UNMANNED

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Game: *Unmanned*
Developer: Molleindustria (designed by Paolo Pedercini and written by Jim Munroe)
Year: 2012
Platform(s): PC; Mac (Windows, macOS, Linux); Browser-based
Number of players: Single player
Genre: Political; art; subversive; satirical
Type of game: Computer-based/online digital game
Curricular connections: Psychology; philosophy; education; ethics; political science; social justice
Possible skills taught: Social and political awareness; game-to-world connections; decision-making; ethical thinking; ideological positioning; citizenship; human rights
Audience: 16+ (high school students; college students; adults)
Length of time: 30 minutes to be fully explored
Where to play: Home; class; afterschool; non-formal contexts
Cost: Free
URL: http://unmanned.molleindustria.org/

SUMMARY

Unmanned is a satirical written and visual narrative that focuses on the life of a soldier who remotely operates a military drone (or unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV)). *Unmanned* allows the player to experience and explore the daily life of the drone pilot, and his other social roles (father, husband, work colleague), while witnessing the subsequent private inner conflicts experienced by the character. Throughout the game, the players are confronted with a set of provocative scenarios, upon which they are challenged to take a position, make meaningful choices, co-create the narrative and be exposed to its consequences (or lack thereof). In doing so, the game recognizes and grants visibility to the simultaneous distance and proximity of war in the everyday life of the character, and, ultimately, raises topics such as anomie, alienation and the fragmentation of society. The game presents and identifies, critically and ironically, the new methods of warfare, fostering an ethical questioning about the daily actions it involves, and the paradoxes entailed in the war elements that exist in many games.

Figure 1. Unmanned screenshot.

HOW TO USE THE GAME

We used the game in three workshops of mixed groups of students, lecturers, and researchers from two public higher education institutions in the Porto region, in Portugal. Thirty participants were involved, from various degrees and disciplines, such as psychology, education, natural sciences, engineering, or arts. The three workshops explored the use of serious video games in a higher education context, and the educational and civic dimensions of different serious video games. In the workshop, participants first performed warm-up group activities to create connections to each other, such as "I am looking for a person who…" (e.g.: "…likes to play the same kind of video games as me") and "speed date meetings", addressing specific topics around their educational and civic experiences (e.g.: *"How do I prefer to learn?; What kind of civic experiences did I have in my life so far?*). After that, participants played *Unmanned* in pairs, without any previous introduction to the game, for about 20 minutes. Then, they were challenged to reflect and share their experience of playing, answering questions, such as: *"How was for you the experience of playing this game? What did you learn from the experience? How is the experience of playing this game connected with your life or other aspects of society?"*

Then, the facilitators presented educational dimensions commonly found in research using video games, such as "Types of knowledge", "Learning types and strategies", "Motivation and Involvement" and challenged participants to reflect and consider if they were present in their experience of playing this game.

In a final group discussion, which took around 30 minutes, participants shared the difficulties and possibilities of using this game in higher education contexts and generated relevant insights and connections between the actions within the game and the reality of the off-line world. Participants suggested that the game promoted critical literacy about society, challenged personal and social

values, and linked critical positions and awareness about social reality with considerations on the process of social change.

Most participants were interested in the opportunity of co-creating a narrative as the playing experience developed but, at the same time, some mentioned that the game's lack of explicit instructions and clear structure of rules and objectives generated feelings of uncertainty and lack of control sometimes in combination with feelings of enthusiasm towards exploring options more freely and figuring out the game while playing. For players with higher levels of tolerance to ambiguity, this facilitated rich insights and reflections. For other players, it was felt as an obstacle to enjoy and learn from the game.

Two main reflections emerged from the discussions: the ability of the game to create ethical challenges when confronting the player with dilemmas and with the need to position him/herself; players felt involved in the characters' everyday life decisions. Moreover, by exposing the players to different perspectives and ideological positions, the game averted dichotomization (of judgements and actions, such as those about who are the "good ones" or the "bad ones") and provided a secure context to experience different moral behaviours through different identities and roles.

TIPS & BEST PRACTICES

1. The game is browser-based, requires an internet connection to be played, and demands motor coordination skills since it confronts the player with dual and split screens.

2. Teachers should pay special attention to especially sensitive students who could be disturbed by the gameplay, as well as by the game's soundtrack.

3. It is important to create a relational context with warm up activities before playing the game.

4. The learning experience will benefit from the use of collaborative strategies like having participants playing the game in pairs. Together this can help creating a supportive environment for the process of playing and further participants' reflection on the game's narrative and dilemmas.

5. It is important to combine action (playing the game) with reflection (open talk about the process of playing the game).

RELATED GAMES & MEDIA

Other games by Mollendustria (http://www.molleindustria.org/

September 12 (http://www.gamesforchange.org/game/september-12th-a-toy-world/)

Terminal air (https://vimeo.com/16232359)

FURTHER READING

Ars technical, https://arstechnica.com/gaming/2012/02/unmanned-presents-a-nuanced-psychological-perspective-on-modern-warfare/

Bogost, I. (2006). Playing politics: Videogames for politics, activism, and advocacy. *First Monday.*

Schrier, K. (2015). EPIC: A framework for using video games for ethics education. *Journal of Moral Education.* 44(4): 393-424