The Limits of Recognition: Rethinking Conventional Critiques of Drone Warfare

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A Google search for "anti-drone clothing" mostly and predictably yields an array of t-shirts printed with slogans protesting drone warfare. But the results also include something far more interesting: Adam Harvey's *Stealth Wear* line, garments "fabricated with silver-plated fabric that reflects thermal radiation, enabling the wearer to avert overhead thermal surveillance."[1] These shirts, burqas, hijabs, and hoodies muffle the heat signature of the human body, presumably making it undetectable to the drones loitering above. This apparel is designed to foil drone operators by rendering the wearer unidentifiable as a human, and consequently invisible as a target, thereby breaking the circuit of recognizability on which drone surveillance and warfare fundamentally depend. Within this circuit, to be recognizable as a living human is to be recognizable as a target, and hence to be endangered.

While *Stealth Wear* operates on the assumption that a human rendered unrecognizable as such will be protected by this type of invisibility, much anti-drone activism presumes that humans who *are* recognizable as such will be protected by their visibility. Anti-drone activists often seek to emphasize the humanness of the people who are killed by drone strikes and call for drone operators, as well as the states and militaries who prosecute drone warfare, to recognize that humanness. The anti-drone faith in recognition is grounded in two conceits. The first is that drone technologies—with their remoteness, mediation, and putative similarity to video games—dehumanize their targets and thus encourage and facilitate wanton violence on the part of their operators. The second, and corollary, notion follows: if drone operators recognized the

beings on their displays as human, they would be unable or unwilling to kill them. Both of these premises, I suggest, are faulty. Indeed, there is increasing evidence against them, including the high rate of PTSD among drone operators, which suggests they are keenly aware of the consequences of their actions. But the figure of the oblivious drone operator who needs only to be enlightened persists in popular culture, as well as in activist and scholarly critiques of drone warfare. Consequently, anti-drone work often proceeds as an attempt to disabuse drone operators of their supposed ignorance through an emphasis the humanness of their targets.

According to a March 2019 BBC count, the Trump administration approved 2243 strikes during its first two years, while working steadily to relax reporting requirements about drone casualties.[2] Critics were already dismayed by the Obama administration's embrace of drone warfare, and this form of violence persists, sprawls, and sometimes intensifies, with no sign that it will abate (or that the American public will lose the appetite for it). In short, the durability and entrenched nature of drone warfare suggest a need to rethink prevailing critical frameworks for opposing it. In this article, I query the limits of recognition as a strategy of anti-drone resistance. I begin with a consideration of the politics of recognition and humanity in drone warfare. This overview serves as the foundation for my subsequent exploration of approaches to recognition operative in three artifacts of drone warfare: a 2014 report from the Stimson Center Task Force on US Drone Policy; a public art installation in Pakistan called *Not a Bug Splat*; and the playful photographic meditation on drone subjectivity by the IOCOSE collective, "Drone Selfies." I conclude with a consideration of the emerging awareness of PTSD in drone operators and the economies and politics of recognition operative within it. Ultimately, I demonstrate that the emphasis on recognition amounts to a misidentification of the conditions by which drone warfare proceeds and, moreover, of the means by which it might be resisted.

Recognition in Anti-Drone Activism

The discourse of recognition in anti-drone activism is rooted in liberalism and reliant on a range of beliefs about individuality, freedom, and humanity. It hinges on a pair of assumptions: that the systematic lack of recognition of targets' humanity enables the persistence of drone warfare and, consequently, that adequate recognition of that humanity would short-circuit the willingness of both nation-states and drone operators to engage in this type of killing. I argue that this perspective entails a double miscalculation. The first tenet underestimates drone operators, implying that they are not otherwise capable of comprehending what they are doing. The second, by contrast, risks overestimating them, presuming an inherent but latent goodness in them that needs only to be activated, which is also a tacit claim about inherent, even exceptional, American goodness. Both convictions lead anti-drone activists to target the drone

operator's vision, conscience, and agency. I argue that this discursive nexus of drone technology, visibility, recognition, and humanness needs to be untangled.

War has always been, in Christine Sylvester's succinct formulation, essentially a "politics of injury" in which actors aspire to mete out as much harm to their enemies as efficiently as they can. [3] Yet drones have arguably sparked more controversy than any other technology deployed in current conflicts.[4] Caren Kaplan notes that, for both their defenders and detractors, drones "appear to be always already exceptional."[5] The singularity of our fascination with drones is curious; there are, after all, other weapons that are more lethal, more indiscriminate, more automated, more widely deployed, and perhaps even more shrouded in secrecy. In effect, the term 'drone' refers to a specific object but also conjures what Lisa Parks and Kaplan describe as a "cultural imaginar[y]." "Drones are not," Parks and Kaplan argue, "idle machines hovering above; they are loaded with certain assumptions and ideologies."[6] The drone carries with it a thicket of assumptions, beliefs, doubts, and desires, which may or not be anchored in fact. These include notions about how drone warfare might be contested. For Grégoire Chamayou, drone warfare is particularly objectionable because it is the epitome of a fundamental reversal in the state's approach to warmaking: a shift toward "hyperprotection of military personnel" and an understanding of military casualties as aberrational and preventable as opposed to expected and inevitable. This change, he argues, "tends to compromise traditional social division of danger, in which soldiers are at risk and civilians are protected."[7] Anti-drone activists posit recognition—specifically of civilian innocence, vulnerability, and humanness—as a way to rebalance this system.

Advocates for drone warfare insist that this technology enables pinpoint strikes that disrupt terrorist networks and minimize civilian casualties, and it seems that American popular support for drone strikes outweighs concerns about collateral damage, despite years of challenges from anti-drone scholars and activists.[8] If the proponents of drone warfare are unreasonably enthusiastic about the efficacy of their weapons, then perhaps its critics have been too certain about the power of their strategies for resisting them. For example, many critics of drone warfare contend that the interface dehumanizes its targets. [9] However, although non-recognition of another's humanness may make it easier to kill them, it does not necessarily follow that recognition of their humanness will make it harder. The humanization approach, I suggest, is a too-simple remedy for the quandaries posed by drone warfare, and my critique of the discourse of recognition also, and necessarily, refuses the reductive logic of de/humanization. As a strategy, humanization foists the burden of repairing this violence onto the abstract figure of the drone pilot, while deflecting attention from the structural forces that precipitate it.

Although the call to recognize the humanity of vulnerable others has an intuitive appeal, it is profoundly limited by its entanglements with hierarchies of race, nation, and gender. Samera Esmeir, in her work on women in colonial Egypt, offers a doubled critique of the "recourse . . . to the figure of the

human."[10] Legal designations of who counts as human, she argues, make the humanness of a particular subject contingent on the presence of the law itself. Thus, any suspension or retraction of the law renders invalid a subject's claim to humanness, a dynamic that is especially damaging to marginalized subjects like women and people of color. More generally, the seemingly inclusive gesture of extending legal recognition of humanness to those previously excluded from the category simultaneously reaffirms the power of those whose humanness was never in question, and who now exercise that power by acting as the arbiters of who else qualifies to be recognized as such.

Writing about slavery in the United States, Walter Johnson makes a compatible argument against the frame of de/humanization for interpreting this history. Johnson insists that when we describe the actions of slaveholders as 'inhuman,' we "separat[e] ourselves from our own histories of perpetration." But the greater harm, he suggests, comes in the insistence that slavery itself was dehumanizing. His analysis is worth quoting at length:

> More than misleading, however, the notion that enslavement "dehumanized" enslaved people is harmful; it indelibly and categorically alters those with whom it supposedly sympathizes. *De*humanization suggests an alienation of enslaved people from their humanity. Who is the judge of when a person has suffered so much or been objectified so fundamentally that the person's humanity has been lost? How does the person regain that humanity? Can it even be regained? And who decides when it has been regained? The explicitly paternalist character of these questions suggests that a belief in the "dehumanization" of enslaved people is locked in an inextricable embrace with the very history of racial abjection it ostensibly confronts. All this while implicitly asserting the unimpeachable rectitude and "humanity" of latter-day observers.[11]

In other words, the claim that someone else has been dehumanized actually enacts, and perhaps even abets, a violence of its own. And the accusation that one person has dehumanized another does nothing to rebalance the hierarchy between them. Given all of this, I contend that the dehumanization argument against drone warfare is palliative at best, damaging at worst, and not nearly as radical as it purports to be.[12]

In making this argument, I do not mean to trivialize the importance of recognition. It has, of course, been an important goal for feminist, anti-racist, and anti-militarist activism. In these contexts, calls for recognition are ways of claiming the rights of marginalized subjects to be seen, heard, and taken seriously in public life.[13] But recognition, in and of itself, does not guarantee political change or a readjustment of social relations. As Kelly Oliver argues, recognition is generally premised on an agonistic framework of subject/object

in a way that views interpersonal interactions as fundamentally conflictual and precludes acknowledgment of what is "unfamiliar and disruptive" in others.[14] This means that we only recognize others to the extent that they remind us of ourselves, which is a paltry mechanism for remedying injustice. Wendy Kozol frames this dilemma in a different way, reminding us that "recognition . . . operates relationally as well as hierarchically through factors such as race, gender, class, nation, and sexuality to reinforce systemic social inequalities," dynamics that can be amplified during times of war.[15] Recognition, in these theorizations, can cement differentials whereby the more powerful party is the only one endowed with the capacity to confer recognition on their less powerful counterpart. In the case of drone warfare, then, all the work of recognition—and thus all the ethical reward—falls to the drone operator him or herself; the other party is passive, ethically null, present only as a potential victim or object of rescue.

Most discourses of recognition privilege sight as the mechanism by which recognition unfolds, and thus, much anti-drone activism targets the vision of the pilots, attempting to correct or expand it. But just as recognition, as a social or relational phenomenon, tends to proceed according to pre-established patterns of dominance and marginalization, sight too is always already saturated by power. Power conditions the way that we see, as well as our interpretations of what are looking at. Mark Reinhardt, for example, has documented the myriad ways that sovereign power shapes patterns of awareness and blindness.[16] And in the specific context of the War on Terror, Sharon Sliwinski argues that the real question is not simply "what is or is not available to be seen, but rather the way in which this war has affected how we see."[17] This suggests that correcting militarized visualities is not simply a matter of increased representation of others, or changing the view of drone operators; rather, Sliwinski is calling for a careful consideration of how militarization changes sight itself. Anti-drone strategies that assert the humanity of the target presume that operators need only to be reminded in order to see it, but they fail to consider all the forces militating against the visibility of that very thing.[18]

Most popular culture depictions critical of drone warfare traffic in this hope about the power of recognition.[19] For example, the 2014 film *Good Kill* follows a pair of drone operators dogged by their consciences as they carry out increasingly questionable missions. The film emphasizes their suffering as they follow orders delivered via speakerphone by a disembodied voice known only as "Langley," who insists that they proceed despite the near-certainty of collateral damage.[20] Throughout, the protagonists' awareness that they are killing actual people, and often civilians, becomes nearly sufficient proof of their heroism, while their anguish obviates any suggestion of their responsibility for the deaths that they lament.

The 2015 film *Eye in the Sky* follows a similar logic, even as it begins from a more complicated premise. *Eye in the Sky* tells the story of a joint operation by British, American, and Kenyan forces against a small cell of Al-Shabab militants who are planning a large-scale suicide attack. While a drone strike would

almost certainly defuse this threat, the presence of a young girl selling bread outside their compound introduces an ethical complication into the decision-making. The British colonel in charge of the operation urges the strike despite the near-certainty that the girl will be killed or seriously injured by the missile, while the American team of Air Force drone operators become the voices of just war and even manage to temporarily interrupt the launch of the missile. In the end, however, the team carries out the strike, while the film itself emphasizes the colonel's lethal lack of scruples and zeroes in on the resultant suffering of the young girl and her family. At the same time, the film also exonerates the Americans for their role in this outcome, suggesting that they did everything they reasonably could to prevent it, and portraying them as distressed, often to the point of tears, throughout. In the end, the American team emerges from the control room to congratulations from their commander and an instruction to go home and rest so they are ready for work tomorrow. This conclusion reminds audiences that drone operators are constrained by the institutions in which they labor, but also squarely individualizes responsibility for civilian casualties onto the British colonel who insists on carrying out the strike, while exonerating Americans by burdening them with conscience. The contrast between her steely resolve and the Americans' hesitation implies, again, that if she only recognized the young girl's humanity, she would have acted otherwise.

The simplicity of these moral exchanges obscures the complexity of drone warfare, the array of forces that conspires to license killing, a dynamic that Keith Feldman characterizes as a "fus[ion of] visuality, pre-emption, and a disregard for territorial sovereignty."[21] A drone strike, in Feldman's interpretation, is never an isolated event or the result of one person's decision; it is, instead, the expression of a range of historical, political, juridical, perceptual, and ideological forces, which cannot be undone by recognition alone. However, in both scholarly and popular representations of drone warfare, the prevailing image is one of a pilot (perhaps assisted by a sensor operator) flying autonomously, and the decision about whether to fire is almost always framed as a matter of individual personal conscience while the act of firing itself (or not) is portrayed merely as a matter of volition. Factually, this is a misrepresentation; Derek Gregory calculates that there are more than 180 people involved in every drone strike, while Peter Asaro wagers that it takes a crew of 80 to operate a Predator.[22] Emphasis on the agency of the individual drone operator decontextualizes this violence, smudges over complex relationships of power, responsibility, and complicity, and simultaneously hints that the remedy for all of this is reform on the individual level, with some blame shifted faultlessly onto the media and screens by which they monitor and track their targets.

Yet this emphasis on agency in the discourse of recognition coexists with a form of technological determinism implying that drone operators are not fully to blame for their actions, a suggestion that the interface itself enables them to dehumanize, and thus goads them to kill, their targets. Despite this inherent contradiction, anti-drone discourses of recognition often mobilize both dis-

courses at once. Interest in the conscience of drone operators—as evidenced in *Good Kill* and *Eye in the Sky*—often circulates along with the conventional wisdom that drones reduce war to a 'video game,' a depiction so pervasive that it has no clear single origin.[23] Chamayou encapsulates this concern, asserting that "the filtered nature of perception, the figurative reduction of the enemy, the nonreciprocity of the fields of perception, and the dislocation of the phenomenological unity of the action" lead to a "strong 'moral buffering' effect."[24] At its core, this is a technological determinist argument positing that the nature of the interface directly and predictably shapes the operator's sensory, cognitive, and affective experience of killing. Technological determinist arguments are appealing in part because they imply obvious solutions: change the medium to change human behavior, and in the case of drone warfare, change the medium to one that would give the operator a clearer view of the humanity of his target.

Other scholars have begun to complicate this technological determinist framework, insisting that our conventional understandings of drone warfare are insufficient to the point of oversimplification. For example, Adam Rothstein contends that the video game image obscures the complexities—technical, sensory, and cognitive—of the actual work of operating the drone.[25] Asaro argues that drones and video games share "some similarities in terms of interfaces and activities," but notes that drone operations are "usually much more boring and tedious, with brief moments of incredible pressure and stress" in a form of labor that requires intensive multi-tasking, complex visual-motor demands, and the management of varied and numerous distractions.[26] Against a technological determinist frame, Alison Williams uses ethnographic study of UAV pilots as evidence for her claim that the "military aircraft assemblage is both human and machine, but also neither only human and machine," a formulation that implies a complex interaction between operator, interface, and drone. She also insists that the physical detachment of drone operators from their targets does not equate to "emotional detachment" from the process of killing them.[27] Similarly, Kevin McSorley argues that "the embodied experience of drone operators themselves is not simply marked by the detachment of physical distance, but is rather punctuated by disruptive new mediated intimacies."[28] The presumption that the drone interface prompts users to objectify their targets can, in other words, blind us to other outcomes, including the possibility that prolonged watching overrides the feeling of distance. Ultimately, the 'video game' depiction of drone warfare might serve to replicate the very un-seeing that it attempts to correct. By characterizing the act of launching a drone strike as a mere reflex akin to zapping a fictional enemy in a video game, this depiction belies the influence of phenomena like racialization in determining who is targeted, and how.[29]

With its vexed approach to the agency of drone operators, the argument that drone warfare transforms killing into a game may also, and paradoxically, take for granted the logic it seems to undermine, and continue to subordinate the targets that it seeks to rescue. Of course, I share the concerns of other scholars

who have observed patterns of deeply problematic, often racialized, representations in contemporary American militarism. Since September 11, as Elisabeth Anker notes, the U.S. approach to prosecuting war has emphasized American victimization, an orientation that licenses a new range of practices that include drone warfare.[30] Concomitantly, as scholars like Susan Carruthers have argued, a range of representational practices have conspired to render enemies like 'insurgents' functionally invisible in the contemporary visual landscape. News stories might talk about the casualties they cause, but rarely show the fighters themselves; if they do appear, it is never as "sentient individuals," only as targets or stereotyped caricatures.[31]

These broader historical, political, and cultural trends shape the practice of drone warfare in a range of sometimes unpredictable ways that cannot be encapsulated by unfounded assertions that drone warfare reduces the experience of killing to a video game. At the same time, we should not overcorrect by narrowly emphasizing the suffering of drone operators. Indeed, as Kaplan argues, "The challenge for those of us who study the history of visuality in relation to military technologies is to avoid remythologizing and promoting the narratives generated by colonial occupations and asymmetrical warfare," particularly as they recirculate in oppositional discourses.[32] To be clear, in developing this critique of deployments of recognition in anti-drone activism, I am not seeking to undermine anti-drone activists or defending drone warfare. Quite the contrary; I was motivated to do this research because I am concerned that predominant anti-drone strategies are not working, and I hope my analysis might clear space for imagining alternative approaches to this lethal problem.

Rethinking Video Game Warfare in *The Stimson Report*

In May 2013, President Obama made a speech at National Defense University in which he called for an examination of options for the legal oversight of drone warfare. In response, the Stimson Center, a nonpartisan think tank, convened a task force with representation from military, intelligence, legal, academic communities and the private sector.[33] Overall, the report is a measured assessment of drone warfare that attempts to correct misapprehensions about this type of warfare. For example, the report notes that new military technologies have always begotten debate and anxiety.[34] While conceding that some drone strikes have killed civilians, the report also contends that "there is no reason to believe UAVs cause more civilian casualties than other weapons delivery systems."[35] It also surmises "that US government decision-makers make targeting decisions in good faith and with genuine care" and moreover that most of the public would support those decisions if they knew who the targets were, and so advocates for more transparency and oversight of the UAV program.[36]

Additionally, the authors of the Stimson Report directly contradict the idea that drones transform war into a video game. They write,

> There is . . . little reason to view UAVs as uniquely creating
> a "PlayStation mentality" about war . . . UAVs permit killing
> from a safe distance—but so do cruise missiles and snipers'
> guns. And ironically, the men and women who remotely op-
> erate lethal UAVs have a far more "up close and personal"
> view of the damage they inflict than the pilots of manned air-
> craft, who speed past their targets in seconds from far above.
> In fact, some evidence suggests that UAV operators are par-
> ticularly vulnerable to post-traumatic stress: they may watch
> their targets for weeks or even months, seeing them go about
> the routines of daily life, before one day watching on-screen
> as they are obliterated.[37]

This finding was widely covered; stories in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and *Al-Jazeera America* all cited this challenge to the prevailing wisdom about drones.[38]

The extensive coverage that this finding received suggests that many outlets deemed it newsworthy, that this was information their readers might not otherwise know, and that the belief that drones transform war into a video game is pervasive.[39] Such a belief underestimates the cognizance of drone operators while also partially absolving them of responsibility for killing by shifting blame onto the interface. [40] Yet the Stimson Report's correction signifies ambivalently here, and illuminates the limitations of a recognition-based approach to contesting drone warfare, revealing how this model can objectify the very people it means to protect. The report references the anxiety that drone warfare sows among populations on the ground, but frames it primarily in terms of "blowback" and the likelihood that drone warfare is creating enemies far faster than it can eliminate them.[41] The report allows that populations who experience drone warfare as its targets would have intense reactions to it, but portrays these reactions in terms of 'anger' and 'hostility' (rather than, for example, 'sadness' or 'grief'). By emphasizing these potentially violent emotions, the report traffics in stereotypes of people from such countries as inherently, irrationally warlike, while also positioning American military personnel as uniquely sensitive by contrast.[42] After making quick reference to foreign 'targets,' the report re-centers the experience of the drone pilots, emphasizing their vulnerability to PTSD. This characterization aligns well with militarized discourses of American exceptionalism, which identify the nation as enlightened and compassionate enough to care about the casualties but also noble and stoic enough to continue the fight despite the pain of doing so.

Anti-drone platforms grounded in recognition are predicated on a similar vision of exceptionalism, insofar as they assume that if American military personnel could (be made to) recognize the humanness of their targets, their inherent goodness and morality would inhibit them from killing.[43] For my part, I am interested in the durability of this image of military personnel, and the way

it vexes discourses of recognition. After all, the whole premise of recognition collapses if we consider the possibility, or perhaps the likelihood, that drone operators know what they are doing, who they are killing, and do it anyway, a prospect intimating that recognition itself can be militarized.

Not a Bug Splat and the Shame of Drone Operators

The anti-drone faith in recognition finds one of its clearest, and largest, expressions in a project called *Not a Bug Splat,* an art installation in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region of Pakistan that takes the form of a 60-by-90-foot portrait of an anonymous girl who lost both her parents in a drone strike. Unfurled on a field in a heavily-targeted part of the country, *Not a Bug Splat* was created at a size and resolution that would make it clearly visible to drone operators, on the logic that if they could see the human face of a target, they would behave differently. This widely-lauded public art installation is a collaboration between artists from France, America, and Pakistan; the human rights organization Reprieve; the Foundation for Fundamental Rights; the advertising agency BBDO Pakistan (which won a handful of Clios for the project) and "highly enthusiastic locals." The original portrait was taken by Noor Behram, a photojournalist from Waziristan who made a practice of visiting the sites of drone strikes to record the damage that they caused.[44] Such image-making is, of course, a necessary counter to media patterns of inattention to the casualties of U.S. military actions.[45] My concern here is with the way that *Not a Bug Splat* deployed this image into a visual economy of recognition.

Positioning the intimacy of the facial portrait against the ostensibly dehumanizing aerial view of the drone operator, *Not a Bug Splat* operates according to a visual logic of recognition.[46] Notably, the project relies on the image of the apolitical, innocent, feminized child, representations that often resonate with imperialist forms of paternalism.[47] Indeed, the girl appears only as a passive victim and potential target. This portrayal, like discourses about recognition more generally, obscures the agency and subjectivity of people who are subject to this form of aerial warfare, intimating that their best hope is to wait for recognition from an outsider; indeed, the entire discourse of recognition is predicated on the passivity of the less-powerful other, who in turn becomes an instrument for the self-improvement of her more-powerful counterpart, in this case the drone operator.[48] At the same time, it also reifies the lethal power of the drone operator, rather than asking us to question it.[49] Consequently, I suggest that *Not a Bug Splat* operates more as an appeal to Western sensibilities, and a canny maneuver in that visual economy, than as a representation of a specific child and her suffering. In any case, the strategy seems to have worked. The #notabugsplat hashtag went viral, and news coverage of the project was largely positive. [50] With the exception of a *Newsweek* story that gave the last word to a skeptical academic, these pieces endorsed the use of recognition to prick the conscience of drone operators.[51] For example, a CNN story quoted an artist who

expressed a wish to 'shame' drone operators, while in the *New York Times*, an activist asserts, "'this isn't a video game.'"

Yet the only truly verifiable impact of the project is a virtual one. The installation was never designed to be a permanent fixture on the landscape. The creators noted that after about two weeks, locals repurposed the fabric for uses like roofing material, but also insisted that because the image was also visible to satellites, the child's face would be recorded forever. Social media circulation of the project serves a similar function. And although I take seriously endorsements of the project from a range of constituencies, I argue that *Not a Bug Splat* succeeds more at branding than at actual intervention.[52] None of the content produced by the creators, or the media coverage it generated, includes the voices of anyone from the region, nor do the creators offer any information about how the community was changed by the experience or whether or how drone operators saw it. There may well have been other outcomes, including raised awareness worldwide, but the lack of any follow-up inquiry reveals how assumptions about the power of recognition go untested.

Not a Bug Splat targets the conscience of drone pilots, operating antagonistically on the assumption that they can be shamed into caring about their targets. *Not a Bug Splat* thus enacts the underestimation and overestimation of drone operators that I described at the outset of this paper, presuming in the first instance that they are too deluded by the drone interface to recognize the consequences of their actions, while also acting on the assumption that they would want to change course if they did and, moreover, that such diversion is merely an individual's decision to make. (Parenthetically, the creators of *Not a Bug Splat* never reference the possibility of trauma among drone pilots and operate on a narrow set of assumptions about their emotional responses.) In practice, this type of targeting may be more of a gesture than an actual strategy, given that drone operators themselves rarely make independent decisions about whom to kill. Indeed, as Feldman observes, the image "purports to hail an abstract (as opposed to actual) individual operator, someone who is in a real sense a fiction."[53] In other words, *Not a Bug Splat* imaginatively conjures the drone operator it seeks to engage. This ensures that its logic of recognition remains unassailable. Simultaneously, the deployment of the girl's face as a device meant to injure the conscience of the drone operator weaponizes the image. By introducing a new type of antagonism into the act of looking, *Not a Bug Splat* may serve to expand the visual distance that it intends to bridge.

Melancholic Drones in Times of Peace

Not a Bug Splat makes a questionable wager about the interiority of drone operators; in this penultimate section, I turn to an artistic intervention that ascribes a melancholic subjectivity to drones themselves.[54] This piece by the IO-COSE collective, entitled "Drone Selfies," speculates about the desires of a decommissioned drone no longer needed for wartime applications. The images

in this series are playful, if a little inscrutable, a turn on the activist project of making drone warfare visible to outsiders, representing drones as banal rather than deadly, but also inviting viewers to think about the unpredictable afterlives of these machines. Superficially, these drone selfies might seem to have little to do with the questions of recognition and dehumanization that I have been working through here, but I argue that these photos illuminate the limitations, if not the occasional absurdity, of the use of recognition as a counter to drone warfare.[55] The series of photos features a drone hovering idly in various interior spaces, photographing itself in a mirror, and documents an exchange of gazes: we watch the drone watching itself and apparently wanting to be watched by us.[56]

The visual is central to the practice of drone warfare and to the 'identity' of the drone itself.[57] But of course, the drone—notwithstanding prognostications about a future in which these machines will operate autonomously—is merely a conduit; drone vision is only lethal because humans make it so. Drones have no scopophilic desire to watch or to see; they have no relational connection either to the people on the ground or the people at their controls. Yet in "Drone Selfies," the drone appears to want things, seems to desire visibility, connection, *recognition*.[58] Indeed, news coverage of the project also participates in this make-believe about the drone's interiority.[59] An article about the project in *Wired* describes the drone as "curious and self-indulgent," speculating that if drones got days off, they would do what humans do with their leisure time: document it with selfies.[60] As IOCOSE narrates it, the drones have been "deprived of their main reason to be," and so "point their built-in cameras to mirrors in an act of vanity."[61] In essence, vanity is a concern with others' perceptions; vanity implies an observer. We contort ourselves to take selfies because we want—even, or perhaps especially, when no one is there to take the picture for us—to be seen, and seen in a certain way, by others.[62] "Drone Selfies" implies that this desire is so universal as to extend even to drones. But this playful suggestion also reminds us of the presumptuousness that underpins the discourse about recognition in drone warfare, as if its targets aspire only to be seen as human by the people who are trying to kill them.

These six selfies feature a drone hovering in two bedrooms, one empty bar, a snowboard shop, a formal dining room, and a public restroom.[63] All the pieces are untitled but captioned with hashtags, as if created for social media, underscoring the drone's wish for visibility. For example, in "#bedroom #droneselfie #intimesofpeace," the drone captures itself in what is apparently a teenager's bedroom. There is a plush dog resting atop a messy stack of notebooks, a small array of plastic toys on a shelf, a poster of a heterosexual couple embracing on a beach, a computer monitor, a pencil case. The drone is tragicomically out of place in the scene, but its presence is not menacing. It is not invisibly surveilling the room from above, but rather facing the mirror directly, a trespass that feels fairly benign. This drone seems to desire *being seen* rather than *seeing*.

This desire manifests even more clearly in "#restroom #droneselfie #in-

timesofpeace," where the drone watches itself in a mirror above the sink in a public bathroom. We see the soap dispenser, the porcelain sink, the shiny tile on the walls. The mirror selfie is a distinct, and oft-maligned, subgenre of selfies ubiquitous on social media, and the *bathroom* mirror selfie is typically deemed even lowlier than that, criticized as evidence of hunger for attention combined with lack of regard for spectators, who are often treated to views of toilets and urinals in the background. Even if the drones with cameras embedded make more artful mirror selfies than humans, in all of these self-portraits, the drone appears as a figure that is at least a little pitiable: lonely, useless, desperate for attention.

In this way, "Drone Selfies" inadvertently reveals a crucial fault in the anti-drone discourse of recognition; it purports to be a concern with vulnerable others, but ends up being something much more solipsistic. These amusingly poignant images hail spectators to identify with the drone: its loneliness, its melancholy, its apparent wish to connect with someone, with anyone, with us. By rendering drones familiar and quotidian, this project positions them as objects of attention, even care or sympathy. In this way, the project enacts a double displacement; although it is ostensibly meant to be critical of drone warfare, by centering our attention on the drones themselves, it deflects our attention off of the victims of drone warfare (civilian 'collateral damage' in particular) and, insofar as we might be tickled by the project, it reorients our attention back onto ourselves. In essence, this is the same operation that the discourse of recognition performs all the time. Both the drone selfie and the discourse of recognition more generally become switches that refocus our attention inward. We see a similar economy of attention at work in discourses about drone pilot PTSD, to which I turn in my next, and final, section.

Drone Pilot PTSD and the
Rescue of American Exceptionalism

"The Wounds of the Drone Warrior," a June 2018 feature in the *New York Times Magazine*, critiques the "narcotizing effect" that drones apparently have on the American public. The author describes the fantasy of a bloodless war being prosecuted frictionlessly by a military comprised of 'joystick warriors,' and contrasts it with an account of the somatic and psychological suffering experienced by many drone pilots. He notes that these warfighters often witness more carnage than ground troops, and that their views get progressively, and agonizingly, clearer as the technology improves, a development that contradicts the technological determinist claim that a 'better' medium would lead to more humane outcomes. Ultimately, the author contends that because war has become normalized, and so much of the drone program is kept secret, these military personnel are often left alone with their 'moral injuries.'[64] This story, while newsy in its focus on experimental treatments for this type of PTSD, is hardly *news*; accounts of drone pilot distress have been circulating on academic, clini-

cal, and journalistic platforms for years, belying the notion that drone operators do not realize the lethal significance of their actions. Consequently, I want to pose two final questions, neither of which asks whether drone pilots "really" get PTSD. Instead, I want to query the ideological work this diagnosis does: how do we explain the continued journalistic and public curiosities about the notion of drone pilot PTSD? And what does this kind of suffering reveal about recognition in drone warfare?

Although the US military has begun to acknowledge the stresses that drone operators encounter, as evidenced in the *Times* article and elsewhere, it has also tended to euphemize them as "burnout," essentially chalking their struggles up to overwork, and thus underestimating the complexity of their sensory and ethical experiences.[65] Asaro describes the military's approach to drone pilot PTSD as a "medico-bureaucratic compromise" that offers a provisional and strategic response to their suffering but does not account for its causes or magnitude.[66] But even as the military minimizes the seriousness of this type of PTSD by treating it as a logistical problem, it also betrays an awareness that drone operators are experiencing *something* overwhelming. A different skepticism of drone pilot stress arises from anti-drone quarters. Chamayou, for example, is dismissive of their trauma and argues that the very notion of drone operator PTSD "makes a public rehabilitation of homicide by drones possible," because it portrays these warriors as caring and empathetic.[67]

Nonetheless, the widespread popular fascination with the trauma of drone operators is curious, particularly in the context of a prolonged war that has become largely uncontroversial. Moreover, as Andrew Bacevich has persuasively demonstrated, the American public has been rather unconcerned with the mental health and general circumstances of veterans in general, being largely content to admire and thank them for their service.[68] Given this, I suggest that the superficial interest in drone operator PTSD, the need to find evidence of their suffering, is ultimately about the rescue of American exceptionalism from the breach caused by the military technology that seems most to imperil it. Relatedly, the emphasis on recognition as a remedy for the excesses of drone warfare is predicated on an optimism about American goodness, namely that a lack of recognition, essentially a correctible oversight, is the only explanation for the proliferation of these weapons. This also helps to explain the persistent faith in recognition as a corrective, despite widespread evidence—including PTSD itself—that drone pilots are already aware of the humanness of their targets, a potential overestimation of their ability or inclination to protect the people on the ground. But pro- and anti-drone camps alike are at pains to deny this, albeit for different reasons. The depoliticized military rhetoric of 'burnout' among drone operators belies the significance and costs of the violence that they witness (and perpetrate). Paradoxically, however, anti-drone discourses replicate a version of this blindness by insisting that drone operators do not recognize the humanity of their victims. In turn, this often compels anti-drone activists to ignore, celebrate, or leverage the trauma of drone operators (e.g. the hope and

intention that *Not a Bug Splat* will upset or shame them). Of course, the solution to this dilemma is not merely to foreground the suffering of drone operators, which simply trades the recognition of one trauma for another.

Instead, all of this points to a need for anti-drone activists and scholars to rethink the attachment to recognition as a strategy, tactic, and objective. Indeed, Harvey's *Stealth Wear* is compelling because it refuses to partake in this flawed visible economy, seeking refuge instead in the protections afforded by *un*recognizability. Rather than place its hope in the reform of drone warfare, or drone warriors, this approach emphasizes instead the agency of the people who live under the threat of drone strikes. Discourses of recognition otherwise portray these people as passive agents, who are suffering for the lack of recognition, can only wait for its bestowal, and will eventually be saved by it (and, by extension, the West). By contrast, a turn toward unrecognizability is predicated on a skepticism about the ethical potentialities of drones, their operators, and the states that send them to war. Such skepticism is both warranted and necessary, and may indeed provide the foundation for a new form of resistance to this type of militarization.

Notes

1. Adam Harvey, "Stealth Wear," December 3, 2012, https://ahprojects.com/projects/stealth-wear/.

2. BBC News, "Trump revokes Obama rule on reporting drone strike deaths," *BBC News*, March 7, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-47480207.

3. Christine Sylvester, *War as Experience: Contributions from International Relations and Feminist Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2012), 3.

4. Adam Rothstein asks, "What is it about an aerial robot that earns such distinct attention? If the drone narrative is simply a composite of its component technologies, what is it that makes it unique, and worthy of the name 'drone'?" Adam Rothstein, *Drone* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 75.

5. Caren Kaplan, "Drone-A-Rama: Troubling the Temporal and Spatial Logics of Distance Warfare," in *Life in the Age of Drone Warfare*, eds. Lisa Parks and Caren Kaplan (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 161.

6. Lisa Parks and Caren Kaplan, "Introduction," in *Life in the Age of Drone Warfare*, eds. Lisa Parks and Caren Kaplan (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 9.

7. Grégoire Chamayou, *A Theory of the Drone*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: The New Press, 2013), 77. Elsewhere, he writes, "The attempt to eradicate all direct reciprocity in any exposure to hostile violence transforms not only the material conduct of armed violence technically, tactically, and psychically, but also the traditional principles of a military ethos based on bravery and a sense of sacrifice. Judged by the yardstick of such classical categories, a drone *looks like* the weapon of cowards" (17). If Chamayou is correct about this perception, then the popular fixation on the suffering of drone operators may be an indirect assertion of their bravery.

8. Pew Research Center, "Public Continues to Back U.S. Drone Strikes," May 28, 2015, http://www.people-press.org/2015/05/28/public-continues-to-back-u-s-drone-attacks. This survey seems to be the most prominent measure of public opinion.

9. For example, Kathrin Maurer situates drones within a larger transformation of war into 'manhunt,' with a resultant "animalization of humans into prey." Kathrin Maurer, "Visual Power: The Scopic Regime of Military Drone Operations," *Media, War & Conflict* 10, no. 2 (2017): 141-151, p. 142.

10. Samera Esmeir, "At Once Human and Not Human: Law, Gender and Historical Becoming in Colonial Egypt," *Gender & History*, 23, no. 2 (August 2011), 235.

11. Walter Johnson, "To Remake the World: Slavery, Racial Capitalism, and Justice," *Boston Review*, February 20, 2018: http://bostonreview.net/forum/walter-johnson-to-remake-the-world.

12. On the increasing displacement of humans from the process of war-making, see Jeremy Packer and Joshua Reeves, "Taking People Out: Drones, Media/Weapons, and the Coming Humanectomy," in *Life in the Age of Drone Warfare*, eds. Lisa Parks and Caren Kaplan (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 261-281.

13. Judith Butler has argued for recognition of the humanness of 'enemy' lives and deaths, affording them grievability. Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009). Butler lays the foundation for this argument in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004).

14. Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 2.

15. Wendy Kozol, *Distant Wars Visible: The Ambivalence of Witnessing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 65. She also writes, "Yet if the relentless focus on 9/11 reinforces a nationalist myopia, looking elsewhere is no guarantor that recognition can break free from hegemonic scripts about self and other, much less of a reckoning with accountability" (5-6).

16. Mark Reinhardt, "Vision's Unseen: On Sovereignty, Race, and the Optical Unconscious," *Theory & Event* 18, 4 (2015): n.p.

17. Sharon Sliwinski, "Face of Our Wartime," *Photography and Culture* 8, no. 2 (2015): 233-241, 234.

18. As Emily Gilbert argues, "an analysis of military targeting thus requires moving beyond identifying what sites are made visible, to a more embodied examination of the practices through which they are made visible, to whom, and in what contexts." Emily Gilbert, "Eye to Eye: Biometrics, the Observer, the Observed, and the Body Politic," in *Observant States: Geopolitics and Visual Culture*, eds. Fraser MacDonald, Rachel Hughes, and Klaus Dodds (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 227.

19. On the history and politics of prevailing stereotypes of drone warriors, see Caren Kaplan, *Aerial Aftermaths: Wartime from Above* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 211.

20. They are a perfect enactment of Jonathan Beller's description of drone operators as "melancholic functionaries (who will go home to kiss their kids after pulling the trigger on someone else's family half a universe away)." Jonathan Beller, "Pathologistics of Attention," *Discourse* 35, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 46-71, 63.

21. Keith P. Feldman, "Empire's Verticality and the Af/Pak Frontier, Visual Culture, and Racialization from Above," *Comparative American Studies* 9, no. 4 (December 2011): 325-341, 330.

22. Quoted in Feldman, 331. Peter M. Asaro, "The Labor of Surveillance and Bureaucratized Killing: New Subjectivities of Military Drone Operators," *Social Semiotics* 23, no. 2 (2013): 196-224, 207.

23. One of the most oft-cited articulations can be found in United Nations General Assembly, "Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary, or Arbitrary Executions, Philip Alston, Addendum – Study on Targeted Killings," May 28, 2010, http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/14session/A.HRC.14.24.Add6.pdf. The report surmises that "because operators are based thousands of miles away from the battlefield, and undertake operations entirely through computer screens and remote audiofeed, there is a risk of developing a "Playstation" mentality to killing. States must ensure that training programs for drone operators who have never been subjected to the risks and rigors of battle instill respect for IHL [international human rights law] and adequate safeguards for compliance with it" (25).

24. Chamayou, 119.

25. Rothstein, 127.

26. Asaro, 218, 209, 207.

27. Alison J. Williams, "Enabling Persistent Presence? Performing the Embodied Geopolitics of the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Assemblage," *Political Geography* 30 (2011): 381-390. She also points out that the human operator is "ultimately responsible for providing the final visual recognition of what the Reaper is 'seeing'" (386). This also means that humans limit the efficacy of the weapons system; the process aspires to a "loitering, continually gazing" kind of vision, but humans inevitably blink (386).

28. Kevin McSorley, "Towards an Embodied Sociology of War," *The Sociological Review* 62, no. 52 (2014): 107-128, 120. Here, McSorley is building on the work of Derek Gregory.

29. Jamie Allinson, "The Necropolitics of Drones," *International Political Sociology* 9, no. 2 (2015): 113-127, 120.

30. Elisabeth R. Anker, *Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 140.

31. Susan L. Carruthers, "Why Can't We See Insurgents? Enmity, Invisibility, and Counterinsurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan," *Photography & Culture* 8, no. 2 (July 2015): 191-211, 192.

32. Kaplan, *Aerial Aftermaths*, 210.

33. The Stimson Center, "Recommendations and Report of the US Task Force on Drone Policy," April 2015 (2nd edition), https://www.stimson.org/sites/default/files/file-attachments/recommendations_and_report_of_the_task_force_on_us_drone_policy_second_edition.pdf, 5. The second edition appeared roughly ten months after the first, but there were no changes in the parts of the report relevant to my analysis here.

34. Ibid., 17.

35. Ibid., 25.

36. Ibid., 32, 41-49. Reflecting on the increased attention to cultural awareness and sensitivity in the U.S. military, Derek Gregory demonstrates that such knowledge can be easily accommodated into the processes of targeting and killing, rather than undermining them. Derek Gregory, "'The Rush to the Intimate': Counterinsurgency and the Cultural Turn in Late Modern Warfare," *Geographical Imaginations*, 2012, https://geographicalimaginations.files.wordpress.com/2012/07/gregory-rush-to-the-intimate-full.pdf, 4.

37. Stimson Center, 25.

38. Mark Mazzetti, "Use of Drones for Killings Risks a War Without End, Panel Concludes in Report," *New York Times*, June 26, 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/26/world/use-of-drones-for-killings-risks-a-war-without-end-panel-concludes-in-report.html; Thomas Gibbons-Neff, "U.S. Drone Policies a 'Slippery Slope' for Continuous Wars, Report Finds," *Washington Post*, June 26, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint/wp/2014/06/26/u-s-drone-policies-a-slippery-slope-for-continuous-wars-report-finds; Peter Moskowitz, "Report: Obama Drone Policy Destabilizing for World, US Democracy," *Al-Jazeera America*, June 26, 2014, http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/6/26/drones-stimson-report.html. The finding was not mentioned in a National Public Radio piece about the report. Carrie Johnson, "Report Questions U.S. Policy on Overseas Drone Strikes," National Public Radio, June 26, 2014, https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2014/06/26/325614541/report-questions-u-s-policy-on-overseas-drone-strikes.

39. In her meticulous history of aerial warfare, Caren Kaplan argues that "The conventional binary between distance and proximity and its related oppositions—objective and subjective, global and local, unfamiliar and familiar, strange and intimate—may be culturally and historically specific to Western modernity, but even within that narrow register of human experience, there is evidence of greater nuance and possibility than those bluntly contrasted extremes." The Stimson Report's argument about the possibility of a one-sided but profound visual intimacy in drone warfare provides another bit of evidence for this claim (Kaplan, *Aerial Aftermaths*, 22).

40. In a turn on the conventional depiction of drones as video game warfare, Gregory argues that "video games do *not* stage violence as passive spectacle; they are profoundly immersive, drawing players in to their virtual worlds, which is in part why the US military uses them in its pre-deployment training. The video streams from the UAVs seem to produce the same reality-effect." In this way, he is not so much suggesting that drone warfare is dissimilar to video games, but rather that the two media are alike in ways that most critics overlook. Derek Gregory, "From a View to a Kill: Drones and Late Modern War," *Theory, Culture & Society* 28 (2011): 188-215, 198.

41. Stimson Center, 10-11; 29-30.

42. There is an extensive literature on media representations of the emotional predispositions of Arabs and Muslims. See, for example Evelyn Alsultany. "Arabs and Muslims in the Media after 9/11: Representational strategies for a 'Postrace' Era," *American Quarterly*, 65, no. 1 (2013), 161–169; Amira Jarmakani, *An Imperialist Love Story: Desert Romances in the War on Terror* (New York: New York University Press, 2015); Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East Since 1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

43. Of course, there is no guarantee that more emotional warfighters would be less lethal. Indeed, as many scholars have noted, the US military has increasingly turned to forms of war-making that are 'intimate' and 'emotionally intelligent. Derek Gregory, "'The Rush to the Intimate': Counterinsurgency and the Cultural Turn in Late Modern Warfare," *Geographical Imaginations*, 2012, https://geographicalimaginations.files.wordpress.com/2012/07/gregory-rush-to-the-intimate-full.pdf. Laleh Khalili, *Time in the Shadows: Confinement in Counterinsurgencies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 45.

44. Matt Delmont, "Drone Encounters: Noor Behram, Omer Fast, and Visual Critiques of Drone Warfare," *American Quarterly* 65, no. 1 (March 2013): 193-202, 195. Behram's images often served as the only visual record of casualties caused by strikes in areas that were geographically remote or otherwise inaccessible to journalists.

45. Lisa Parks describes the drone as a technology of "vertical mediation." *Not a Bug Splat* is an effort to intervene in this relation. Lisa Parks, "Vertical Mediation and the U.S. Drone War in the Horn of Africa," in *Life in the Age of Drone Warfare*, eds. Lisa Parks and Caren Kaplan (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 134-157.

46. On the uses of ground-level photojournalistic techniques in opposition to aerial imagery, see Caren Kaplan, "'A Rare and Chilling View': Aerial Photography in the Visual Culture of '9/11,'" *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture* 11, 2 (2011): http://reconstruction.eserver.org/Issues/112/Kaplan_Caren.shtml (accessed June 1, 2012).

47. Many scholars have critiqued the problematics embedded in this view of childhood. Anneke Meyer, for example, argues that the 'sacralization' of childhood via notions of innocence actually serves to perpetuate the structural inequalities and violence that disempower and victimize children. Anneke Meyer, "The Moral Rhetoric of Childhood," *Childhood* 14, no. 1 (2007): 85-104, 85, 90-91.

See also Katrina Lee-Koo, "Horror and Hope: (Re)Presenting Militarised Children in Global North-South Relations," *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (2011): 725-742. Sunaina Maira's theorization of 'good' and 'bad' Muslims, who are deemed worthy of civil rights and legal protections, or

not, respectively may also be instructive here. Sunaina Maira, "'Good' and 'Bad' Muslim Citizens: Feminists, Terrorists, and U.S. Orientalisms," *Feminist Studies* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 631-656.

48. I make this claim about agency mindful of Johnson's caution against using expressions of agency as definitive 'proof' of a subject's humanness.

49. Kaplan warns critics to be cautious in assuming that aerial warfare affords its agents an omnipotent 'God's eye view' of the ground, and targets, below. This is, after all, precisely how states tend to promote the use of these technologies, and can function to "create a highly selective, mystified narrative of modern war" (*Aerial Aftermaths*, 209).

50. Nick Kirkpatrick, "People are not 'bug splats," *Washington Post*, April 8, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/04/08/people-are-not-bug-splats/; Robert Mackey, "Artists Try to Prick the Conscience of Drone Operators With Giant Portrait of Orphan in Pakistani Field," *New York Times*, April 9, 2014, https://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/04/09/artists-try-to-prick-the-conscience-of-drone-operators-with-giant-portrait-of-orphan-in-pakistani-field/; Robinson Meyer, "For Shame: The Giant Poster that Shows Drone Pilots the People They're Bombing," *Atlantic*, April 7, 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/04/for-shame-the-giant-poster-that-shows-drone-pilots-the-people-theyre-bombing/360257/; Sophia Saifi, "'Not a Bug Splat': Artists Give Drone Victims a Face in Pakistan," *CNN*, April 9, 2014, https://www.cnn.com/2014/04/09/world/asia/pakistan-drones-not-a-bug-splat/index.html; Justin Sciuletti, "Giant art installation in Pakistan recasts drone attack targets as more than 'bug splats,' *PBS News Hour*, April 7, 2014, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/giant-art-installation-pakistan-recasts-drone-attack-victims-bug-splats; Rob Williams, "Giant 'Not a Bug Splat' Art Installation Takes Aim at Pakistan's Predator Drone Operators," *Independent*, April 8, 2014, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/giant-not-a-bug-splat-art-installation-takes-aim-at-pakistans-predator-drone-operators-9246768.html.

51. Zach Schonfeld, "#Notabugsplat, an Art Project Designed to be Seen by Drones," *Newsweek*, April 8, 2014, https://www.newsweek.com/notabugsplat-art-project-designed-be-seen-drones-245191.

52. For an academic endorsement of the project, see Maurer. She argues that it "goes beyond . . . visual criticism: it breaks the one-sided frame and performs the idea of looking back to the perpetrator on a large-scale format" (147).

53. Keith Feldman, "#notabugsplat: Becoming Human on the Terrain of Visual Culture," in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Human Rights*, eds. Sophia A. McClenne and Alexandra Schultheis Moore (New York: Routledge, 2016), 226. Feldman critiques *Not a Bug Splat* for its traffic in the oppressive visual grammar of human rights, arguing that "through its objectifying gaze, the visuality of human rights renders seeable, knowable, and "humanized" the truths of violation that at the same time brackets from critical inquiry the structured differentials of power that make such seeing possible" (228).

54. According to Joanne McNeil and Ingrid Burrington, people who work in the drone industry believe the machines to be unfairly judged and discriminated against in a phenomenon they call 'droneism.' Joanne McNeil and Ingrid Burrington, "Droneism," *Dissent* 61, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 57-60.

55. Other elements of the project include a memorial to "drones fallen in action" and video that documents a drone's Sisyphean attempt to run a 100-meter race and record its progress on the Nike+ fitness app.

56. "Drone Selfies" is just one of a growing number of art projects that engages with drone visualities and experiments with suturing them into more quotidian ways of looking. For example, James Bridle's 2012-2015 project "Dronestagram" uses the familiar platform of Instagram, posting aerial views of locations hit by drone strikes as they occur. See https://www.instagram.com/dronestagram/.

57. On the discourses and cultural practices that seem to anthropomorphize drones, see Daniel Greene, "Drone Vision," *Surveillance & Society* 13, no. 2 (2015): 233-249. He writes, "Seemingly naïve questions about what those weird sexy planes want and need expand our political imaginary to grasp the work of these new networks of violence and surveillance" (234).

As Williams notes, a Reaper drone can 'loiter' for 30 hours but its human crews cannot sustain that kind of presence or attention (385).

58. Musing about what a drone would do once a war was over, IOCOSE asks, "What is the life of a drone in times of peace? What is the creative potential of a drone, apart from the things we could do with it? Indeed, drones do not have such a thing as a 'life.' But what if?"

59. Priscilla Frank, "Imagine a World Where Drones are So Bored They're Taking Selfies," *Huffington Post*, August 1, 2014, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/01/drone-selfies_n_5638888.html.

60. Jordan G. Teicher, "What if Drones Stopped Going to War and Started Taking Selfies?", *Wired*, December 18, 2014, https://www.wired.com/2014/12/in-times-of-peace-iocose/.

61. IOCOSE, "Drone Selfies: Press Release," 2014, https://docs.google.com/document/d/15-fK-0RpZZbP0H2JFjGUr8dYR3tLm3oRFghUGUT-H9I/edit.

62. For a discussion of how we might interpret the act of selfie-taking, see Jessica Maddox, "'Guns Don't Kill People . . . Selfies Do': Rethinking Narcissism as Exhibitionism in Selfie-Related Deaths," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* (2017): 1-13.

See also Nina Azzarello, "Drone Selfies Visualize Technology's Vanity in Times of Peace," *Designboom*, July 29, 2014, https://www.designboom.com/art/drone-selfies-technology-vanity-in-times-of-peace-07-29-2014/.

63. These "Drone Selfies" are distinct from the emergent subgenre of the 'dronie,' which is a selfie that a person creates using a drone.

64. Eyal Press, "The Wounds of the Drone Warrior," the *New York Times Magazine*, June 30, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/13/magazine/veterans-ptsd-drone-warrior-wounds.html. See also Asaro, 199.

65. Asaro, 213.

66. Ibid, 214.

67. Chamayou, 108. He argues that the notion of drone pilot PTSD serves a problematic recuperative function: "The emphasis placed on the supposed traumas suffered by drone operators made it possible to assimilate them, via a common psychic vulnerability, to classic soldiers (fighters suffer the stress of fighting and so do drone operators, so drone operators must be fighters too) and to humanize them as agents of armed violence (despite the technical nature of their weapons they were not just cold killers)" (107).

68. Andrew Bacevich, *Breach of Trust: How Americans Failed their Soldiers and their Country* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2013). See also Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4 of Rebecca A. Adelman, *Figuring Violence: Affective Investments in Perpetual War* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019).