

<b>Institution:</b> Abertay University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA 32 – Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Video Games, Tactical Media and Memory: Challenging Perceptions of Violence and War		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> January 2017 to December 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name:</b> Joseph DeLappe	<b>Role (e.g. job title):</b> Professor of Games and Tactical Media	<b>Period employed by submitting HEI:</b> 01/01/2017-present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> January 2017 to December 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>  <p>Research by Joseph DeLappe using video games and media to explore international conflict has expanded the understanding of politics, war, and violence. DeLappe's research focuses on utilizations of digital and analogue artworks to creatively expand the possibilities of art, video gaming and activism in the digital age. The work expands and initiates fresh debate surrounding violence and war through the use of video games, participation and memorialization to reach a variety of international audiences including the public, game art practitioners and the gallery/museum sector. DeLappe's work has been presented in over 30 exhibitions with over one million visitors and reached hundreds of thousands more through online views and playable downloads.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>  <p>DeLappe is at the forefront of international developments of new methodologies for engaging video games and participatory art to provide new material through which international conflict and violence is questioned, understood, and commemorated [3.1, 3.2]. DeLappe's work in the field of experimental game art is unabashedly political - responding to current events, in particular, war, conflict and violence. His research explores memorialization, play and interactivity by utilizing novel and original methodologies of engagement.</p> <p>In 2016, DeLappe was commissioned by presenting organisations <i>Phoenix Leicester</i> (UK) and <i>Turbulence</i> (USA) to develop <i>Killbox</i>, an unconventional video game about drone warfare. The project was created in collaboration with the Biome Collective with an additional grant from Creative Scotland. Since joining Abertay in January 2017, DeLappe has further developed <i>Killbox</i> for the purposes of widespread distribution for public access and sharing online as well as designing a variety of installation formats for gallery, museum and festival installations [3.3]. The research takes a novel, empathetic approach to two-person play to critically explore the nature of drone warfare, its complexities and consequences. Abertay University served as a partnering organization to the NEoN Digital Arts Festival which hosted the international premiere of <i>Killbox</i>.</p> <p>In 2017, DeLappe was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in the Fine Arts. Funding from the Guggenheim Foundation award and an Arts and Humanities Research Council Immersive Practices grant facilitated the development of <i>Elegy: GTA USA Gun Homicides</i> (2018-19): an online work that modified the popular game <i>Grand Theft Auto V</i> to function as an active, real-time, 24/7 data visualization system and memorial to gun homicide victims in the USA [3.4]. Developed with the Biome Collective, this work broke new ground in its design. Using an innovative and novel approach to data visualization and game play real-world data from the <i>Gun Violence Archive</i> online was programmatically accessed. Up to date USA gun homicide totals were fed directly into the game in real-time, using programmatic modifications to facilitate the</p>		

automation of non-playing characters within the game space to essentially kill each other in a daily recount of gun homicides. Starting from 0, each day the new total body count since January 1st was reenacted in its totality.

Concurrent to the focus on experimental video games, DeLappe has a strong commitment to forms of collaborative practice developing new methodologies for creating community based temporary physical memorials. Opportunities to extend this work into conflict zones have included: 1) *The Thousand Drones: A Participatory Memorial* – which involved school children in California making 1,000 paper drones, on which they wrote the name of a civilian drone casualty from Pakistan. These community created drones were strung together as one of the major installations in DeLappe's 2017 solo-retrospective *Watch the Skies* exhibition at the Sonoma Valley Museum of Art [3.5] and 2) *Jasmine: Memorial to Drone Strike Victims* - which involved the creation of a temporary, rooftop installation in Karachi, Pakistan in 2018, and included gifting 350 jasmine plants to local residents as a gesture of memory and atonement [3.6].

### 3. References to the research

#### **Publications:**

- 3.1. DeLappe, J. (2019). Memory and Resistance. *Radical History Review*, 2019(133), 177-191. Duke University Press, USA <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-7160150>
- 3.2. DeLappe, J. (2020). Are those real people? Memory and Creative Resistance. *Digital War*, 2020(1) 83-92. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s42984-020-00017-8>

#### **Practice-based research outputs:**

- 3.3. DeLappe, J. (Producer/Lead Artist), Abbas, M. (Designer/Developer), deMajo, T. (Designer/Sound), & Elwin, A. (Programmer), (2016-17) *Killbox: A Game About Drone Warfare*, Digital or Visual Products, Videogame. <http://www.delappe.net/play/killbox/>
- 3.4. DeLappe, J. (Producer/Lead Artist), Elwin, A. (Programmer) & Wood, J. (Consultant), (2018) *Elegy: GTA USA Gun Homicides*, Digital or Visual Products, Game Modification Data Visualizer, <http://www.delappe.net/play/elegy-gta-usa-gun-homicides/>
- 3.5. DeLappe, J. (Artist) (2014 & 2017), *The 1,000 Drones: A Participatory Memorial*, Digital or Visual Products, FSU Art Museum, Florida and the Sonoma Valley Museum of Art, California. <http://www.delappe.net/sculptureinstallation/the-1000-drones---a-participatory-memorial/>
- 3.6. DeLappe, J. (Artist), (2018) *Jasmine: Memorial to Drone Strike Victims*, Studio Seven, Karachi, Pakistan, Digital or Visual Products, <http://www.delappe.net/sculptureinstallation/jasmine-memorial-to-drone-strike-victims/>

#### **Related grants:**

- Gibson, R., DeLappe, J., & Jayemanne, D., *Reality Remix*, AHRC Immersive Experiences Grant, Nov 2017 – Jul 2018, £14,600 (AHRC Reference: AH/R009368/1)
- DeLappe, J. Guggenheim Fellowship in the Fine Arts, John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, \$50,000

### 4. Details of the impact

DeLappe's research has created impact through a series of outputs that have contributed to the emergence of video games within contemporary art [3.3, 3.4], whilst also disseminating these works into the public realm in a manner that contributes to wider cultural meaning and understanding. DeLappe has sought ways in which to expand the reach and significance of his work through onsite community based sculptural installations using the approach of 'making with others' to serve as models of cooperative action and change [3.5, 3.6]. His works have generated impact amongst creative practitioners and scholars through the development of innovative methodologies and participation.

DeLappe's distinctive approach to the design and creation of works innovatively translates the abstract data of drone warfare and gun violence into empathetic virtual and physical experiences of memorialization as well as create readily understandable, accessible, technologically complex, engaging, and meaningful experiences. His work aims to engage and change perceptions of often controversial and difficult issues surrounding war, conflict, and violence

Significance and reach of DeLappe's research have been achieved through national and international exhibitions and installations, online streaming, web-based downloads, screenings, lectures, publications and community based public events. His complex and multi-layered work has reached thousands via internet-based projects and digital sharing of gaming content while at the same time he has delivered localized participatory memorials within communities.

### **Killbox**

By December 2020, *Killbox* had been downloaded by 7,000 users and received 14,000 views on YouTube. Between 2017 and 2020, *Killbox* was exhibited at several notable international galleries and museums (Figure 1). The V&A Dundee, the first design museum in Scotland, selected *Killbox* to be featured in its Scottish Design Galleries when it opened in Sept 2018. Since opening, the Scottish Design Galleries have attracted over 800,000 people [5.1]. *Killbox* was also featured in the high-profile exhibition *24/7: A wake up call for a non-stop world*, at Somerset House, London, 2019-20, which drew 35,000 visitors. Other museum exhibitions of *Killbox* include The Karachi Art Summit, Pakistan; Goethe Institut/Studio X Gallery, Istanbul, Turkey [5.2]; and the Sonoma Valley Museum of Art. Across the six installations of the work the game software recorded over 5,000 players. Both players and observers had the opportunity to immerse themselves in the experience and consider the implications of drone warfare.

Feedback from *Killbox* players (including those with and without prior experience of conflict), provided by online reviews, museum visitors and interviews with USA Air Force Drone operators [5.3] demonstrates the substantial impact and significance a video game can achieve:

*"Killbox does an amazing job providing perspective to the costs of drone warfare. I've had several vet friends play through this, and it alone gave them a perspective they had never considered before. Honestly a work of expressive art that I encourage everyone to try."*

—Hicks\_206, review, 7 March, 2018, Steam video game online digital distribution service

*"It changed my impression of drones...not only did the game give me an understanding of what it might mean to have the sense of surprise and shock on the ground, it also gave me a sense of how drone pilots are kind of becoming automated and compliant within this technology."* -Anonymous player at the '24/7: A wake up call for a non-stop world' exhibition at Somerset House, London, 2019-20.

The reach of *Killbox* has also been expanded through publications in national and international press including reviews/features on BBC 1 [5.4], ITV News, The Washington Post [5.5], The Face UK [5.6], The Baffler.com, and DerStandard among others.



Figure 1. *Killbox*, Sonoma Valley Museum of Art 2017 (© Robert Holmes) and Somerset House, 2019/20 (© Joseph DeLappe)

**Elegy: GTA USA Gun Homicides**

*Elegy: GTA USA Gun Homicides*, (which creatively visualizes USA gun homicide totals through automated gameplay), was live-streamed on Twitch.tv 24/7 for a year from July 4<sup>th</sup> 2018 to 2019. During that time, it drew over 230,000 distinct views. *Elegy* has been featured in several major museum exhibitions displaying game art, including; *Playmode*, MAAT – Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology, Lisbon, Portugal (63,000 visitors/catalogue); *Open World: Video Games & Contemporary Art*, Akron Art Museum, Akron, Ohio (15,552 visitors/catalogue) [5.7]; *In a Gamescape Landscape, Reality, Storytelling and Identity in Video Games*, NTT InterCommunication Center [ICC], Tokyo, Japan (8,086 visitors); *Where We Now Stand—In Order to Map the Future*, 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, Japan (129,110 visitors) and *The Twin*, The Coventry Biennial 2019 (124,886 visitors) [5.8].

Visitor feedback about *Elegy* highlights its ability to change understanding around the issues of gun violence as well as change people's perceptions about the medium of games:

*"Elegy is fascinating but also quite terrifying, especially when you see this type of thing going on and the way that it is shown in this piece brings to life that non-stop endless cycle of violence."* Anonymous viewer, *Coventry Biennial of Contemporary Art*, Coventry, UK, 2019

*"This work certainly added to my understanding of the issues of gun violence in America, by making me feel shocked by the facts and also guilty for being addicted to watching the same violent scene over and over again."* Anonymous viewer, *Elegy*, *Joseph DeLappe Public Hazards #1*, ViZ Laboratory for Visual Culture, Athens, Greece

*"It has changed my perception of the medium of games in how you've disrupted its normal pattern of use."* Anonymous viewer, *Elegy*, *Coventry Biennial of Contemporary Art*, Coventry, UK, 2019

In recognition of *Elegy*'s world leading impact and innovative approach in the field of NetArt, DeLappe received a 2019 Webby Award, Honoree from the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences.

*Elegy* has reached additional audiences through media coverage and art reviews. For example, following the *Open World* exhibition at the Akron Museum of Art, DeLappe's *Elegy* project garnered a series of positive articles and reviews in both the popular and critical press (including: Artnet; Hyperallergic.com; *Forbes*; and *The Boston Globe*). It is worth noting that in an exhibition of this scale, reviews tend to focus on a few exceptional works.

Both *Killbox* and *Elegy* have drawn attention from the art world, impacted on creative practitioners, changed perspectives of video-game players and contributed to public discourse, as highlighted by Curator, Film & Media Collections, Stanford University Libraries [5.9]:

*"DeLappe's contributions are at the highest level, both in terms of the provocative nature of their content and the attention drawn to them both in the art world and, nearly to the same extent, in player communities....Killbox and Elegy: GTA USA Gun Homicides continue a conscious shift from playful use of and commentary on digital games to directing our attention to overt political agency expressed through games.... DeLappe has become quite adept and finding contexts outside of galleries, museums and festivals to disseminate his work and thus create opportunities to engage and impact a diverse and very public audience".* Henry Lowood, Curator, Film & Media Collections, Stanford University Libraries [5.9]

**Collaborative Practice Memorials**

DeLappe's collaborative work with local communities to create temporary installations, including *The 1,000 Drones: A Participatory Memorial* (2017) and *Jasmine: Memorial to Drone Strike Victims* (2018) has impacted participants through creatively visualizing and enacting works of memory and atonement. Using the approach of 'making with others', his creations of onsite community based sculptural installations serve as models of cooperative action and change.



In addition to the impact on the participants in these collaborations, the works have generated impact among creative practitioners and scholars through the development of innovative methodologies. Finally, the works have improved understanding for the public (1,000 people visited the *Watch the Skies* exhibition at the Sonoma Valley Museum of Art where *The 1000 Drones: A Participatory Memorial* was exhibited (Figure 2) [5.10].

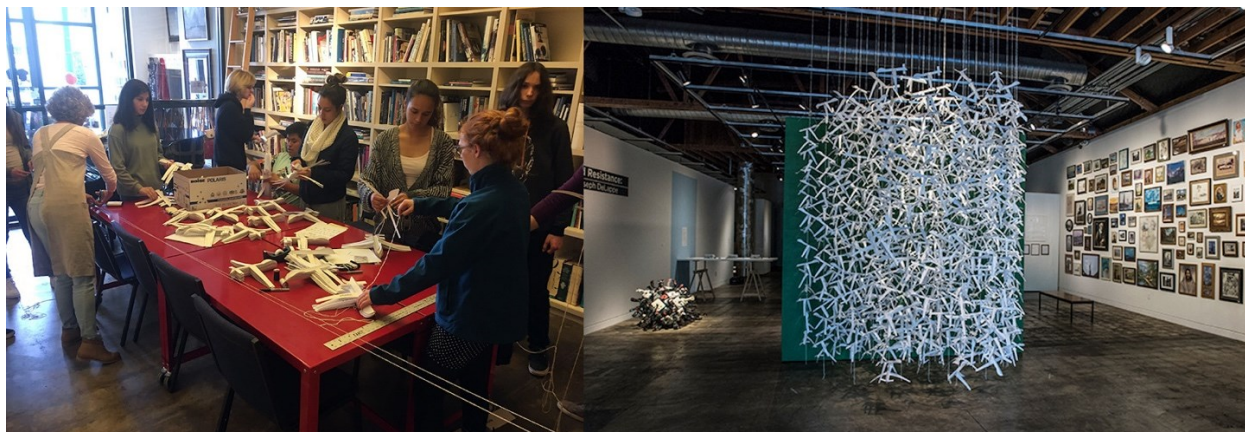


Figure 2. The 1000 Drones being created by volunteer high school students (© Sonoma Valley Museum of Art) for the *Watch the Skies* Exhibition, 2017 (© Robert Holmes).

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Testimonial from Dr Mairi Maxwell, Curator, V&A Dundee. Evidence supports impact and contribution to public discourse from featuring *Killbox* in the Scottish Design Galleries.
- 5.2 Games and Politics in Istanbul, Showcase, TRT World, Turkish English Language Television Network, Istanbul, Turkey <https://www.trtworld.com/video/showcase/games-and-politics-in-istanbul-exhibitions-showcase/5c7e0409273f86695b6b1b48>
- 5.3 Testimonial from Jenna Altomonte, Assistant Professor of Art History. Provides details of the impact of *Killbox* including interviews with US Air Force drone operators.
- 5.4 Baggs, Michael, *How this Grand Theft Auto stream is highlighting US gun crime*, Newsbeat, BBC News, July 15, 2018 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-44820473>
- 5.5 Fowler, Hart, *Artists have used Grand Theft Auto V as a canvas for years. Now, protesters are doing the same*, The Washington Post <https://www.washingtonpost.com/video-games/2020/02/11/artists-have-used-grand-theft-auto-v-canvas-years-now-protesters-are-doing-same/>
- 5.6 Evans-Thirlwell, Edwin, *World of anti-Warcraft: the activists turning online video games into protest sites*, The Face, UK <https://theface.com/life/video-games-violence-grand-theft-auto-world-of-warcraft-americas-army-joseph-delappe>
- 5.7 Testimonial from Theresa Bembnister, Associate Curator, Akron Art Museum, Ohio. Evidence supports impact through visitor numbers, press coverage, catalogue distribution and public discourse from the *Open World: Video Games & Contemporary Art* exhibition.
- 5.8 Testimonial from Ryan Hughes, Artistic Director, The Coventry Biennial 2019. Provides details of impact through viewing numbers, audience feedback, and contribution to public discourse surrounding the inclusion of *Elegy* in The Coventry Biennial, 2019.
- 5.9 Testimonial from Henry Lowood, Curator, History of Science & Technology Collections and Film & Media Collections, Stanford University Libraries. Evidence supports claim of impact of *Killbox* and *Elegy* among practitioners and of contribution to public discourse.
- 5.10 Testimonial from Linda Keaton, Executive Director, Sonoma Valley Museum of Art. Provides details of impact through visitor numbers, audience feedback and contribution to public discourse surrounding the retrospective exhibition *Watch the Skies*.