Toys for the Boys? Drones, Pleasure and Popular Culture in the Militarisation of Policing

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Abstract This paper argues that the various and contradictory rationales offered for law enforcement drones are symptomatic of a 'weapons fetish' evident in popular culture. This fetishisation imbues military technology such as the drone with masculine fantasies of control and domination that obscure the practical limitations and ethical implications of drones for crime control and prevention. By linking the pleasures of militarism to crucial shifts in the social and economic order, the paper argues that counter-terrorism discourse functions to legitimate the militarised masculine subject positions of paramilitary policing specifically and the neoliberal state generally. In such a context, the drone features as a regressive 'weapon-toy' that fuses state control with technological transcendence.

The term 'drone' refers to airborne devices that are controlled remotely by computer systems and/or operators on the ground.[1] Unmanned aerial military technology dates back to World War I, and the use of small robotic planes for surveillance was further developed for use in the Cold War (Benjamin 2013). Drones have forcefully emerged to public consciousness via their use by the United States of America in the 'war on terror' throughout the Middle East. This has raised questions about whether such use of drones is in accordance with international law as well as concerns that drones exacerbate the de-personalisation and derealisation of state violence for those most directly involved (Ro-yakkers and van Est 2010; Virilio 2005; Wall and Monahan 2011).

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[1] There is some debate over the term 'drone' which has been used interchangeably with a range of phrases, including unmanned aerial vehicle, unmanned aerial system, remotely piloted aircraft, remotely piloted aircraft system, unmanned aircraft, remotely piloted aircraft and remotely operated aircraft (Corcoran 2013a, b). The name is derived from the appearance of the small robotic planes used for target practice by World War II gun crews, which were colloquially named after 'drone' bees due to their black striped markings (Benjamin 2013: 13).

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Police drones were first imagined by George Orwell (1949: 2) who, in his famous fictional account of a police-controlled dystopia, described a miniature police helicopter that 'skimmed down between the roofs, hovered for an instant like a blue-bottle, and darted away again with a curving flight'. Given the dual association of the drone with war and totalitarianism, it is unsurprising that the integration of drone technology into internal policing in the United States, Britain and elsewhere has been greeted by civil libertarians and criminologists with considerable unease. Such transfers of military technology into policing are far from unprecedented[2] but drones represents a new stage in the militarisation of policing that has been the subject of critical commentary since the advent of the Cold War.

Kraska (2007: 3) defines militarism as an ideological commitment to the 'the use of force and threat of violence as the most appropriate and efficacious means to solve problems' as distinct from militarisation, which is the implementation of this ideology. This paper explores the linkages between a broader cultural militarism and the militarisation of policing by analysing policing demand for drones. It argues that the various and conflicting legitimisations offered by police forces in their pursuit of public support for drones in law enforcement can be understood as mystifications of the desire of police to embody and enact the militarised subject positions made possible by such technology. This is a subject position occupied not only be individual officers or teams but potentially by states seeking to legitimise particular governmental strategies through crime control.

The paper begins by describing the historical context to contemporary forms of militarism and the emergence of the 'weapons fetish', the cathecting of military weaponry with gendered and sexualised associations. It then explores the impact of cultural militarism upon policing and argues that the militarising trend within law enforcement is driven, at least in part, by defensive masculine fantasies of solidarity and coherence in the face of unprecedented social, economic and cultural change. The final section explores how these fantasies are embodied within the drone fetish and the fantasmatic qualities of police militarisation more generally as a focal point within the masculine imaginary. The paper concludes by reflecting on the disconnection between the modes of crime control enabled by the drone and the needs of those communities experiencing problems with crime and social disorder.

The Role of Militarism in the Social Construction of Masculinity

Historically, militarism has been one of the primary ideological frameworks that has shaped the social construction of masculinities in Western culture (Higate and Hopton 2005). A willingness to use force has long been associated with male honour (Liddle 1996) and violence continues to feature in male responses to percieved insult from other men, women and sexual minorities (Tomsen 2009; Tyson 2013). While individual or indiscriminate uses of violence may be deemed criminal according to the law, they reflect a readiness for conflict that is inherent in militarism, which at a cultural level manifests as 'a set of attitudes and social practices which regards war and the preparation for war as a normal and desirable social activity' (Mann 1987: 35). There are a range of historical examples dating back to ancient Greece and Sparta in which honourable masculinity has been associated with militarism and military life (Nye 2007).

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[2] For examples, tasers, capsicum spray and kinetic impact weapons are now used by police in a range of jurisdictions but they originated as military ordinance (Kraska and Kappeler 1997).

Mann ([1987](#)) suggests that a populist militarism emerged in Western cultures in the nineteenth century that explicitly linked war to social development and the spread of democracy. This corresponded with colonial and imperialist agendas and had wide-ranging social impacts. During this period, the socialisation of men and boys was adjusted to incorporate team sports and military-style discipline in an effort to instill military values and prepare boys for war (Crosset [1990](#)). Masculine violence has taken on an ambivalent status since it is condemned in some contexts but valorised in others where it is linked to (male) citizenship and patriotism. This has produced an internally contradictory form of masculinity that Nye (2007: 417) suggests is peculiar to the modern nation-state, 'in which the citizen must carry within himself the qualities of a warrior, but as a warrior must also remain the citizen he will become again at conflict's end'.

The popularisation of militarism has become increasingly diffuse and pervasive throughout the twentieth century. In the post-war period, critical theorists have called attention to the expanded influence of state and private sector military interests in Western countries in politics, economics and the media (Marcuse [1964](#); Mills [1956](#); Quinney [1974](#)). The rise of consumer culture and mass media during the Cold War was inextricably bound up with the vicarious participation of citizens in the drama of militarism through film, television, toys, comic books and games (Mann [1987](#)). The cultural influence of militarism has accelerated as Cold War investment in military research and development produced a range of technological innovations that now form the basic platform of the media, communication and entertainment industries, such as the internet, computing, video games and satellite technology (Dyer-Witheford and De Peuter [2009](#)). The density of the transfers of technology, skills and personnel between the entertainment, media and defence sectors has led one leading theorist to argue that the 'military industrial complex' has been superceded by the 'military-industrial-media-entertainment' network (Der Derian [2009](#)).

The appeal as well as influence of militarism has suffused Western media production with the narratives and subject positions of a 'militarised masculinity' (Dyer-Witheford [2003](#)) to the point that militarism has become culturally unmoored from a direct association with the military. Instead the characteristics of the soldier—his attitude, clothing, physicality, and accessories—have become integral to representations of masculinity in the media and political discourse (Braudy [2005](#)). Somewhat paradoxically, the cultural intensification of militarism can be linked to the destabilising influence of militarisation upon hegemonic masculine ideals (Cowen and Siciliano [2011](#)). For example, the conscription of black soldiers served as an important catalyst for the subsequent developments of the civil rights movement (Estes [2005](#)). Women's relation to militarism has been fraught and uneven but the influx of women into the workforce during wartime was an important challenge to gendered heirarchies (Enloe [2000](#)). Confident assertions of masculine honour underwritten by assumptions of Western (and specifically American) exceptionalism were dealt an extraordinary blow with the defeat of the Western allies in the Vietnam War (Gibson [1994](#)). The emergence of a globalised economic order, enabled by the internet and other computing technologies first developed for military application, has disrupted working class masculine identities due to the collapse of Western manufacturing strength and an increasingly demand for professionalised labour (McDowell [2003](#)).

Armament Culture and the Weapons Fetish

These profound changes in the social and economic order as well as in gender and race relations provide the context for a popular fascination with force and weaponry. Towards

the end of the Cold War, Luckham (1984) observed the fetishisation of military ordinance and weaponry evident throughout a gamut of products from toys and video games to novels and movies. He warned that the apparent triviality of these commodity forms belies the ways in which they idealise militarism. He described an 'armament culture' in which toys and popular media invest military ordinance with compelling symbolic associations through a 'cultural processing of war' (p 2). Weapons have become '*collective representations of the political programs of those who control them*' (Luckham 1984: 5, emphasis in original). Sublimated within the anxieties of the arms race and fears of nuclear war was a fascination with state power and technological supremacy that became manifest in the proliferation of idealised representations of weapons and military life, surreptitiously militarising the subject positions available to consumers in their engagement with the market economy.

It is telling that armament culture emerged during a period in which hegemonic masculine ideals had been decentred by the advance of feminism and the civil rights movements, as well as the loss of the blue collar jobs that underpinned 'Fordist' masculinity. Gibson (1994) suggests that the increasing dominance of militaristic symbols and themes within Western culture and politics represents a defensive collective 'fantasy' by boys and men seeking to deny the crises of legitimation faced by patriarchal masculinities. In his detailed analysis of American popular culture and politics, Gibson (1994) argues that the emergence of fictional narratives of paramilitary vigilantes and 'elite' military operatives offered a parallel universe of masculine camaraderie and certainty in contrast to the complex reality of social and economic change. What Giroux (2001) described as the 'structural violence' of neoliberal capitalism—job insecurity, cuts in public spending, disinvestment in public institutions—is misrepresented in political discourse and media depictions as a 'feminisation' of men and an attack on masculinity. Hence the solution offered by armament culture is not one of social reform or political change but rather militarist spectacles designed to re-establish and re-assert a fantasmatic image of masculine authenticity.

The prominence of militarism in cultural production therefore offers imaginary solutions to the same masculine anxieties that it has engendered. Combining the insights of Luckham (1984) and Gibson (1994), it can be seen that the weapon features within armament culture as a fetishized object that is invested with mystified economic and sexual forces; a disavowal of fragility and uncertainty through specifically masculine prosthetics that promise individual and collective renewal through violence. This fascination with weaponry is intrinsically linked to the transformations in masculine status catalysed by a globalised, militarised and neoliberal economic order. In her analysis of science fiction films, Fernbach (2000) suggests that the fusion of man and machine evident in the cinema of the 1980s and 1990s is indicative of a view that ordinary masculinity now 'lacks' and requires the 'technofetish' to secure its superordinate place in the social order. Such representations are typically accompanied by a highly reactionary gender politics characterised by once-hegemonic gender norms and relations. Analyses of 'gun culture' find similar fetishistic dynamics at work within the numerous discursive and symbolic overlaps between the phallus and the gun (King 2007).

Integrating Freudian and Marxist accounts of the fetish, Baudrillard (1981: 93) suggests that all commodities have a dual economic and sexual aspect, enabling 'the subject to weave around himself a closed and invulnerable world that dissolves all obstacles to the realization of desire'. Through the commodity, the consumer seeks to disavow the incoherence and contradictions of post-industrial subjectivity, although it is the commodity at the centre of the economic and cultural system that produces such incoherence

(Baudrillard, 1981). The weapons fetish and armament culture can be understood as a specifically gendered realization of this dynamic and an intensification of a more general populist militarism. The following section will examine how armament culture and the weapons fetish features within the militarization of policing, and in turn how paramilitary policing has become the nexus point for cultural fantasies of righteous male violence and camaraderie within a pluralizing racial, sexual and gender order.

Militarisation, Policing and the Paramilitary Aesthetic

The emergence of an armament culture has occurred contemporaneously with the proliferation of paramilitary police units[3] throughout Western countries since the 1970s (Kraska and Kappeler 1997). Policing is to some degree inherently militarised (Kraska 2007) however the boundaries between policing and the military became increasingly permeable in the latter half of the twentieth century. Globalisation has blurred the distinction between internal and external security, and hence policing and the military, as the geographically bounded Western national state negotiates international flows of capital and people (Andreas and Price 2001). This has given rise to concern about transnational threats such as terrorism and organised crime, although arguably these threats are produced by the lived and felt injustices of the world economy (Gibbs 2010). Terrorism in particular has served as the legitimisation for the formation and maintenance of paramilitary policing units. However critical commentators suggest that the risk of terrorism has been exaggerated by police and the state for political advantage (Crelinsten 1998; McCulloch 2007). This finds support in the fact that terrorist incidents have proven to be so rare that paramilitary police units have come to be widely deployed in response to more mundane and everyday policing issues so as to ward off redundancy (McCulloch 2001).

Paramilitary police units are distinguished from other police by their 'military training, equipment, philosophy and organization' (Jefferson 1990: 16) and a mission 'to threaten or use force collectively, instantaneously, and not necessarily as an option of last resort' (Kraska and Kappeler 1997: 4). Their uniforms mimic a military aesthetic and the culture of such units is typified by hyper-masculine camaraderie (McCulloch 2001). This is an area of policing from which women are almost wholly excluded (Dodge et al. 2011; Kurtz et al. 2012). These developments have been the subject of sustained criticism due to an apparent retreat from a commitment to community-orientated policing and gender integration, as well as an emphasis on violence in police work which undermines fundamental liberal and democratic principles (Jefferson 1990; McCulloch 2001). Paramilitary police units have come under scrutiny due to their preferential use of high-risk ambushes and raids where other, less dangerous approaches were available, placing officers, suspects and bystanders at unnecessary risk of injury or death (Hill et al. 2007; McCulloch 2001; McCulloch and Sentas 2006). These ambushes and raids were at times staged apparently to maximise the drama, excitement and impact of the policing intervention (McCulloch 2001).

Despite (or perhaps because of) the risk associated with their use of violence, paramilitary police units are generally considered to be 'elite' and they are widely idealised by

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[3] There are a range of definitions of 'paramilitary police units' evident in the literature on police militarisation but for the purpose of this paper they are defined as 'organisations within law enforcement bodies that in differing degrees are modelled after the military, but with the statutory powers and legitimate status of the police' that receive military forms of training and utilize military ordinance and tactics (Rantatalo 2012: 51).

other police (Kraska 1997, 2007; McCulloch 2001). Given this privileged status, it is unsurprising that the paramilitary appearance and tactics of these units have exerted considerable influence over policing practice. Over time, paramilitary tactics and weaponry have become features of police responses to a variety of forms of crime and disorder (Kraska 2001b). This has been linked to the indiscriminate use of teargas, clubs, pepper spray and rubber bullets for the purpose of crowd control (Hill and Beger 2009). Police uniforms in some jurisdictions now mimic a form-hugging paramilitary fashion complete with combat boots, cargo pants and a utility belt which holds once-military technology such as tasers and capsicum spray (McCulloch 2001). The dissemination of paramilitary tactics into 'normal' police work has accelerated following the events of September 11 2001 due to the establishment of joint military-police counter-terrorism operations (Monahan 2010a) and the increasing prominence of 'national security' imperatives in the remit of law enforcement officers (Kraska 2007). This has been underwritten by formal institutional arrangements and government funding for the transfer of military and war technology to law enforcement (Haggerty and Ericson 2001).

There has been an increasingly military flavour to crime control rhetoric and policy with successive 'wars' on 'drugs', 'crime' and 'terror' (Kraska 2001a). However the generalisation of 'war' as a paradigm of response applicable to internal as well as external security concerns has proven to be a poor method of safeguarding social order; instead, it has produced a range of counterproductive effects (Hardt and Negri 2004; McCulloch and Pickering 2009). Each successive 'war' has tended to legitimise the expansion of law enforcement budgets (and a corresponding underfunding of social supports) and the differential targeting of disadvantaged, ethnic and racial minority communities (Meeks 2005). This has eroded rather than supported the capacities of those communities to develop the social cohesion and capital necessary for resolving collective problems such as crime and disorder (Wacquant 2009). Furthermore, such 'wars' have typically exacerbated the underlying determinants of social problems, complicated efforts at crime prevention and control, and estranged individuals and communities from the police and other authorities (Hill and Beger 2009; McCulloch and Sentas 2006; Meeks 2005).

Despite its shortcomings, paramilitary policing has been politically positioned as the ideal response to the dual threats of crime and terrorism, which in turn serve as necessary foils for the kinds of militarised masculine performances and subjectivities that have status within armament culture. The simultaneous concordance of paramilitary policing with the masculine pleasures of armament culture and the political and economic prerogatives of neoliberal governmentality signals a 'hyper-reality' in which gendered fantasy, policing practice and political rhetoric become indistinguishable (see Baudrillard 1994). Through an embodiment and elaboration of fantasies of righteous masculine violence, paramilitary policing has become a nodal point within celebratory militarist spectacles produced for television and cinema, which in turn have been embraced by police and policy makers to the point of influencing their decision making (Monahan 2010b). The injured or humiliated hero who has no choice but to use violence to restore his honour and protect others is a recurring fictional trope in television and film, acting as a device through which aggressive masculinities are re-enchanted as primordial and valourous (Savran 1998). However this also describes the subject positions and postures adopted by Western powers who have characterised themselves as under attack from within and without by the combined threats of crime, drugs and terrorism (Coe et al. 2007).

The iterative relation between cultural militarism and police militarization suggests that the framing of crime as a 'war' has been driven, at least in part, by the specifically masculine pleasures and enjoyments promised by armament culture. Kraska (2007: 506)

has described the 'intoxicating' effect of militarisation upon police officers enamoured with 'techno-warrior garb, heavy weaponry, sophisticated technology, hypermasculinity and dangerous function'. These fetishised objects are then put into play, quite literally, through paramilitary police training and tactics, which police characterise as intensely thrilling and pleasurable in comparison to 'mundane' everyday police work (Kraska 1997; Kraska and Paulsen 1997). Such masculine melodramas signal a specific permutation and even intensification of the cultural logic of militarism that has become integral to the political and economic order. This foregrounds the role of play, thrill and excitement in militarism and helps to explain policing interest in militarization (and government support for the same) despite the lack of evidence that such tactics are efficacious in addressing crime and social disorder. Instead, paramilitary policing can be understood as just one of a number of opportunities for the legitimization and performance of the masculine subjectivities constructed by armament culture. The next section will consider this more closely through the example of the drone.

The Drone Fetish

One of the most recent developments in the militarization of policing has been the attempts of law enforcement agencies to secure public funds to purchase drones. Despite the international controversy over the use of drones overseas, domestic law enforcement agencies have been pursuing the case for the use of drone technology in policing (McBride 2009). Their interest has been whetted by weapons manufacturers, aerospace companies and industry groups keen to open up new domestic markets in the wake of the Western withdrawal from the Middle East (Greenwald 2011, 2013; Singer 2009). These groups are directly marketing drones to police agencies and lobbying governments alongside expansive claims about the inexpensiveness, safety and usefulness of drones for law enforcement (Greenwald 2013).

In the United States, the Federal Aviation Authority was ordered by Congress in 2012 to integrate drones into national airspace by 2015 however there remains considerable uncertainty over the privacy, social and legal implications of drones (Levin 2012). In response, the American Civil Liberties Union has reported an 'unprecedented surge of activity' by state legislatures seeking to restrict or ban drone use, with legislation 'proposed in 42 states, enacted in 6 states, and still active in 28 states' (see Bohm 2013). Other jurisdictions have developed more comprehensive drone regulation frameworks, such as in Europe and the United Kingdom, where licenses and permits are required for all drones, with heavier drones and surveillance drones attracting closer scrutiny (Hopkins 2013). In some countries, such as Mexico and Brazil, there are no restrictions on the use of drones for civilian, commercial or state purposes.

Despite the ethical and legal ambiguities, select American police agencies have been able to use drones for law enforcement since 2005[4] and some British police forces have been using drone technology since 2008. Police agencies convened a conference in Australia in 2012 to discuss the use of drones in local law enforcement (Stewart 2012) with the South Australian police recently announcing plans to use drones in the field (Crouch and

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[4] The United States Congress only authorised the use of drones for customs and border protection in 2005 but police almost immediately began 'borrowing' drones for domestic police work (Benjamin 2013, pp. 77–78).

Hunt 2013). At the time, the South Australian Police Minister, Michael O'Brien, claimed that drones have become internationallyrecognised as useful law enforcement tools:

> The quadcopters are also ideal for quick inspections of towers, buildings, or premises when police are searching for explosive devices, or after a fire or an explosion. And, the UAVs have excellent capability for use in areas of rugged terrain, especially during searches for missing people or for illicit drug crops. (quoted in Crouch and Hunt 2013)

This invocation of dramatic (although usually rare) scenarios is typical of the manner in which police interest in drones has been legitimized. Frequently named situations include terrorist attacks, hostage situations, the pursuit of armed offenders, riots and protests. This is at times supplemented by references to the supposed utility of drones for more mundane policing activities. In the United States, Missouri Police Chief Captain Sam Dotson recently applied to the Federal Aviation Authority for a license to fly a drone, telling the media it would be used for 'monitoring public spaces' such as fairs and baseball games as well as 'for terrorists, suspicious activity' (Rush 2013). An article published in the FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin in 2008 imagined a future scenario in which a drone would be launched to scan city blocks for 'any known felons, prostitutes or drug dealers' that might be 'loitering' in the area (Reed Jr. 2008: 16). This suggests that, like other examples of police militarisation, drones are likely to differentially impact on disadvantaged groups and communities (Meeks 2005), situating drones firmly within the politics of surveillance and risk minimisation (Lyon and Bauman 2013).

Police and government claims about the utility and cost effectiveness of drones tend to blithely reproduce the marketing material of manufacturers and industry groups, falling into the 'technofallacies' identified by Corbett and Marx (1991). In their analysis of criminal justice enthusiasm for new technology, they emphasise a tendency to assume that new technology is more effective and promising than established approaches or non-technological methods. In the case of the drone, such assumptions are contested by independent analyses. While being considerably cheaper per unit than piloted aircraft, drones may not be more cost effective since their operation costs are substantially higher (Congressional Budget Office 2011; Haddal and Gertler 2010: 4; see also Boyle 2012). Law enforcement is likely to be using smaller drones than the military with a much lower unit cost but this is offset by the short flight time and limited endurance of small drones, their susceptibility to inclement weather, and the ongoing costs of pilot licensing, training and operation (Haddal and Gertler 2010: 5). As a result, 'the life cycle cost of UAVs [unmanned aerial vehicles] could actually be greater than the life cycle cost of manned aircraft' (ibid.). The limited studies available have found that manned aircraft are more effective than unmanned aircraft in civilian law enforcement applications (Haddal and Gertler 2010: 6) with the 'unimpressive' results of drones coming at a high financial cost (Benjamin 2013: 75).

Drones are notoriously difficult to pilot with accident rates estimated to be several times higher than piloted aircraft (Haddal and Gertler 2010: 4). In 2009, the American Air Force reported that one third of their Predator drones deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan had crashed (Drew 2009). In the United States, there have been at least two incidents in which military drones have crashed during test missions (Benjamin 2013: 23). A large Predator drone being used for border surveillance crashed in Arizona in 2006 and all drone flights in Texas were grounded for a 6 day period in 2010 after a drone lost contact with the ground control system (Haddal and Gertler 2010: 2). The high rate of drone accidents raises obvious questions about the potential risks associated with police use of drones. This was

further illustrated in 2012 when a Texas paramilitary police unit staged a photo opportunity for the local media to photograph a drone in action. Within minutes of launching the US $300,000 Shadowhawk helicopter there was a communication failure and the drone crashed into a police vehicle (Hill 2012). Concerns over the reliability and security of the communications signal between drones and the ground system are not limited to their accident rates and extends to the possibility that the signal can be hacked (BBC News 2013).

Even the anecdotal evidence for the usefulness of police drones is uneven and characterised by cautionary tales. In the United States, it was 6 years before a drone resulted in a single police arrest. The suspected criminals were not the difficult and dramatic cases that American police claimed required drone technology but instead three suspected cattle thieves (Bennett 2011). Drones were being used in Britain for over 2 years before they resulted in a single arrest, which involved police using a drone mounted with thermal imaging technology to locate a teenaged car thief hiding behind bushes in 'thick fog' (Hull 2010). The drone was almost immediately grounded for breaching legislation regarding unmanned aircraft in inhabited areas (McDermott 2010). After police obtained the necessary license, officers took the £13,000 drone to the local police social club where it was launched only to crash and sink into a river (Traynor 2011).

It is becoming clear that police interest in purchasing drones far outweighs their practical utility. In the United States, the Federal Aviation Administration has reported that 7 % of approximately 300 permits issued for drone use by government agencies have gone to law enforcement (Balcerzak and Hiegel 2013). However it has emerged that the majority of those police agencies that purchased drones have never deployed them due to legal concerns and the ongoing costs (Balcerzak and Hiegel 2013). The theatrical scenarios envisioned by Minister O'Brien and Captain Dodson above, in which police drones foil terrorist plots or navigate through fiery towers, have yet to materialize, and are in stark contrast to the current reality of numerous drones gathering dust in police storage rooms.

Police and government rhetoric about drones are characterised by unrealised and unrealistic fantasies of total surveillance and swift intervention that are disrupted by an absence of supporting evidence and a tangle of technological, legal and practical limitations. Benjamin (2013) lists a number of incidents in which the capabilities of drones have been put to good use, such as when drones were used after the 2011 earthquake in Japan to monitor radiation levels in at the Fukushima nuclear plant, or when crisis services have used drones to monitor floods or fires. However it has yet to be established through research or experience that drones have any substantive place in crime prevention, detection or intervention.

The baseless but ongoing claims about the policing potential of drones are important markers of fetishisation, signaled by '[e]xpressing desire for and approval of the object and its capacities, celebrating the object, revering it, setting it apart, displaying it, extolling and exalting its capacities, eulogising it [and] enthusiastic use of it' (Dant 1996: 511–12). However the dearth of evidence for the usefulness of the drone for policing marks this as a particular form of fetishism that, according by Baudrillard (1981: 32) accrues to the 'useless gadget', characterized by 'pure gratuitousness under a cover of functionality, pure waste under a cover of practicality'. Such commodities may serve no purpose other than to enable ostentatious displays through which prestige amasses to the possessor of the object. Underlying this fetishism, according to Baudrillard (1981), is a fascination with the code of signs that the object or good is embedded within. In the case of the drone, this code or system is a fundamentally militarised financial and cultural economy that imbues drones with its associations with state power and a militarized masculinity.

Arendt (2004) observed the inexorable repatriation of colonial strategies of control and domination into the governmental strategies of imperial powers. In a similar fashion, Moyn (2013) suggests that the drone is an important medium through which the ideology of technologically enhanced counter-terrorism, elaborated by Western powers in the 'war on terror' overseas, is being transposed from national to internal security. If the distinction between criminal and enemy combatant is increasingly one of perception (Kahn 2013) and drones typify the 'logistics of military perception' (Virilio 1984) then the incorporation of drones into policing necessarily has militarising impacts on the subject position of police officers vis a vis 'the criminal' and the ethos and culture of crime control. Technology, Corbet and Marx remind us (1991), is not politically neutral.

The military origins of the drone have been downplayed by police agencies who have instead described them as an extension of existing police aerial resources (Greenwald 2013). However this is a disingenuous trivialisation of the unavoidable association of the drone with the missile strikes that have terrorised civilian populations in the Middle East. Indeed, the potential for weaponisation has been a feature of police and political discourse on the domestic application of drones. In the United States, some police agencies and weapons manufacturers are openly speculating that law enforcement drones may be fitted with non-lethal weapons such as tasers, 'bean bag' guns, tear gas canisters and rubber bullets in the future (Stanton 2011; Benjamin 2013, p 79) while the Senator for Kentucky, Rand Paul, recently suggested that it would be legitimate for a police drone to be used to kill an armed robber (Johnson 2013). Infamously, American military drones have been used to target and kill American citizens overseas (Cole 2013c). Meanwhile the drone industry has developed weaponized drones for domestic application and is marketing these 'assassin bugs' to police agencies and governments (Greenwald 2013).

At present, no police drone is armed with lethal or non-lethal weaponry and any such development would likely be extremely controversial. Nonetheless the fetishisation of an object does not require the realisation of its full capacities. To the contrary, the fetishisation of the commodity can be signified by an 'excess capacity' that is never utilised (Dant 1996). Dant (1996) provides the example of cars manufactured with a capacity for speed that would be illegal to deploy on the road. It is this excess of capacity within the car that acts as a sign of prestige and value. In a similar fashion, drones may be appealing to police at least in part because their 'excess capacity' for weaponisation operates as a signifier of the individual power of the police officer and collective status of the police force. As such it accords with the increasingly stylised displays of militarised force that have come to characterise contemporary policing, marking the indeterminant boundaries between militarisation, gendered fantasies of domination, and the masculine pleasures of 'playing war'. This fusion of fantasy and weapon is characteristic of the products of armament culture[5] and generate considerable consumer interest (Luckham 1984). Drones are now available on the adult 'toy' market, and the bemusing intersection of weapon and toy in the drone became evident in 2012 when it emerged that an American police agency had purchased a toy drone although it would be illegal for an officer to use it in the field (Koebler 2013). Little wonder that the American Civil Liberties Union has suggested the police interest in drones as case of 'boys with their toys gone wild' (cited in Gruber 2011).

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[5] It is interesting to note that key examples of police technology originated in science fiction. Not only was the police drone first depicted by Orwell (as previously discussed), but 'taser' is an acronym for 'Tom Swift and his Electric Rifle', the 1911 science fiction book that depicted the 'electric rifle' that inspired the taser (Berenson 2004) and the concept of electronic monitoring was supposedly inspired by a Spiderman comic book in which a villain places an electronic bracelet on the hero to track his whereabouts (Corbett and Marx 1991).

Conclusion

The deadly serious tone of counter-terrorism discourse is somewhat undermined by the excesses of armament culture and the evident but suppressed child-like pleasures that drive police militarisation. However the fusion of technology, pleasure and militarism within the drone has potentially grave implications. It signals that a consumer militarism driven by cultural and emotional linkages between violence and masculinity is being indulged by the nation state as part of a systematic militarisation of internal security. The evident gap between the fantasy and the reality of the policing drone becomes secondary to its role as a prop within the performances of militarised masculinity that are central to 'war' (on crime/drugs/terror) as a governing strategy. Cole (2013a) notes that much of the controversy over American use of drones overseas pertains to disagreements over the definition of war, and yet in relation to internal security, a militarised ideology of crime control is so hegemonic and pervasive that it has circumvented basic ethical and legal debate. However there is an obvious similarity between the 'signature strikes' of military drones that kill otherwise unknown targets on the basis of a 'profile' of suspicious activity (Cole 2013b), and the manner in which disadvantaged and ethnic minority communities are differentially impacted by new surveillance technologies and paramilitary policing strategies, sometimes to lethal effect (see McCulloch and Sentas 2006).

Singer (2012) has asked 'Do drones undermine democracy?' by reducing the political risks associated with engaging in war, but the same question might be asked in relation to police drones and 'playing' at war. Within armament culture, boys and men are enjoined to seek simulations of war in order to affirm their relations with one another and establish their masculine *bona fides;* peace appears positively boring in comparison. Like other manifestations of armament culture, drones are appealing to police because they are embedded within a pervasive cultural code of military signs and symbols promising the rush and thrill of masculine conflict and, ultimately, victory. For Baudrillard (1981) the signs within such cultural systems are free-floating and entirely interchangeable however this paper has highlighted how militarism retains its compelling qualities because it offers imaginary solutions to the contradictions inherent in material, social and economic relations. As such, it retains its linkages to the 'real' even as it penetrates and obscures it, reconstituting gendered anxieties into internal and external 'threats' whose neutralisation legitimises self-renewal through violence. Behind the prerogatives of the pleasure and thrill of the drones is an emerging mode of governmentality that does not recognise the social and economic determinants of crime. Instead it views criminals as potential targets for a weaponised engagement through which militarised masculinity can be renewed for the aggrandisement of police, as individuals and as a group, but also for the neoliberal state.

Anecdotal reports of female drone pilots are making their way into the mass media (e.g. Abe 2012) but the linkage between femininity and militarism is not a straightforward story of empowerment but rather it continues to be characterized by official efforts to 'maintain the sorts of masculinity that enhance militarism' (Enloe 2000: 271). The predominance of men in paramilitary units, and the overt reconstruction of an aggressive masculinity within the paramilitary ethos more generally, suggests that the militarization of crime control is a mode by which threatened formations of masculine values and practice are preserved within a changing social and cultural landscape. Central to this dynamic are the feelings of pleasure and excitement that intersect in the drone, and hence the integration of such technology into policing symbolises a dual obfuscation: Crime as 'game', or crime as 'war'? Or crime as 'war game'? Crime control strategies based on the 'logic' of armament culture, with its dreams of omniscient surveillance and supreme firepower, have

consistently produced results counter to their stated aims by inciting resistance to 'shock and awe' tactics. Nonetheless the failings of militarism as a mode of crime control is continually eclipsed by a technological fetishism based on militarised hardware that promises triumph and affirmation through violence. This is a telling measure of the potency of militarism as a symbolic code of gendered displacement and defence against social change.

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