss those that contradict it. "They" make propaganda; "we" speak the truth. Reality always suffers any number of distortions when forced into particular narrative frames. Gaps and omissions are the rule for both what we dismiss as propaganda and what we deem "true" to reality.

The tipping point between fiction and nonfiction in traditional and virtual documentary lies in what these gaps and omissions exclude or include, and the extent to which we deem these choices to be critical to the project's larger truth

claims. *Gone Gitmo* excludes abstract or embodied experiences like indefinite detention and torture, both of which might be considered "unrepresentable" in a broad sense. Indeed, both are practical impossibilities given the nature of the chosen medium; thus the project invites participants to reflect on such realities by way of their obvious omission. In *America's Army,* the gap in the text is instead the defining feature of the chosen medium. That is, the first-person shooter is arguably defined as a forum in which the player is able to engage in consequence-less killing firsthand, with no corporal, legal, or ethical jeopardy at stake. Warfare, on the other hand, is the exact opposite. *Gone Gitmo* chooses *not* to represent these things, but to instead play on their absence. *America's Army* utilizes this representational distance to make killing ubiquitous and individual death a mere inconvenience. (One has to start the game over.) This distinction makes one a documentary and the other a fiction.

The fictional status of *America's Army* is further underscored by the mediated experiences of drone pilots—soldiers who actually fight in combat situations but do so through a gamelike interface. Unlike virtual representations, the video and data feeds that confront pilots don't point toward reality; they emanate directly from it. This is still reality represented, but done so without an author, seeking not a broader "call to action" but instead a stimulus/response from the soldiers who jointly monitor its various feeds and collectively weave together the bizarre text of a drone mission. The attendant feelings of stress and guilt that such experience seems to evoke for many of these individuals further highlights the lack of stakes in the game version of virtual war, which allows and even rewards higher body counts. While the experience of remote, telepresent combat that the drone interface provides offers important parallels to documentary representation, there are clear distinctions that make a direct connection between them problematic.

In its efforts to curb the incidence of PTSD for drone pilots, the military began investigating technology to give the computer systems that pilots and sensor operators interact with more personality.[84] The thought is that sharing the guilt with a "third party" would lessen the burden shouldered by the individuals pulling the trigger. Depending upon the level of automation the military eventually achieves, a fully automated drone fleet might alleviate the need for human operators entirely. While this would further obscure the visibility of the program from the public in whose name this warfare is waged, it would also necessitate the use of new technologies by activists like Weil and de la Peña seeking to make its absent reality more tangible to everyday citizens, even if only through virtual means.