

## Drones: Between securitarian surveillance and necropolitics

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**Abstract:** Moving away from the growing techno-scientific fascination embodied by the drone, the main aim is to analyze the role played by this device in the context of the current securitarian surveillance. Following to a great extent the conceptual approaches coming from critical securitarian studies, we will address issues that refer to the redefinition of the surveillance provided by the scopic power of the drone, the military-police logics in which it is immersed in order to detect what has been defined as a threat and, finally, to the specific geographical reconfiguration of the sovereign power the drone activates within the framework of securitarian surveillance. It will be concluded that, opposing the surgical warfare discourse that legitimizes the drone, via its techno-scientific accuracy potential, this device reproduces a necropolitical logic that must be exhibited and questioned from the violence it causes.

**Key words:** drone, dispositive, securitarian, surveillance, necropolitics.

**Resumen:** El objetivo central del presente artículo es analizar el papel que juega el dron en el contexto de la actual vigilancia securitaria. Con base en gran parte de los planteamientos conceptuales de los estudios críticos de la seguridad, se abordarán cuestiones que remiten a la redefinición de la vigilancia que depara el poder escópico del dron, a las lógicas bélico-policiales en las cuales está inmerso, para detectar lo que queda definido como amenaza y, por último, a la específica reconfiguración geográfica del poder soberano que el dron activa en el marco de la vigilancia securitaria. Se concluirá que, frente al discurso de guerra quirúrgica que legitima al dron a través de su potencial tecnocientífico de precisión, este dispositivo reproduce una lógica necropolítica que ha de ser expuesta y cuestionada desde la violencia que ocasiona.

**Palabras clave:** dron, dispositivo, seguridad, vigilancia, necropolítica.

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## Introduction

In his analysis on the figure of panopticon, Foucault (1989: 16) mentions a crucial feature that acts as the triggering mechanism of a whole repertoire of social practices, whose outline is traceable up to the present day: “obsessive fear has covered the second half of the XVII century: dark space, the screen of darkness that prevents the full visualization of things, people, truths”. Here a desire is enounced, supported on the very core of modernity, which has been an essential part of the endeavor to articulate an observation regime, which ultimately turns society into a transparent fabric where every opacity and obscurity dissolves so as to obtain visible and legible reality.

A look that sees all, omniscient, “dominating and invigilating”, which reverts shade into light, enables “a universal visibility” and is able, when all that is fulfilled, to subsume what has remained trapped by such light into “a rigorous and meticulous order”. This dream is a dream that not only wants to activate mere vigilance mechanisms that move across social order; in a deeper sense, it is a dream that wants to know and find out about that what is done and might be done, knowledge that anticipates to prevent and regulate.

It is worth adding that this longing for *a universal visibility* embodies an impulse that necessarily re-updates in a continued mode, which cannot be contented by the visibility obtained at any given moment, as there always may be chinks that short-circuit it, which enable shadow zones where power has not yet seen what occurs there; because of this, the claim for that transparent society, the urge for such *universal visibility*, is but the verification that there is no rest, that such look that wants to see everything is incarnated in an eye that cannot close.

It is undeniable that the imbrication between visibility and power has become the background for a whole field of analysis in which one could trace aspects such as the sociohistorical reconstruction of discourses and practices that have legitimized the need to articulate that omniscient look (Harcourt, 2016; Lyon, 1995), the various technologies by means of which identification processes of people and their activities have been implemented (Abot and Denis, 2011; Lyon, 1995; Sekula, 1986), the political-punitive mechanisms deduced from preemptive, regulation and punishment practices subsumed into the knowledge-power that accompanies vigilance (Foucault, 1990), or finally, the resistance strategies unfold by the subjects in order to be able to continue creating opaque environments in which the look of power does not manage to penetrate (de Certeau, 1996; Harcourt, 2016).

From the stage that opens in this multidimensional field with the production, legitimation, management and experiencing an invigilating knowledge-power, the reflection here exposed does not intend so much to deepen at all into these analytical axes as explore the way topics mentioned here overlap as a concrete invigilating device, which gains social relevance.

From the Foucaultian invitation to think the present, this is, to critically enquire in the regimes of truth and power that shape the everydayness we live, attention will be focused on the device that articulates around drones, unmanned planes that can be operated by remote control. The drone, infused by growing political, media and military fascination, becomes in the early XXI century the almost paradigmatic re-updating of that old dream of a diaphanous society, where the dark ground of shadows is illuminated by an unrestricted look.

It is this fascination and the practice of the drone itself what here will be questioned. It is necessary to add that there is a whole development of technological research conducting to tailor drones for application fields other than those here referred to: their use to rescue people (or bodies) located in hard-to-reach areas or to monitor spaces that have experienced natural disasters are application scopes with indubitable potential for help. However, such field is not the one the present article approaches.

In the context of this reflection, attention will be paid only to the irruption of the drone as a part of political-military framework, which uses it to detect that which is read in the key of threat and eventually, to act accordingly.

And more concretely, even if all this is not fully detachable from the police, stress will be made on the war projection of drone. This, not other, is the drone interrogated and problematized here.

The use of unmanned planes in surveillance tasks in armed conflicts had already been tried in the XX century, later, in the early XXI century, in the context of the conflict between Israel and Palestine (Shaw, 2016). In any case, and for the effects of the present reflection, the sociopolitical context that affects the most and impregnates the development of drone as a part of the war context is that after the September 11 attacks, called War on Terror.

Within this space-time frame, the beginning can be dated to October 2001, when in Afghanistan unmanned flights that could shoot missiles against targets aimed by the drones' cameras began. Ever since, the use of military drones, known as MQ-1B Predator and MQ-9 Reaper, has experienced a very significant escalation that heads in parallel to a deep alteration in the way of conceiving and practicing warfare (Blackmore, 2005).

In view of clearing the drone, an analytical outline over three interconnected axes is proposed: visibility, securitarian surveillance and necropolitics. This axes, progressively approached, have the objective of critically analyze the visibility regime (re)produced by the drone, the way this is inscribed into a knowledge regime that articulates around securitarian surveillance, and finally, the concretion of all this in a series of bellicose practices that produce (the exposition to) death. We do not face, because of this, autonomous axes, but dimensions that cross and feedback one another, conferring specific distinction signals to the drone used in war contexts.

### **Power and look: beyond fetishist fascination**

The starting point of this outline necessarily contests any glimpse of fascination that the unrestricted look at the drone might elicit. And as a previous step, inexcusable, it is worth bearing in mind there is no naïve look, neutral, that may objectively deepen into reality, to return narrating that which remained hidden.

Not only will such look come to reproduce the embers of a classic epistemology anchored in ocular-centrism, which reproduces the divine trick of an eye that unveils that which remains hidden (Haraway, 1995); an eye which leaving the distortions that body and space may convey behind becomes the legitimate inhabitant of the coveted objectivity. Such omniscient look would appear, to sum up, as a clean limpid look that has reached such gaze because it has silenced the context of the subject who observes, thus unleashing a sort of unembodied look that sees without saying where it looks from, and at once it hides the production process of the look itself.

The epistemological criticism to this approach has been undertaken in a profuse manner from various philosophical, socio-anthropologic and techno-scientific spheres, not necessary to reproduce here in detail. Our interest is to underscore the importance of a seminal element contained in Haraway's critique and which visual culture theorist Bal (2016: 32) resoundingly enunciates: "the act of looking is anchored in the body and therefore, it is deeply impure"; i.e., every look emerges from a bodily, spatial context that irretrievably affects that way of looking at what is observed, the images that reproduce and the very way these images, which interact with one another, are read.

Moving this to the present concrete sphere of analysis, it is worth mentioning that the abandonment to fascination the drone unchains as an interrupted look, needs to state the production itself of the visibility regime

from which the drone-like look bearing in mind that such regime takes place in some spaces, in contexts which condition the form and exercise of look; this is to say, the look of the drone is the non-neutral effect of something that precedes and accompanies it, or in terms more relevant for the theoretical-analytical of the approach here unfolded: the look needs to be spatialized, relocated in the sociotechnical network which provides its conditions of possibility.

The emphasis of Lefebvre (2013), as regards the need to conceive the social as a framework of specialized spatializing practices, acts as a conceptual background that enables contextualizing the drone as a topologically complex sociotechnical network.

This affirmation already needs a series of classifications to deepen into the complexity of drone. Speaking in terms of a sociotechnical network implies admitting the drone does not exist in it self, but as a component part in a heterogeneous fabric in which the human and nonhuman actors come into contact. This way, the drone can be read, heeding the suggestions from translation sociology (Latour, 2008), as an actor-network; this is, a node that has ramifications of various signs (technological, political, economic, discursive, spatial), which condense in this peculiar sort of unmanned place.

From this standpoint, drone is ontologically inseparable in relations with human and nonhuman actors that enable it. This is to say, the figure of the actor-network intends to respect the constitutive heterogeneity of the social, connections established and in virtue of the way they produce, they provide the emergent singularities (either human or not) with distinctiveness, and so the actor-network does not preexist this pattern of relations at all, as it is a concretion of them, the dynamical and chaining effect of that undelaying and constituent heterogeneity.

Suggesting the drone is an actor-network, an assemble of humans and nonhumans, as relevantly developed by Holmqvist (2013), needs to distance from any glimpse of fascination and reification to deepen into its constructive architecture and into its performativity, into the geographies in which it is and that it reproduces. The look here distances in an irremediable manner from the halo of omniscience to project as an affect or practice of such sociotechnical networks mediated by relations of diverse nature.

In order to clarify the previous reflection, some of the elements of this network, the heterogeneity from which the drone interrupts: the military-scientific research line that receives public funds for technological development (with the growing synergies unleashed between the civil and military), the military databases necessary to operate (either from land or

sea through aircraft carriers), all the set of actors needed to maintain the persistent look (the pilots of drones located in the US, but also all the military personnel deployed in various places and that are necessary to maintain the logistics of drone), the geographic position of the various technological instruments that enable the reception and distribution of the image captured by the drone (among which, distinguishable is, for example the centrality of the Ramstein military base in Germany), the connection of the drone with other surveillance devices (those that operate on the computational monitoring of communications) or, finally, the very geographic displacement of the drone as a military weapon that is commercialized (Frew, 2018).

All this machinery assemblage that threads geographies, human and nonhuman actors of diverse nature shows, when traversed in its constitutive multiplicity, what the fetishist fascination hides. This is the first step though. It is necessary to go beyond the fact of rescuing the underlying heterogeneity of the drone, the networks in which it is immersed and which at the same time it reproduces.

And this going beyond considers, to a large extent, to contextualize the networks the drone weaves in a sociopolitical scenario, which demands the articulation of a visibility regime from where to erase the opacity that may exist in the social: all this has a socio-technical substrate, but it is inseparable from a discursive regime that enunciates the growing demand for a transparent society, and it is here where it is believed more fertile the idea of the device in Foucault's conception, as in there are gathered, with greater sharpness, the symbolical and material dimensions of the spatiality of the social, the power relations that produce it and the subjectivation processes produced there, aspects that in the approximation from translation sociology have a lesser development.

It is worth retaking the definition put forward by Foucault (1985):

A markedly heterogeneous set that includes discourses, institutions, architectural installations, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, philanthropic propositions, to sum up: the elements of the device belong both to what has been said and to what has not been said. The device is the network that may be established between those two elements (Foucault, 1985: 128).

The interest of this research is to see the drone as a device that threads different levels of the social, a sort of performative effect of a heterogeneous network that enables it, of a techno-discursive plot, of a political-scientific-juridical fabric that acts as a network of relations connecting various actors and spaces; relations of power that influence on the population articulating what Arteaga-Botello (2016), in a Foucaultian way, calls technology for

governmentality. This way, we would face a multidimensional *drone-like device* that condensates in itself a whole way of understanding and influencing on the world. In virtue and because of such multidimensionality, there would be a multiplicity of elements susceptible of being developed, however the argument here proposed, as suggested at the beginning, intends to articulate a theoretical-conceptual plot around visibility, securitarian surveillance and necropolitics, in order to think from there the specificity of the war-police drone. The previous considerations, leading to the reconceptualization of the drone, as a device, were necessary to remove from the issue of visibility any self-referential resonance and place it in a techno-political-discursive context that longs for the unrestricted look the drone has. This repositioning of visibility is enounced utterly clearly by Jonathan Crary, the theorist of visual culture: “the optical devices in question, significantly, are intersection points in which philosophical, scientific and aesthetical discourses overlap with mechanical techniques, institutional requirements and socioeconomic forces” (Crary, 2008: 24).

From the look itself, reified and abstracted from its conditions of possibility, one goes on to produce a visibility regime that produces, mobilizes and interprets the images generated there, assuming at all times that the spatiality of the look, either in its body (one looks *from* and *with* the body, which implies looking, as Bal (2016) suggests, is from the very beginning, synesthetic), discursive (the symbolical ordering of some spaces that legitimize the need to produce a certain image), technological (the machinery dimension of every image produced) and geographic projection (the various spaces that are related to produce, transmit and visualize some determinate images). These succinct considerations move a look that observes denying its constitutive spatiality from the imaginary toward the specific context that permeates every production of images in a bodily-geographical continuum.

If one locates in this statement, definitely distances from the “metaphysics of the drone” (Noys, 2015), to enquire on the techno-politics of visibility the drone unleashes. Here is where the displacement to the second axis: securitarian surveillance of the triad that backbones this reflection, as it is necessary to question that which fosters the optical power of the drone, that uninterrupted look that, as stated by Chamayou (2016: 43), *it wants to see everything and all the time*. To a certain extent, this image resounds with the key device of being able to discipline that Foucault (1990) projects on the panopticon, as if the drone were, ultimately, a sort of mobile panoptic. Though, differences are noticeable. Not only because the panopticon is

thought for operating in a limited space and subsumed in an institutional apparatus that intends to reproduce a knowledge that concerns such institution, but because the visibility of the drone acts, on the contrary, in the open, in a mobile and changing environment, not previously fixed.

Another difference that deserves emphasizing. The panopticon searches for a docile body that assumes the knowledge of the institutional framework upon which it projects; while, the drone searches, before anything, to *capture* bodies; this is to say, the optical power of the drone does not necessarily intend the establishment of a new moral, but the control of space, of the practices set into motion there, the movements that activate: drone surveillance does not long for the docile body (perhaps it looks for a frightened body as it unleashes fear of a possible attack), but the visible body in its spatial travel, the exposition of the bodies, their *apprehension* in a visual regime with no obligation that such a subject captured in an image must interiorize a certain moral.

This way, the look of the drone projects on the spaces, but it is above all a look at the bodies that inhabit or move across such spaces, at the details, the minute, here where the trace of a possible lie can be read. The drone takes the panopticon of the dream of transparency and concern about the insignificant; however, in like manner, it distances from it as it intends, more than the weak subject, the regulation of spaces and the *capturing* of movements.

The visibility intended by the drone, its techno-politics, operates following an interstitial gear that imbricates power and knowledge is the body that is intended to be captured is a body read from a certain knowledge that names it a potential threat and can operate on it suppressing it due to the very threat it may convey; this is to say, the visibility already comes impregnated by knowledge, occurs from it, through it.

All the previous allusions to the unlimited look the drone carries ultimately head to the activation of processes of capture that operate at a dual level: visual capture of people, practices, places, movements, but also a capture in the sense of hunting people (Chamayou, 2010), those who embody a threat: *look to capture*.

It is worth summarizing, then, that securitarian surveillance alludes to a techno-knowledge that impregnates the visibility of the drone; while, the necropolitics bursts as the most evident manifestation of power the drone holds in its bellicose-police meaning. Next, we will enquire on such securitarian surveillance to later go on to analyze its necropolitical dimension.

## **The drone and the securitarian surveillance to detect threats**

One of the effects associated to the fetishist fascination that impregnates the drone is its detachment from any sort of historic background, as if it were a radical novelty that is not recognized in any past. However, as it was necessary to manifest the complex topology the drone updates, it would also be essential to bear in mind that even if we face a techno-scientific device provided with proper and unseen characteristics, there is an entire socio-historic baggage that accompanies the drone, some practices and some discourses whose clearing allowed showing the connections of the drone with other devices from the past.

In the right words of Wall and Manahan (2011):

Drones are a combination of the new and the old: a new airborne surveillance and a system to kill with capabilities not offered before by the conventional forms of airborne power, which relate to an old cosmic vision of air domain by means of vision, verticality and technological speed (Wall and Manahan, 2011: 241).

From this statement it is worth deepening into the aforementioned idea of capture in the field of knowledge-power relations that cross it and concur in the irruption of the drone.

It is worth affirming that the drone occurs as the ultimate materialization of a long-lasting process concerned in the attempt to capture the domain of air space and submit it to a logic of control that enables order, both in what occurs in the air and in the geographies located in the verticality of the controlled air space. In the same way it would be possible to trace the historic process by means of which the mechanisms to codify the earth and the sea have been established, processes of territorialization by means of which it was attempted to regulate the symbolical-material production of such spaces and the uses and practices normatively punished (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988), airspace, beyond a rhetoric of sensation of freedom, has been subsumed in territorializing logics leading to its appropriation and control.

Here we would have what Weizman (2002) has suggestively called “policy of verticality” and where historically, optical power reveals as an air power that accompanies colonization (Adey, 2010) and the surveillance of borders and territories, as clearly exposed by Arteaga-Botello (2016) in his analysis of the development of the drone in the context of Latin America. Historic episodes such as those in the Vietnam War (Shaw, 2016) or in the zone known as Arabia, dominated by the British Empire (Satia, 2006) evince every attempt to exercise air power, which included observation and military domain over determinate geographies.

From this background, the bellicose drone logically emerges as a consequence of a whole techno-scientific development process, but also impregnated with a colonial past that is necessary to bear in mind.

Air power has always been a police power. We have to read the drone, consequently, not so much as a new form of military technology which one way or another enables entering quietly in the civil spaces for police ends, but on the contrary as a continuation of the police logic inherent to the air power from its inception (Neocleous, 2014: 156).

What some authors have called dronification of the state violence (Shaw and Akhter, 2014) to refer both to an impulse of securitarian surveillance and to a redefinition of the bellicose, there must be a context for a process of a lengthy historic tradition (Kaplan, 2006; Neocleous, 2014; Shaw, 2016; Wall and Manahan, 2011), where surveillance and the military, police and bellicose, act intertwined in a sort of mobile balance which, according to the circumstances and spaces in which it operates, will acquire one form or another, exercising or not, its necro-political potentiality.

It is enlightening as an example and more directly affecting the present lived; deepen into the details of the careful report *Eurodrones Inc.* by Hayes *et al.* (2014). In the report, the way research on drones has been fostered in the framework of research funded by the European Union and also stresses the rhetoric that impregnates the drone in the institutional and research spheres. In a political-economic context where techno-scientific research concerned with securitarian policies and the suitability that such research can have a dual use in the military and the civil are being progressively supported, the drone increasingly enters as a strategic assemblage that mobilizes a larger number of institutions, funds, technologies and securitarian discourses.

The most significant projection perhaps refers to the boost of drones in the context of the European border surveillance (Ecosur), managed by Frontex (the agency in charge of border control of the European Union) and the supports from the European Defence Agency. Indubitably a central issue for as we will see further in the text, the drone becomes a device especially concerned with borders: on the one side, to invigilate the State borders before the migratory flow, but also, as a device that crosses borders, producing a re-updating of the mobile sovereign power that intends to detect a presence, there where it is necessary, the threat.

In this scenario that evinces civil and military synergies, the drone emerges in the way of the updating of omniscient visibility, desire and a performative practice of uninterrupted surveillance that is materially and discursively woven; from there, the drone interrupts as a guarantor of protection in the face of the dangers this vigilance foresees and detects.

Securitarian, categorical core of the bourgeoisie society (Neocleous, 2010) and that survives in its mutations as the clothing of a neoliberalism that distributes in an unequal manner threats and risks, expresses here all its centrality and power as it is the meeting point of the symbolic (protection and defense) and the technological (development of optical power), the node that expands in various manners and underlies and impregnates the production and legitimation of the police-bellicose drone. Owing to the above, it is worth saying the drone acts as a securitarian device by means of which it is intended to regulate the order of events, a multidimensional fabric in which a symbolical-techno-scientific-political-economic-juridical plot tries to give an account of the occurrences and act before the magma of growing suspicion that, using a Borgean image, (con)fuses with the territory.

Logically, the vigilant *ethos* the drone produces in the field of uninterrupted surveillance must be located; such surveillance has acquired notability in recent years, indubitably stressed after Snowden's declarations (Lyon, 2015) and which enables the tracking of communications and access to computing devices in view of analyzing the contents by means of complex datamining programs which eventually produce *big data*.

There is no possibility here to recognize oneself in a secure and risk-free future (it is always the possible latent threat which can appear at *any* moment), with which the securitarian surveillance reproduced by the drone in its air projection, in concomitance with other techno-scientific vigilance mechanisms that work in parallel, ends up becoming structural, recreating a securitarian mobile geography that superposes every trace of doubt and by means of which data are continuously produced, a huge amount of data matrixes and metadata whose analysis demands more data.

Thus, we precipitate into an exposed society (Harcourt, 2015), open and immersed in surveillance, in which as point out by Shaw (2016), the way of acting is not supported upon the certainty of an already detected threat likely to activate, but in a way of acting that has assumed and naturalized the potential presence of suspicion as a mechanism by means of which surveillance operations are carried out.

The most visible example of this in the bellicose drone has been the displacement operated by the US from the policy of selective assassinations of dangerous people (called personality strikes), considered of high strategic value owing to their valuable role in terrorist groups, to a policy of generalized suspicion, under President Obama, in which the objective was not a known and previously located person anymore, but what was called pattern of life, a certain pattern of lifestyle that because of their features and the way it is

analyzed ends up being read in the key of threat, as an imminent potential risk on which there is immediate action with an attack which at this level is called signature strike: a military attack not necessarily on someone known but on the anomaly itself:

The main goal of these devices of persistent surveillance is not so much to follow already known individuals, as suspicious elements denounced by their anomalous behaviors, for this information model is “supported on activity”, this is to say, on a behavioral analysis, not on a recognition of nominal identities (Chamayou, 2016: 47).

The qualitative change this operates is no doubt visible and contains an informational substrate to take into account: the permanent surveillance device is followed by a reiterated analysis of the available data matrix, whose dimension requires the use of complex algorithms by means of which relations and connections are established so as to begin able to detect and nominate those traces susceptible to become something threatening.

The algorithm becomes the computational-material substrate from which the behavior of people is read, their daily life patterns, looking for the possible trace of suspicion, the sign that something has gone out of the normalized. Therefore, this hyper-technologized vigilant knowledge thus confers the algorithm an international background of connections, similarities, patterns or behavior models in which to search indefatigably an anomaly; all this would come to become the plot from which the possible drone’s targets are identified, examined, validated and appointed.

The “algorithmic war” (Amoore, 2009) reveals as the expert knowledge that conveys the conflict, conferring, in the adopted decisions (either to surveil a certain zone or to attack) the attire of techno-scientific rationality identified in the data entanglement obtained an threatening discontinuity in normality, the moment in which the omniscient look finds something that allows articulating a story in which one already finds the way a set of data which were disconnected relate. The algorithm, then reveals itself as the techno-political connector located in the interstitial terrain of bifurcation that remits to the norm and anomaly, the trace of a vigilant ethos that wants to track and keep localized a suspicious presence at all times.

But in this, once again, the technification of the decision intends to depoliticize the decision made, as if it would not be impregnated with political-symbolical valuations for those that potentially embody danger. The algorithm, owing to this, simultaneously performs a dual function. On the one side, it names the anomaly as regards that previously constructed normality. However, and as stated by Amoore (2009), this normality does not respond to the schema of an already constituted disciplinary regime and

that is applied in a closed space in a more or less stable manner: we face a ductile normality, which has to be interpreted in their variations and the deviation degrees that start to be interpreted as a risk.

What is relevant here is that the interpretation of the situation effectively incorporates the algorithm's techno-scientific knowledge, but also a whole experiential knowledge on a geography and the subjects who live in it, with which a whole symbolical-cultural dimension around threat and the subjects that embody it are already inextricably present at the moment of making such decision. As stated before, one looks *from* the body and that contests any glimpse of neutral look.

At this point, the drone prepares to give an account of the enemy, to apprehend it, but only as a body located in an image submitted to a pursuit, but as a target that can and might be eliminated.

This is what Chamayou (2010) has suggestively called hinting power barges as the necropolitical activity of the apprehension in the context of the "war on terror" set into motion (or stressed) after the attack on the Twin Towers acquires its most significant materializations, in the production of a *torturable* subject (Mendiola, 2014) and the *killable* subject (Pugliese, 2016), both subsumed in an apprehension that imprints in the subjectivity upon which the despise that erases the possibility of recognizing the other, the empathy that would have to undermine the imposition of pain and suffering.

The *torturable* and *killable* subjects are specific manifestations of a common background, the *despicable* subject, various modes in which the apprehension goes after a life that is no recognized as such, lives stripped of the right to continue living, lives immersed into the securitarian logic of the exceptionality that takes them out of any legal guarantee. The drone, in the context of this genealogy, operates as a cynegetic device to capture a killable subject and it is because of this that the production of the (exposition to) death thus adheres, as a constitutive feature, to the drone.

## **The drone and border necropolitics**

In the present outline of the drone with bellicose intentions, the starting point is a desire of omniscient visibility that becomes securitarian vigilance on what is deemed an anomaly. Now, we will deepen into the third and final axis of this reflection: the way in which actions are taken on this anomaly, starting from the act that the use of drones has implied a significant redefinition of warfare. It is here where a necropolitical making barges, which is necessary to question and display.

In the first place, we will have to verify that the context of this redefinition of the war logic, the objective is not the effective military occupation of a territory as the attempt to try to influence on the ordering processes of such territories and more connected to the present argumentative line, owing to the need of detecting and eventually suppress the enemy *wherever it is*; the right to conquest transforms into a right to persecute, to search (Chamayou, 2016).

The centrality of this last observation is defining, since the enemy becomes a mobile geography that does not respond to a geographic-state compartmentalization of the conflict. The bellicose-police fabric articulates a shifting line that acts in parallel to the enemy's mobile geography, thus surpassing the immobile fixation of the state border, and producing territories in which complex relations weave between sovereignty, land and population (Elden, 2009).

Then we enter a scenario marked by a sovereignty that makes up its own territories in function of the movements that the securitarian vigilance urges it to effect. The idea to emphasize this is that the drone produces a territory that operates by means of a radically-dynamical verticality policy. All the topics of the redefinition of the border in which the heterogeneity and implosion stress (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013; Vaughan-Williams, 2012) barges with unmistakable noticeability, as ultimately, what here is being elucidated is a deep reflection of the previous frameworks of state geography, in a context of mobile sovereignty that drags securitarian vigilance as it moves, which self-confers the authority to kill the prey. The drone must be read, because of this, as a radically border-like practice, an exercise of de-territorialization, in which the production of a sovereign space in which life and death are chosen between is at stake.

All what has been said on the visibility that wants to be omniscient and securitarian vigilance that longs to capture the threat concurs in the flight of the drone as a border practice that decides on life and death. And it is here where a specific sort of necropolitics barges into, a redefinition of the old sovereign power expressed by Foucault (2003), who was concerned about the "make die and let live". Beyond the substitution of such regime of power by others that will have to be conceptualized on the military and securitarian, Foucault (2003 and 2006) himself underscores the importance of enquiring the way how previous power regimes survive, in their own mutations, in later socio-historic contexts, making room for the specificity of each geography and temporality.

This way, the question to produce death, central for the sovereign power, far from being something from the past, is an issue with potentiality to enquire at the actuality of the present, bearing in mind that such death production might come from exercising direct action, but also from a way to order the social that unleashes exposure to death (Foucault, 2003).

Even if there is no possibility to export now their differences, it is necessary to add that theoretical developments which, one way or another, have opted for reflections on the product of life and the production of (the exposition to) death, acquire in the context of this research an indubitable centrality, as they allow finding an arrangement for the specificity of bellicose drone. Likewise, it is essential to underscore here the proposal by Mbembe (2011) on necropolitics, to the extent that it relates to a colonial derivative that is not developed in Foucault (2003) and is inseparable from the production of death linked to the drone, here analyzed.

The imbrication between necropolitics and the drone is framed in the context of a defense politics that intends to protect it self from that who has been defined as a threat, a sort of unavoidable response subsumed into the parameters of a juridical doctrine that alludes to the presence of an imminent danger (Gregory, 2015), as a legitimation to use military force to commit selective assassinations or bombings on living anomalies. But we do not witness a specific situation, a moment and space susceptible to be limited as the assumption of an exceptionality, located inside and outside laws according to the Agamben's approach, which would have to allow responding as deemed fit before the detected threats.

This exceptionality will make room for what Butler (2006) calls spectral sovereignty, a re-appropriation of the old power in the framework of a securitarian governmentality logic, which assumes the production of death in a contingent and unpunishable way; this exceptionality underlies, all in all, to the reconfiguration of the bellicose-police power, to manage the risk and the capture of the enemy (Chamayou, 2010; Neocleous, 2014).

And from here the bellicose drone sketches the outlines of a shifting line, fragile, evanescent, capture line unfolded and retreated when necessary to produce a geography of exceptionality, which exercises its necropolitical potentiality:

The algorithms of the drone, in other words, decompose the civil subjects into suspicious "life forms" (with a biological substrate) that are later recomposed by the operators of drones as killable targets. The grim attack fulfills, ultimately, the literal decomposition of what once were human subjects into necropolitical substance (Pugliese, 2016: 12).

A life, to sum up, immersed in technologized dehumanization that detects mobile coordinates at the screens, a surveilled life, monitored, eliminable, silenced, a life, because of all this, radically exposed to death. This is the brutal sign of necropolitics that has entered, as structural element, into the drone.

It is worth adding that such shifting line “the front line before the enemy” has been subtracted from the danger to death exposition that the very battlefield traditionally conveyed. The drone mobilizes a necropolitical power, but it hides itself from its omniscient optical power, composing thus a bellicose context in which the battles (for some) are fought in a screen and in which the soldier transmutes into a pilot located in a US military base thousands of kilometers away from the observed zones.

The enormous geographic distance strangely opposes this visual proximity, in which the indubitable relevance of everything that occurs there (the possibility to live or die) has already been subsumed into a complete know-how, which has naturalized and assumed the drone’s necropolitical function, by means of the very banalization of securitarian violence.

In this context, Pugliese (2016) has rightly called to attention on the synergies unleashed between the piloting of the drone and the use of videogames in places such as casinos. Synergies that remit to the very organization of the space (screens, controllers, seats), but also to the fact that the piloting of the drone is conceived as a videogame (given the case, as commented by Pugliese, that even at the downtimes between surveillance, the drone’s pilots, without moving, play videogames to entertain themselves), thus becoming a sort of “videogame mentality”, which is accustomed to playfully experiencing the bellicose and has naturalized the fact of killing images that represent a human. A whole background that one way or another is present at the time of visualizing actual people on screen and shooting to kill these images.

And it is true, as expressed by Gregory (2012) that there are noticeable differences between video games and the actual operation of a drone (among which it is worth emphasizing who the combatant and who the civilian are, something the videogame displays crystal clear), but it is also convenient not to forget such differences as regard a deeper symbolical substrate, which has consolidated *game after game* the assumption of violence, the banalization of what it implies to kill a demonized (actual or fictitious) subject.

The bloody frontline, where historically the hurting and killing of an enemy has been experienced in the immediacy of the corporal (Bourke, 2008), thus transmutes into a remote-controlled shifting line that deeply

alters the experience of warfare itself: the combatant does not have to “return home” after their traumatizing experience in war, because the combat itself is part of their daily routine, and after their war-work day, they will return to their house to retake their domestic chores.

Here we notice the consolidated beginning of a deep strategical, technological and discursive redefinition of the war. A war necessary to face a fuzzy and threatening enemy, fought along a hyper-technologized shifting line guided by an alleged omniscient optical power, which claims to ensure the accuracy of the capture in its necropolitical exercise. Precision war becomes a surgical war that allows finding and eradicating the detected metastases, the movements or tumorous bodies that convey the danger.

This (illusion of) accuracy would thus legitimize a form of acting that allegedly has to prevent any collateral damage, with which the production of death the drone activates in its military version is projected onto a necroethics, in which what occurs there is not so much *to die in peace*, but *to kill in peace* (Chamayou, 2016); this is to say, a way of killing that does not expose the one who kills (the killer is not present in the act of killing, a kill from afar that eradicates the risk of direct intervention in warfare) and a way of killing that only kills the one that has become killable (the anomaly turned into a target). This necroethics therefore fulfills a human redefinition of warfare, supported on the techno-scientific accuracy of its omniscient look.

The clean techno-war, projected on a clearly limitable target, with (few) civil casualties, shrouded in opacity and adapted to the mobile geography of its prey, would be supporting such killing in peace that begins to be naturalized as a new way of warfare actuation: an acceptable war with low media profile, relieved from each and every penal responsibility that is ultimately presented as an admissible war, as the necessary war that has been finally rendered possible and bearable by the drone.

This way of killing in peace is the culminating point of the drone’s techno-scientific fetishism, the regime of truth that fulfills its utter de-contextualization: on the one side, it erases the entire geographic-corporal regime that enables the omniscient look; and on the other, assumes the allegedly surgical violence that the necropolitics incorporated into securitarian surveillance unleashes. However, this is the regime of truth that must be challenged, in view of apprehending that which occurs in the production and experience of warfare.

In this sense, the discourse of accuracy would have to be analyzed not as the proof of techno-scientific objectivity, but as an objectification that through a whole process and translations and mediations (Latour, 2008)

intends to build and keep a material-discursive world, where everything that does not fit has to be relegated and silenced. And what does not fit here is the death of civil population, those wrongly called collateral damages that come with *every* war.

Aspects such as the fact that the accuracy in eradicating the target does not necessarily prevents that such threatening-target is accompanied by civilians, that infrastructure necessary for daily life is destroyed, that there are mistakes in the supply of information by the intelligence services or that the image on screen is interpreted in a wrong way, would design the elements that undermine the surgical accuracy discourse (Zehfuss, 2010), the footprints of the necropolitics that drone leaves in its wake.

The peculiarity proper to the war drone and the opacity that shrouds it makes it difficult to find out what occurs in the attacked places, but if one pays attention to data from *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism* (2017), a source that has become a reference to substantiate the impacts of drone attacks, only in Afghanistan from 2015 to 2017, between 2.837 and 3.833 people died as consequence of 3.005 documented attacks.

In a deeper sense, it is worth commenting that even if air power reproduces, in order to legitimize its own functioning, the notion of an enemy which has to be surveilled and eventually suppressed, its own operation ends up rendering irrelevant the distinction between the civil and the military, as its goal is to destroy a life read in the key of threat aside from the civil havoc it may wreak. The category of civil thus appears *retrospectively*, as a denunciation of the life that has been eliminated and that only from its own death barges as a civil life that should not have been killed (Neocleous, 2016); such life while living was a life subtracted from a recognition logic: not a *killable* life anymore (it is not, in a strict sense, the life of the enemy, of the suspect), but a dispensable life, a mere visual impression on a screen that designates a life that does not deserve protection.

In the face of such necropolitical logic, of all this fascination with the drone and its media popularization (for example, the awarded television series *Homeland*), the production of another visibility regime becomes necessary; one to give an account and shows the violence unfold by the drone. Initiatives such as the project of photographer Noor Behram (Delmont, 2013; Walters, 2014) here become relevant. This project gathers the state of the places left by the drones after bombarding; a scenario of destruction and ruins where dead people are photographed, photographs that display the faces of the dispensable lives in the foreground, of those denied subjects that we only see because they are no more.

And to this adds the bodies that are broken or dismembered and that remain a mash of flesh and bone, preventing their identification, the very possibility of identifying remains to burry later. A project that exposes the necropolitics and exposes itself to the risks of giving an account of such violence.

But also, such exposition of the necro-political had to bear in mind the biopolitics issued by the securitarian vigilance that alter the forms of life that exist in such space where the suspicion of an attack has been assimilated into daily life. As suggested by Shaw (2016: 126): “the biopolitical logic of the drone attack is not simply to kill: it is the regulation and control of the world of life”.

The stories collected in reports as *Living under drones* (International Human Rights and Conflict Resolution Centre and Global Justice Clinic, 2012) and *Death by drone* (Open Society Justice Initiative, 2015), carried out in Pakistan and Yemen, respectively, show what implies living in exposition to death, which has become quotidian and demands to reformulate its daily practices.

All this is noticed in aspects such as the existing fears to assist the victims of the attacks, for the place (as it has occurred) may be bombed again, the socioeconomic effects of destruction caused by the drones, the impacts on mental health, derived from the restlessness generated by the possibility of being attacked at any time, the suppression or alteration of all the activities that encourage the formation of groups, because the association itself may be interpreted as the meeting of enemy combatants, this aspect has modified social practices such as attendance to schools, meeting friends or something as important at symbolical level such as funeral rites.

It would be worth concluding by pointing out that, paradoxically, the production of another visibility that evinces the mendacious substrate that composes the securitarian regime of truth not only designates that the model of surgical war intends to hide and move away from the media-political level; it is as well, and blatantly, that the optical power blocks from sight, what the drone’s pilot, in spite of the physical distance from the target they have attacked; they can observe such destruction which now with unnerving accuracy on screen.

In the past, the plane pilot did not see the destruction they caused, however, this substantially changes in the redefinition of warfare the drone implies: the pilot is not at risk, they see the figure they have to eliminate, they do not see the face of the killable subject, but see what their action unleashes, they see everything, perhaps too much and those images they take home after

they finish their labor-warfare day. The appearance of symptoms associated with posttraumatic stress in drone pilots (Pugliese, 2016; Shaw, 2016) evinces the unavoidable corporality of warfare; the fact that such violence unfolded ends up being experienced and felt in the proper body, even in that body which without being in the battlefield has a privileged visual access to it.

## Conclusions

Emphasizing the technoscientific substrate of surgical war or even the juridical debate on the way the drone attacks fit into a current normative framework (Gregory, 2015) that supposes to subtract the very war of spaces and bodies that it reproduces, as if the battle that is observed on the screen would have been snatched from the vital geography that receives the impact of the missiles. Warfare is always production of death, but also displaces bodies, ways of life affected by the violence exercised and this, all in all, is what the central element around which the reflection on the performative making of drone must revolve: the destruction implied by the surgical war, living unpunished violence, the characterization of warfare as a sensorial space crossed by the fear of the attack, by the experience of broken bodies (Gregory, 2015; Lujan, 2015; Shaw, 2016).

Consequently, the militarized zenithal vision must be contrasted at all times with what comes from such optical power, with the bloody making of warfare, showing that the omniscient dream alluded by Foucault, with which we started this reflection, which stressed the “project of universal visibility, which would act in favor of a rigorous and meticulous order” (Foucault, 1989: 15), reveals itself, in the present, as a dystopia, in which the bellicose-police device, the drone, updates and produces territories between the production of death and fear. Only there the impugnation of the fetishized fascination that the machine assemblage of the drone drags is worth.

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