



David Walter Banks for The New York Times

REMOTELY CONTROLLED Some armed robots are operated with video-game-style consoles, helping to keep humans away from danger.

Security by Remote Control: Automation and Autonomy in Robot Weapon Systems

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Lancaster University, UK

Symposium co-sponsored by Security Lancaster, the Lancaster Centre for Science Studies and the Centre for International Law and Human Rights

organised by Karolina Follis, PPR/Security Lancaster, k.follis@lancaster.ac.uk and
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Remotely operated and robotic systems are central to contemporary military operations. Robotic weapons can select targets and deliver lethal force with varying degrees of human control, and technologies for fully autonomous weapon systems are currently in development. Alongside military reconnaissance and the prospective configuration of 'killer-robots,' drone technologies are being deployed for ostensibly peaceful purposes, most notably surveillance of public space, private property and national borders. More generally, the frame offered by contemporary security discourses has redrawn previous boundaries regarding the use of state violence in the name of homeland protection. But despite an extended history of investment in technologies that promise to rationalise the conflict zone and accurately identify the imminent threat, the legitimacy and efficacy of actions taken in the name of security is increasingly in question.

The purpose of this symposium is to present and debate current scholarship on the ethics and legality of robotic systems in war and beyond. By robotic systems we mean networked devices with on-board algorithms that direct machine actions (in this case, tracking, targeting and deploying force) in varying configurations of pre-programmed operation and remote human control. The line between automation and autonomy has come under renewed debate in the context of contemporary developments in remotely controlled weapon systems, most prominently uninhabited aerial vehicles or drones. For

example, in April of 2013 a coalition led by Human Rights Watch initiated a campaign in favour of a legally binding prohibition on the development, production and use of fully autonomous weapon systems. Simultaneously, some military and robotics experts emphasize the advantages of automated weapons and argue that equipping robots with the capacity to make ethical judgments is an achievable technological goal. Within these debates, the 'human in the loop' is posited alternately as the safeguard against illegitimate killing, or its source. Implicit across the debate is the premise of a moment of decision in which judgements of identification and appropriate response are made.

While emerging arms control strategies focus on the 'red line' that would prohibit the development and use of weapons that remove human judgment from the identification of targets and the decision to fire, the question remains to what extent human judgment and decision-making are already compromised by the intensifications of speed, and associated increase in forms and levels of automation, that characterise contemporary war-fighting, particularly in situations of remote control. Rather than attempting to establish one or the other of these concerns as correct, or even as more important than the other, we seek to focus our discussion on the troubling space between automation and autonomy, to understand more deeply their intimate relations, and the inherent contradictions that conjoin them.

To explore the key stakes and lines of argument in this debate, we invite contributions from scholars in the fields of security, peace and conflict studies, international human rights law, anthropology/sociology of science and technology, technoculture and technomilitarism, computing, simulation and cyber law. The ambition for this event is to stimulate ongoing cross-disciplinary discussion and further research on this topic, drawing on the resources of the Lancaster University centres that are its co-sponsors.

Confirmed Speakers:

Patrick Crogan, Senior Lecturer in Film Studies at the University of the West of England in Bristol, scholar of technoculture, videogames and military technoscience, author of *Gameplay Mode: War, Simulation, and Technoculture* (2011).

Derek Gregory, Distinguished Professor and Professor of Geography at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, author of multiple works interrogating social and spatial dimensions of conflict, and currently completing a book titled *The Everywhere War* (forth).

M. Shane Riza, command pilot and former instructor at the U.S. Air Force Weapons School, author of *Killing Without Heart. Limits on Robotic Warfare in an Age of Persistent Conflict* (2013).

Christiane Wilke, Associate Professor in Law and Legal Studies at Carleton University, Canada. She has been researching legal responses to state violence and is working on a project about visibility, photography, and international law.

To indicate your interest in participating, or for further information, please contact Lucy Suchman l.suchman@lancaster.ac.uk.