“HEARTS AND MINDS”

The interrogations project

This script is based on a Detainee Interaction Study that examined the lived experiences of American military and intelligence veterans who observed or participated in detainee-directed abuse in counterinsurgency (COIN) or a counterterrorism (CT) campaigns since September 11, 2001. Selections from these interviews were gathered for Dr. John K. Tsukyama’s 2013 Ph.D. dissertation *By Any Means Necessary: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis Study of Post 9/11 American Abusive Violence in Iraq*. Writer Scott Rettberg adapted elements and narratives from these testimonies in preparing this script for a 3-D immersive CAVE2 new media art project being developed at the University of Illinois Chicago, Electronic Visualization Lab. This project will be developed by a team including film-maker Roderick Coover, artist and visualization researcher Daria Tsoupikova, computer scientist Arthur Nishimoto, and senior research programmer Lance Long. Dr. Jeffrey Stevenson Murer of St. Andrews University, Scotland is also contributing as a consultant on the project. The Electronic Visualization Lab (EVL) at the University of Illinois Chicago is generously providing facilities and development support for this project.

The characters in this script are composites meant to represent different perspectives represented in Tsykyama’s study. The majority of the monologues are based on direct adaptations of interview texts from the study, though elements of these interviews have been combined, abbreviated, and re-presented in the different voices the composite characters represent. Narratives here are intended to be experienced as approximately two-minute stories that will be performed by recorded voice actors. The identities of the individual soldiers interviewed are protected in the original study, and also anonymized in this script. Characters are given names in this script, but these names have no connection to actual persons. The stories and situations are however based on events that were reported directly by the soldiers to Tsukyama during the course of his research.

This project is an artistic reaction intended to bring the problems involved in abusive violence of detainees in wartime situations, and

related issues of post-traumatic stress disorder, to light by presenting them with the affective sensory environment of the EVL's CAVE2 and similar immersive environments in the future.

CHARACTER TYPES

1) The Unrepentant --- CHRIS

Soldier who abused prisoners, and feels some pain afterwards, but expresses no regret.

Part of the reason he got into it to begin with was that he wanted to feel power over people. "Superman" mentality.

2) The Soiled Idealist --- JOHNATHAN

Somewhat more intellectual soldier who actually believed he was going to improve the world by fighting in Iraq, and was fighting to "win hearts and minds." Shocked by what he has seen, ashamed of how much of it he went along with.

3) The Interventionist --- SAMANTHA

Soldier (possibly woman) who acted to stop one or more incidents of abusive violence. Stronger as a result of this, though somewhat embittered by experience of military service.

4) The Destroyed --- EDWARD

Soldier who abused and killed detainees, and is haunted by memories. Life back home a complete mess, conceives of himself as a monster.

ENTERING THE SPACE

The first room is a domed middle eastern architecture reminiscent of a mosque.

As the audience enters the room, there are four chairs arranged around the room, facing four different directions. One chair is a colorfully painted chair from a child's room. Another is some kind of family room chair or recliner. Another is a steel folding chair. Another is a bar stool. If the

tracked user sits in one of the chairs, the scene is pulled towards a room within an American domestic "home" environment: a child's room, a family room, a kitchen, or a garden shed.

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LOOPING VOICEOVERS – ENLISTMENT STORIES

As the audience enters the space, the voices of American soldiers are overheard over Baghdad street noise. They are explaining why they chose to join the military.

NOTE: COULD INCLUDE RANK AFTER NAME.

CHRIS: I've always considered war to be the ultimate human experience, you know, good, bad or otherwise. I had a saying, 'There's only like three things in life that are all they're cracked up to be. It's women, drugs and war." They're the only three things that you ever experience that really are everything that they say they are . . . . seriously, they're all they're cracked up to be, and that—that's kind of the main reason I joined the military, not just because of family ties, but ah . . . just—there's no other way to learn things about yourself that you can learn in the military. I wanted to find out what I was really capable of in the most extreme set of circumstances.

JOHNATHAN: I was one of those "true believers." Um, I, you know, had thought about joining the military since I was a young kid. You know, I liked GI Joe, I liked war movies and books and things like that and I think as a consequence of that of being interested in those things, I, you know, developed a really strong sense of patriotism, and so, when I got a little older and when I was in high school um I felt that, you know, I saw my peers just wanting to just go to college to party and do whatever, that I didn't want that. I felt that I really wanted to be a part of something bigger than myself. I wanted to, you know, commit myself, donate my life um to serving some greater cause, ah and at—at that time, I believed very strongly that the most noble cause was serving in the U.S. military. I believed, you know, that as a soldier, my job would be to free the oppressed, to help people who were in need, bring people a better life. Spread freedom and democracy to people who didn't have it. It was a very idealistic decision and I joined as soon as I could.

SAMANTHA: Why I signed up? It was, you know, mostly it was economic incentive. I wanted to learn skills and I wanted to set myself up for a career. I didn't come from you know the best of environments. There weren't a lot of jobs. I felt like I couldn't you know afford to just go to college, and with the GI Bill, you know you get those benefits. So there was that, but it was also like I felt I needed the structure, to learn leadership skills. Part of it was that I felt a kind of obligation to serve the country. I wanted to do something the right way, and I really wanted to get out of where I was from. So it was the quickest, easiest way to get out.

EDWARD: I joined the military because of September 11. I thought that it was my job, my . . . my duty to serve, uh once we were attacked, that I could no longer enjoy the freedoms that were offered in this country without fighting for them or myself. And I was angry. I—I thought how can anybody do this to us, we're Americans, and—somebody definitely had a death wish to do this to us, ah—and I immediately, almost immediately the stories came out it was from Muslim terrorists, and you know, I hated Muslims. I started walking around Wal Mart and stuff going after Muslims. I would call them names, basically call 'em out in public, and families, Muslim families walking, you know, in Wal Mart or at the grocery store, just anywhere. I would ah, kind of stalk them, hunt them down thinking that they were all out to get us. Ah—it was, because everything that was on mainstream media was coming out that it was that, you know, Muslims are out to attack us.

BOY'S ROOM

This space is the room of a boy, about 8-12 years old, with middle-American décor appropriate to a boy who is growing up during the 1990s. Visual or sound cues pull the user towards particular "trigger" objects. When each object is triggered, subtle visual transformations are layered into each room scene. Touching the given object triggers the voice-over attached to each object.

The boy's room is thematically tied to origins, to attitudes towards abusive violence and first experiences of abuse in the field.

JOURNAL

CHRIS: Everybody in my family served in the military. It was like you couldn't be a man, until you had done your service. My dad served in the tail end of Viet Nam; he volunteered, he didn't get drafted. He joined the Infantry, yeah, so he lied about his age in order to get in. I—I remember . . . when I was a kid, I'd dress up in his old cammies and one time I found a—his old foot locker which had a lot of photos and little notebooks of . . . that he would detail events that happened to him while he was over there and I was always in awe. He did some crazy shit. My grandfather on my mother's side, he had been in Korea. He told me I couldn't do it, that I wouldn't survive, that I wouldn't last. I wasn't tough enough. Fuck him. I hated that old man.

ALARM CLOCK

EDWARD: The most common form of hazing in basic is assigning the worst jobs and messing with somebody's sleep. That was the most common that pretty much everybody had to deal with. Sleep deprivation, —assigning jobs that specifically messed with someone's sleep patterns. We're already working like 100-hour weeks at this point just in general. "Well, let's punish the whole platoon by having two to three hours preparation for going on post and two to three hours preparation for going off post, then let's have duties and mandatory PT in between that…" There's almost no down time except for minimal sleep and then that's the standard, and then when you want to punish somebody it's very easy because now you assign them hour on, hour off duties, so you have-they have six hours of sleep because they've been up for the last 18 hours and three of those hours every other hour. They're going to be assigned to clean the shower at 2 a.m. in the morning. No sleep. Other hazings is more direct. First off, trashing—trashing their living space and taking them into the bathrooms, putting them in a gas mask which add a lot of heat, a lot of moisture, turning on all the hot showers, squirting soap across the floor and having them do exercise on a slick environment and hot, wet environment in a gas mask, pouring crap on top of them. Breaks you down. So that's where we're coming from. The mentality is like if you're doing it to your own soldiers, then why would you not do it to the enemy?

BOY SCOUT SASH WITH MERIT BADGETS

SAMANTHA: Well you know during the first deployment when we just sort of rolled into Baghdad and people were taking down statues and cheering and everything, you really had this sense that it was going to turn into a humanitarian mission. That we were really there to win hearts and minds. Were going to build something. But some of the guys had a saying, from Vietnam, "Let me win your hearts and minds or I'll burn your damn huts down." And one of my Drill Sergeants used to say when you want to finish someone, when you're clearing bodies in the fields, that's how you do it. "One in the heart, two in the mind." People get cynical like that.

TONKA TOY TRUCK

JONATHAN: It was my first interaction with a detainee. It was the first time um…we were in a town, we had dismounted from our Humvees and we started up our patrol and we took some small arms fire and we busted down the door and took the guy by surprise. They dragged him out and they beat him a little bit, yelled at 'im you know, and kicked 'im and then flexi-cuffed 'im and then threw him in the back of our high-back Humvee and we continued on our way and we took him with us and then after continuing our patrol route, we returned back to base. He was left face down in the back of the high-back, and people with their feet on 'im, which is considered disgraceful in Iraq to show the bottom of your foot or put the bottom of your foot on somebody. He was left back there for about an hour, maybe, hour and a half before he was finally pulled out and taken to the holding facility…and there he was beaten again and then thrown in a cell. And then they ah, we, ah, butt stroked him a couple of times, beat him with sticks. I was kind of shocked, you know, but I was just learning how it was done. Keep in mind these guys were trying to kill us with IEDs.

FAMILY ROOM

The family room is a safe place, a place of home memories attached to relaxation and "down time" but it is also juxtaposed with memories of other homes in Iraq that made scenes of violence and violation.

Thematically, this space is associated with agency, with the choices people made in the field about how they would treat other people, as human beings or as animals.

VIDEO GAME / TV

EDWARD: There was a lot of, um, a lot of aggression in our platoon. We'd go out on patrol and you know sometimes if something had happened, it would be like fuck it. If there's a sniper, we wouldn't know where it was coming from, we would just do all directional shooting. Fire at anything that moves. Like in a video game. Everything's a target. You stop thinking of them as people. We had a, a lot of agro. We raided this pharmacy early on and ah, and . . . I had assumed that they were going to, you know, come out with some opiates or something, and would you know, spend the rest of the year comatose with the stuff, but, but instead they—they come out with vials and vials of steroids, and so the whole platoon got on steroids. And then when you'd get hold of a guy, a prisoner, sometimes you would start doing something and just kind of lose track. One time we caught this guy right as he was planting an IED, on the road right in fucking front of us, and we got him in the Humvee, and we just took turns carving stuff, stars and smiley faces, whatever, our initials, in his face. Just to leave him with some scars that, you know, would never go away. And at one I point I like peeled back the skin from his face, like just to see what was under there. His jaw muscles and teeth and tongue and shit. Just a lot of blood. I just spaced or something and went into this zone, and I kept peeling. And he was like moaning, making this awful noise. And after that we were like fuck it, we're not taking him back. Nobody's gonna process him. Who wants to explain that? So we drew straws, and one of us shot him in the side of the head with a drop weapon, and we dumped him in the road. Ran him over. And that was that. We just headed back to base.

FIREPLACE

CHRIS: When we'd come into a place, a home or whatever. A lot of time we knew, like, we knew that these people knew things, and we knew they knew who the bad guys were. And we had to scare them, you know, noise, smoke, fear. We were going to scare the hell out of 'em. We would bag them and bind them, and put them in the stress position with their faces up against the wall. I would like take this metal chair and slam it against the wall, right next to their head. It was something I just um like developed as a tactic to generate fear, extreme fear. It was like extremely jarring; it was extremely loud and it was right next to their ear. It was like an extremely jarring thing— not knowing if the next time they're actually going to get hit. One of the things that we would do is ask them—like one of the things would be like in Arabic to say like, "What's your name?" It was like "Shishmuk" or some shit. I'm pronouncing it wrong. We would just scream this question over and over again. So the guy'd be against the wall, my partner would just scream "Shishmuk" at this guy and as soon as he'd scream that question, I'd slam the chair against the wall and freak the guy out and then he'd scream the question again and we'd just be asking this question that wasn't a question to this person, but he knew we were asking him something, he just didn't know what, and then every time I'd just be smashing this chair, and so it was just like, I mean in a way, there was no information to get from this. It was just putting them in a psychological state that was just extremely disoriented and terrified. All people speak fear. If you scare them and convince them that they will die, they will do what you want them to do. These tactics work, and a lot of times you don't have to go all the way— you just have to, you know, produce the illusion that they are under, you know, a life-threatening circumstance, and it works.

LAMP

JOHNATHAN: I may sound like I'm defending a lot of these really awful practices, but at the time I was the biggest thorn in the side of, of everyone who was doing this sort of thing. I was very much against what we were doing to these people. One time I stayed in the room as they, the Iraqi police, started to interrogate this prisoner. And it wasn't like they had a reason. They weren't trying anything; the guy was a—he was a different ethnic persuasion than they were. He was in the wrong part of town, and they captured him. They were going to beat the hell out of 'im,

and my friend—he was a police officer—I think he may have been trying to impress me maybe by mistreating the prisoner. He starts questioning this guy, putting a gun to his head, and then like, he you know, starts hitting him with a cleaning rod and I was like, "Hey, this is, this is. . . this is kinda going over the line . . ." and then he like wanted me to help search this guy, and so I start searching this guy, you know, took off his shoes, and then my friend takes a power cord from a lamp, and he kind of mimes to me that like, he if hooks the power cord up to his feet he'll feel it in his genitals, and you know at this point, I said, "Stop, stop…" I went to go get the platoon leader who could not have cared less about what the fuck I had to say. He was just like, you know, "Get the fuck away from me, whatever . . ." I was like, "No, you know, they're really going to do this, you need, you need to step in here," he's like, you know, "Whatever. Just—just go away."

STEREO

SAMANTHA: A lot of the enhanced techniques don't involve direct physical contact with the detainee. They can just be loud music playing for hours, sleep deprivation, or sitting in a particularly uncomfortable way. They seem much more benign so you can sort of convince yourself that you're not doing something horrible but it slowly became clear to me that what we were doing is really actually pretty awful. At that point, the prisoners were helpless and they were in our care and just seeing the way they deteriorated and just watching people suffer that it just— it got to be too much. I couldn't do it. You know you're over there and, okay so you're told these things are legal, you're being told by your leaders to do these things and everybody thinks it's okay. So you're kind of in this moral bubble, like you don't—you don't see what's happening but when the Abu Ghraib scandal broke and you could see that—the outrage that people were having back home in the States about this and around the world, you kind of realize "shit, that's exactly what we're doing." I'm a part of it too.

SHED IN THE BACK YARD

A backyard shed of a well-maintained suburban home, a place where gardening tools and other tools used to keep up a nice garden with a pool are held, perhaps a spot where the homeowner might have a beer or a glass of lemonade on a hot summer day or shoot darts with a friend.

This space transforms into memories of the dungeon, the place where soldiers went too far in their interrogation of prisoners and crossed a Rubicon from which they can later not return.

WIRE CUTTERS

CHRIS: There was this guy, this like village elder or whatever. Gray hair and old and wise and all that. So we know. We know if anybody knows where they've got the bombs and shit. It's this guy. So we did shit. We took turns. We beat him. Somebody shocked him with a cord from a lamp, like in Rambo or whatever. We tried out shit from the movies. Um…I, myself, um lopped off a couple fingers, starting from each joint working my way down. With a pair of wire cutters. It was something I read in one of my Dad's books, something they did to prisoners back in Nam. And the guy was completely powerless, screaming "No, no, please don't." And everybody else was like "Do it. Do it to him." And I was like "Just answer the damn question, or this little piggy's never coming home." His fate rested in our hands. It was ours for the choosing. And you know what? It was a unique and wonderful feeling. I had this great feeling, this feeling of empowerment about me. I felt—I felt mighty, you know? Still in the end it felt a little, like, pointless. Whatever I mean we learned where some of the shit was, but after a while it felt a little like we weren't getting any new intel. And so then I shot him. Had to. He wasn't going to get to talk about what happened, about what we did to him. It's one thing seeing, it's another thing having the person talk about it. Kinda helps rally people to their cause.

DART BOARD

EDWARD: We had this one guy, and he was like a money guy, a foreign fighter, had a lot of money in his house. He was probably bankrolling the operation, and he wouldn't say a word. He was like all Mr. Tough Guy. He

was like indignant. Like you can't come into my house and do—whatever. You could slap him around and he wouldn't say a word. But his little brother, teenage guy who looked like him but skinnier, was there too. And so we grabbed this kid and we were like "No, we are in charge, like you cannot act like that . . ." but he, you know, kept it up, the Mr. Tough Guy act. We were like "Don't act like that, tell us, you know. Quit acting that way. You're not in charge of this situation." Nothing. So we're like, "Okay . . . we're going to shoot your brother now" and then he tried to say something else and we shot his brother in the head, and he was like, 'Oh my God, these people really will kill me if I don't tell them . . . *(laughing)* what they want to know.' And then he gave it all right up. We got in the truck and he directed us right to the bomber's house. It was effective, highly effective. But sort of sad, sad that it had to go there.

WATERING CAN

JOHNATHAN: A lot of the techniques were not, like, something we were trained in. We're just grunts, you know? I mean orders come down and they are very nonspecific. Like "Do whatever is necessary to do to obtain the objective." Like that. Whatever means necessary. So you hear things in the mess hall or whatever. Like that battalion intelligence is doing certain things. Techniques like waterboarding, Tasers, cattle prods, Military Police dogs and the "electric chair" stress position. And we get curious. Because we're out there, you know, and we need to get info too. Our lives are on the line and they don't teach us any of this. So we heard about waterboarding and we were talking about it. We were in a town for the night and my squad leader was like, "We need to try that out. That might be useful in the field." And we all agreed so we said, "Let's do it on the next person we see . . ." and it just happened to be a guy about our age. He was walking out on the street alone and we stopped him and we gagged him and we flexi-cuffed him and dragged him into one of the buildings. We found a plastic bag that we used. So we tried it out, we waterboarded him, we learned how it worked. We had our fun and then we let him go. It wasn't, you know, something I would have just done on my own. It was like research, group research. Whatever.

TRICYCLE

SAMANTHA: We raided a house one day and secured it; there was nothing in it. There was like this little kid and one of their soldiers which is an E-4. He's like, "Come here you little fuck…" to the kid, and I was like. . . . "What the hell's wrong with you; it's like a six-year-old kid . . ." and I got into a huge argument with him. And he was like, "Whatever sergeant so and so . . ." and I was like, "Come here . . ." like I would get really—I took the situation with children very seriously. I—you know, it was like, "You're a fuckin' grown man in body armor . . . punking a six-year-old kid, that's pathetic. What is wrong with you? That's—that's a child you're terrorizing." I wanted to get it through his head that, and it wasn't the first time I've talked to him about it, before, I pulled him on the side, I'm like, "Dude, you can't do that." And so like, at that time, you know, we're hot and angry, and I was just like frustrated and he's like, yelling at the kid. I wanted him to feel shame. I wanted to shame him into not—not doing that ever again. I wanted him to understand that what he was doing was wrong.

KITCHEN

The kitchen is about coming home at the end of the day. It is a place where families gather and share food. It is about normalcy; the return to human society. It is about the comforts of home.

For the soldiers, the kitchen is the space in which consequences are reflected. Objects in the kitchen trigger memories they can't shake and the normal life they feel they cannot return to.

The kitchen transforms into a bar where hard memories come to drown, a space of aggression and frustration.

BOTTLE OF LIQUOR

EDWARD: I think that's the one thing I hated worse than anything or anybody was myself for what I . . . was turning into over there and how much I enjoyed it. I mean I enjoyed hurting people. To this day, I still have a problem not hurting people, because I want to, I want to hurt people. I go out to the bar and I just want to get in to a fight with one of these normal, fucking, people. I want them to feel the pain that I feel inside, but I want theirs to be physical. I don't know, it's hard to explain *(quiet laugh).* Like I just want to hurt people, and it makes me feel evil; psychotic and . . . my wife doesn't understand that when I get angry, I just want to hurt people. I go out and I pick fights, I go out and I bait people into fights with me just so I can hurt 'em, and she just doesn't understand why, and I don't know how to explain it to her. I like to break people's bones in a fight; I mean I was trained in the Army and, you know, Brazilian Jiu-jitsu and—I don't go toe-to-toe with people, I take 'em to the ground and I break something; I just want to break some—I want to hear it snap, I want to hear them scream—it makes me feel better, it's like me releasing the scream myself. I'm a fucking monster, ok? I know that now. I got kids, you know, and I don't want them to know— to know who I am and what I have done.

CHEF'S KNIFE

CHRIS: There's a lot more that I wouldn't say in public for fear of the way people are going to look at me, than, say on one-on-one basis where it's just me and one other person and no matter what they look at, how they look at me, they actually have to live with what I tell them. It's them that has to go to sleep with the images that I had in my head. And I started to look at it as "fair is fair," you've asked to do this, why can't—why can't these people look at these images and see these images that are in my head? So they can see that life's not all rainbows and lollipops, and there's a reason that soldiers are killing themselves with a higher rate now than ever before. It's not because we're doing great things for God and country. You know, I was having problems when I got back and I talked to my Dad. I mean I knew what he had done in Viet Nam. And when I— when I was talking to him about my problems, it—it kinda—he had been bottling it up and holding it in for so long without anybody to talk to that when it

started coming out, it kinda— really fucked him up too. He like ah, he almost killed himself. I don't know how to put it. When I started talking about what I did, he remembered what he did and it kinda made things worse for him and I sort of feel that it's my fault.

REFRIGERATOR

JOHNATHAN: It was cold out there even when it was hot. It was always like, one way or another somebody was going to lose a life. It was deciding whether or not . . . at least for the first half of my deployment that the American lives were more important than the lives of the people of Iraq, and then the later part of my deployment was realizing that every life lost is a life lost and it didn't matter if they were American or Iraqi, it's still a human life. I'd like to think that . . . me not shooting the guy for thinking he had something he could have . . . at least for a night saved one life, I mean, the next day someone in a different squad could have shot that man's son and he become an enemy of us anyways, but I had no hand in it. When I got—when I got blown up in Iraq, I wasn't angry, I wasn't upset at the Iraqis, because I started to view them as the same as you and I. I would have done the same exact thing. If I kicked in your front door and shot your kid in the head, are you going to thank me for it and say, "Hey, I—I know you're looking out for me. This is our freedom and democracy . . . ?" or would you pick up a weapon and try to kill me, to kill every single person who looked like me? I'd do the latter, and I would do it until the day that I died."

TOWEL

SAMANTHA: What causes, I think, a lot of the problems, especially, you know, all the problems which also affect the detainee situation, is that we are separate from the other, you know, that there is some kind of super disconnect. We can convince ourselves that what we do to other people really doesn't affect us, which allows us to do these things to other people. But whether we like it or not or want to accept it or not, what we do to others we—you know, we do to ourselves, and there's no way that you can go to war and or you know objectify somebody, detain them, torture

them, mistreat them and think you're going to walk away clean . . . it's not going to happen.

END OF EXPERIENCE

As the experience comes to a close, the user is pulled back to the center of the space, which is now tinged in a dark, reddish hue. The sound of a heartbeat echoes and reverberates in the space.