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J. D. Schnepf

MFS Modern Fiction Studies, Volume 63, Number 2, Summer 2017, pp. 270-287
(Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2017.0022>



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**DOMESTIC AERIAL
PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE
ERA OF DRONE WARFARE**

J. D. Schnepf

On 17 November 2001, First Lady Laura Bush delivered the White House's weekly radio address to the nation to draw attention to the plight of the Afghan woman. Bush linked the US-led War on Terror directly to the alleviation of the oppressive conditions experienced by Afghan women living under "the al-Qaida terrorist network and the regime it supports in Afghanistan, the Taliban," and maintained that "[c]ivilized people throughout the world are speaking out in horror—not only because our hearts break for the women and children in Afghanistan, but also because in Afghanistan we see the world the terrorists would like to impose on the rest of us." In her remarks, Bush asked that we look to Afghanistan's domestic sphere for a vision of the terror-filled future that might await the US.¹ I invert Bush's formulation, looking instead to the American domestic sphere, and mass-media representations of women using drones at home in particular, to disclose the terror that US state violence has imposed on the rest of the world. In her analysis of domestic literature written during America's program of nationalist expansion in the antebellum era, Amy Kaplan argues that the American domestic sphere plays a constitutive role in the project of US imperialism. In this essay I adapt Kaplan's logic and apply it to the contemporary War on Terror, linking the feminine space of the home to the state's drone violence abroad.

Predator drones armed with Hellfire missiles first appeared in combat in the skies over Afghanistan in October 2001 (Woods). Since

this initial authorization of weaponized, remotely piloted aircraft by the Bush administration at the outset of the War on Terror, the US military has rapidly expanded its drone program. In recent years the Obama administration escalated military drone deployments abroad, carrying out signature strikes and counterterrorism campaigns in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, Yemen, Libya, and Somalia (Shane). At the same time, the use of domestic Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS), or hobbyist drones, in US airspace has surged. In February 2012 President Obama signed the Federal Aviation Administration Modernization and Reform Act into law to "provide a framework for integrating new technology safely into our airspace" (Federal). The legislation acknowledged the growing interest in the domestic use of UAS: "From agricultural monitoring and border surveillance to local crime scene investigations, search and rescue missions, disaster response (e.g., wildfires and floods), and military training," reads the Joint Planning and Development Office's *Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Comprehensive Plan*, "UAS provide a wide variety of operational, societal, and economic benefits to its diverse group of users" (5). Left out of the plan's list of potential uses for UAS is the expanding market for aerial photography of homes and gardens by drone. While such photographs are used by real estate firms, security companies, and private homeowners, I focus on their surprising appearance in women's mass-media publications.²

In this essay I discuss two series of photographs featuring drones: Martha Stewart's "Amazing Aerial Photos of My Farm," posted on *The Martha Blog* in July 2014, and "Here's Looking at You," which appeared in the print edition of *Vogue* in August 2015.³ Though Stewart's photographs are the product of casual experimentation and *Vogue's* the result of a carefully orchestrated photo shoot, both sets introduce aerial drone photography to middle-class readers of women's mass-media publications through the visual fantasy of upscale, opulent homemaking applied to the outdoor domestic space of the carefully manicured garden. In these images, the backyard garden—with its greenery, symmetry, discernable geometric shapes, and boxwood hedging—emerges as a crucial site of cultural negotiation where women's fashion and home magazines set about shaping the drone's complex symbolic role within the domestic sphere.

Writing in the early years of the global War on Terror, feminist photography historian Laura Wexler notes the US state's past and present reliance on domestic images to convey the nation's "purportedly higher level of 'civilization'" as a justification for the intensification of military action abroad (38). She argues that such scenes, in their capacity to instill sentiments of domestic preservation, may be used to militarize US society and thereby function as "implements

of terror" in their own right (37). For Wexler, "domestic imagery is a good example of how violence is linked and interwoven at the different scales of the intimate, the community, the national and the international" (38). With these claims in mind, I read domestic drone photographs as promoting and enabling the perpetuation of drone warfare abroad. The two cases I examine below fantasize image-worlds in which women of privilege invite the drone's penetrative gaze into their private spaces. Since women assume the status of both subject and object of the gaze, the drone's remote-controlled, digital image-making technologies function to disrupt patriarchal norms, installing women in a closed loop of image production and consumption. In other ways, the apparent pleasure of experiencing oneself and one's property being surveilled by aerial technology manifests in these texts as the thrill of absolute sovereignty and its trappings of elitism, accumulation, and even imperialist nostalgia. In this respect, the drone images that circulate in these mass-media publications don't offer a critique of so-called civilizing missions abroad; rather, they reproduce fantasies of control and cultivation on the grounds and gardens of American estates in the service of an exceedingly narrow white feminist vision of autonomy. This point of intersection between the imperial and the domestic draws attention to what Jacques Rancière might call the uneven global distribution of the sensible, particularly when contrasted with the conditions of those who live in regions that fall on militarized drone flight paths or, as installation artist James Bridle puts it, "under the shadow of the drone."⁴

French Kings and Queen Bees

Martha Stewart's website, *The Martha Blog*, posted 31 photographs taken with a DJI Phantom flying camera, or hobbyist drone, in the summer of 2014. Titled "Amazing Aerial Photos of My Farm," the photo gallery captures a bird's-eye view of Stewart's 153-acre Westchester County property. Stewart's adoption of the drone is a tech-savvy iteration of the traditional domestic advisor's role: helping "middle-class women navigate the confusing consumer world and make sense of their belongings" (Leavitt 6). In this respect, Stewart's status as a domestic advisor allows her to translate the meaning of the domestic drone for the American public. "Drones can be useful tools, and I am all about useful tools," she reminds her readers ("Why"). "One of my mottos is 'the right tool for the right job.'" In the captions that accompany the photos of her farm, Stewart explains how the drone allows her to see the space anew, identifying its topographical features: her home, her daughter's home, the

equipment shed, the vegetable greenhouse, the hay barn, the hoop house, the main greenhouse, the stable house, the carriage house, and the farm office, as well as the donkey paddocks, horse stables, chicken coops, vegetable gardens, and clematis pergolas. "[T]he fencing makes everything so architecturally pleasing," she observes of her symmetrical fields, before marveling at the "nice structure and orderliness" of the whole ("Amazing"). Here, Stewart proposes domesticity's expansive reach by trafficking in the language of good housekeeping traditionally reserved for the more intimate scale of indoor spaces. Just as Stewart has subjected the interior of the home to scrupulous organization over the years, "Amazing Aerial Photos" illustrates how vast expanses of the natural world can be similarly tidied and ordered.

Stewart's business success depends on her ability to balance the tension between the insulated world of the domestic sphere and the expansive impulses of empire-building and acquisition—a condition Kaplan might call the paradox of "imperial domesticity" (586). Regarded as "perhaps the most famous female brand name in the American consumer world" (Leavitt 199), Stewart built a multimillion-dollar, global corporation by marketing her expertise as a domestic advisor. Her expansive commercial empire seems at odds with the homemaker's traditional focus on smaller tasks.⁵ "She has taken a drubbing," as one critic claims, "for looking more convincing as a businesswoman than a dispenser of milk and cookies" (Talbot). Another points out that "[t]he image of Stewart toasting her initial public offering (IPO) at the New York Stock Exchange with fresh-squeezed orange juice and homemade brioche caught so many people's attention specifically because of the perceived clash between the public sphere of stock trading and the private sphere of the home" (Leavitt 201). By daring to blend domestic interests with commercial ones, "Stewart's lifestyle empire," as Susan Fraiman calls it, "is voracious and frankly self-aggrandizing" (278). Moreover, her "aggressive mobilization of domesticity, enacted on the corporate stage," unsettles traditionalists who believe that well-managed domesticity ought to go hand-in-hand with the orderly femininity exemplified by the traditional housewife. Along with upsetting gender norms, Stewart's singleness destabilizes the norms of sexuality too. Stewart's image as an unpartnered woman severs "women's domestic expertise from normative marital roles and obligations" (Fraiman 262). This separation of domestic duties from heteronormativity allows women's work at home to be "liberated from protocols of service to others and, more wickedly still, reinvented as service to self." Indeed, in making a profession of housekeeping, Stewart has assumed the role of the ambitious career woman of independent means.

This context is important when trying to make sense of Stewart's public praise of hobbyist drones in recent years. Linking corporate feminism to her drone advocacy, Stewart flew a drone around the New York Women in Communications' Matrix Awards Luncheon—which honors female leaders in government, publishing, business, and entertainment—at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City in 2015 (O'Brien). A few weeks after "Amazing Aerial Photos" appeared on her blog, Stewart published a short opinion piece entitled "Why I Love My Drone" in *Time* magazine. The essay is not a love letter to the drone (although, in a satire for the *New Yorker*, Henry Alford insinuates the relationship between Martha and the machine verges on the sexual) but to an imperial past that the drone's vantage makes newly available to America's homemakers. Here Stewart reviews the horticultural history of lands cultivated for European aristocrats. "In England," she writes, the lauded eighteenth-century landscape architect Capability Brown "somehow had the innate vision and perspicacity to reconfigure thousands of acres into country estates fit for royalty." Stewart links this past to the present by turning to the drone photographs posted on her blog: "The shots of my farm were breathtaking and showed not only a very good landscape design—thanks to the surveyors and landscapers who worked with me on the overall vision, much as le Notre [sic] worked with Louis XIV—they also showed me what more I can do in the future, and revealed unexpected beauty." In this bewildering aside, Stewart likens her relationship to her farm's surveyors and landscapers to Louis XIV's relationship to his private garden architect, André Le Nôtre. (Stewart mentions Le Nôtre earlier in the essay: "[i]t is hard to imagine André Le Nôtre laying out the exquisite landscape designs for Vaux-le-Vicomte, and later the magnificent Château de Versailles, with no high hill to stand on, no helicopter to fly in, and no drone to show him the complexities of the terrain.") Venerating Louis XIV as an exemplary patron of the garden arts, the observation simultaneously establishes a parallel between Stewart and the Sun King while appointing her hobby farm as a Versailles in miniature. By aligning herself with the figure of the monarch as a garden enthusiast similarly driven to revise and remake the natural world, Stewart reconceives of women's landscape work not as a domestic duty but as a potential manifestation of sovereign power.

The conflation of domestic management with absolute authority updates the well-worn adage that a man's home is his castle, recasting the ruler of the residence as the woman who keeps it in order. Dubbed the "Queen of Living Well" (Talbot) and the "Domestic Queen" (Bellomo) by the popular press, audiences have long understood Stewart as presiding over an empire of her own. Assimilating drone technology into such a matriarchal realm is not as difficult as one

might suppose. In the drone's own origin story, the world of insects is enlisted to naturalize the gendered control of the environment. Military drones were never functional on their own; in 1935, the US Navy had conceived of them as male subordinates, constitutionally subservient to a female queen. After an admiral in the US Navy witnessed the performance of the De Havilland DH82B Queen Bee, a remote-controlled plane used by the Royal Navy in anti-aircraft target practice, Lieutenant Commander Delmar Fahrney was instructed to build something similar for the Americans. "Fahrney adopted the name 'drone' to refer to these aircraft in homage to the Queen Bee," writes one military historian (Zaloga, qtd. in Zimmer). According to Ben Zimmer, "The term fit, as a drone could only function when controlled by an operator on the ground or in a 'mother' plane."

Here, the drone's structural reliance on its mother-operator unexpectedly infantilizes drone technology, introducing a paradigm that places it in a position of dependence. While Stewart inherits the drone's legacy of female sovereignty, she also does away with its maternal overtones. Indeed, in Stewart's homes and gardens, the family is "purged" entirely from her contemporary vision of domesticity (Fraiman 263). As one commentator puts it: "In the enchanted world of Turkey Hill [Stewart's former home in Westport, Connecticut], there are no husbands (Stewart was divorced from hers in 1990), only loyal craftsmen, who clip hedges and force dogwood with self-effacing dedication" (Talbot). This vision of a domestic world populated by diligent male workers is reflected in the "Amazing Aerial Photos" gallery, in which just one man—Dominic Arena, a member of her security detail—receives mention. Piloting his own hobby drone—a DJI Phantom flying camera—Arena comes to assume dronelike qualities himself. In his study of drone form, Nathan Hensley points out that the replacement of soldiers on the battlefield by drones in the sky has initiated a complex restructuring of masculine military identity.⁶ Simply put, drones, in their capacity as mechanical proxies, have eroded access to "direct agency." The drone's capacity to unman its pilot carries over into the domestic sphere too. In Stewart's captions, the human controller's agency is remarkably unstable; direct action slides away from the man at the controls and toward the drone that he flies. The first caption of the photo series features Arena as its subject: "Dominic was up bright and early! Standing near the horse stables, he flew his drone high enough to take this breathtaking sunrise featuring the Cross River Reservoir." In later captions, though, the drone assumes the status of subject: "The model drone that Dominic purchased can fly to an altitude of almost 900 feet, giving photographers a vantage they could only get by renting a helicopter in the past." Although we know

Dominic mans the drone on this morning flight, he is shuffled out of the role of protagonist in the photo gallery's plot.

When Arena does appear in one of the photographs, the setting overwhelms his figure, and yet the text that accompanies the image makes a point of mentioning his presence: "It is my horse stable. My Chow Chow, Ghenghis Khan, loves to play in the small paddock on the upper right, which is sectioned off from the large horse paddock by an electric fence. If you look closely, you can see Dominic near the gate in the boxwood allee [sic]." Without this prompting, Arena is easily overlooked. He seems to gaze skyward, perhaps looking back at the drone, though the quality of the photo makes it hard to say for certain. The poor resolution obscures smaller details, so Arena appears as one of two figures represented by a smattering of pixels flecking the otherwise pristine gravel drive leading to the stable. The grainy figures bring the aesthetics of combat drone optics into the same frame as domestic aerial photography. Philosopher Grégoire Chamayou points out that due to limitations in the militarized drone's technological capacities, "the resolution, although detailed enough to allow the operator to aim, is not good enough to distinguish faces. All that the operators can see are little figures blurred into facelessness" (117). He calls this effect the drone's "figurative reduction of the enemy" (119). In this image from "Amazing Aerial Photos," militarized and domestic ways of seeing converge. The photograph's caption guides us to seek out Arena's body on the landscape in much the same way Allan Sekula describes looking at World War I reconnaissance photographs in which "the human figure has to be searched out, dragged out, of the image" (32). The hobby drone's image thus encodes the violence of the War on Terror's militarized ways of seeing in Stewart's benign domestic vision of meticulous housekeeping on a grand scale.

Despite the vast dimensions of Stewart's domestic sphere, the drone is ultimately reconciled to conventional homemaking pursuits. In her concluding remarks on the benefits of drones she muses that "[a]n aerial shot of the vegetable garden looked very much like my Peter Rabbit marzipan embellished Easter cake, which was designed without the help of a drone." Here, Stewart experiences a moment of domestic *déjà vu*. This scene of recognition—the discovery of a familiar holiday cake in a topographical image captured by a UAS—conceives of aerial photography as an iteration of cake decoration. The cake and the photograph captured by drone are linked in Stewart's domain through their shared functionality as domestic visual technologies used to structure the homemaker's perception of her garden. Touting this particular application of advanced aerial technology, Stewart finally and firmly domesticates the drone.

"Here's Looking at You": American Gardens and Imperial Violence

As the title of Steven Klein's "Here's Looking at You" suggests, the series of seven photographs published in the August 2015 issue of *Vogue* foregrounds the matter of photographic surveillance in the domestic sphere. Although the photographs are not taken by drone, several of them feature drones or represent a drone's-eye view of the domestic life of a stylish young mother and her child, portrayed by model Arizona Muse and her son Nikko. Apart from the opening image of Muse standing at the front gate, the rest of the shots are set in the home's carefully manicured garden, a *jardin à la française* in the style popularized by Le Nôtre's work at Versailles. The garden's bold show of order over the natural world is consistent with an imperialist landscape. The clipped boxwood compartments of the French parterre garden share the backyard alongside the modern amenities of the aquamarine swimming pool and upscale outdoor furnishings. But the setting also gestures to a more recent past of the postwar suburbs, a consumer's paradise updated for the technophilic family of the twenty-first century. Through acquisition of the latest gadgetry—a smartphone affixed to a selfie stick, a child-sized Mercedes Benz, a virtual reality headset, and the consumer UAS—the backyard becomes the site of domestic leisure.

In a few of the photographs the UAS functions as one of Stewart's "useful tools," meant to make both women's work and the work of being a woman easier. Just as Stewart deploys the drone to ease the burden of garden management, the *Vogue* shoot similarly suggests that technology developed for state violence abroad may simplify a woman's day-to-day domestic routine. Offered here as an instrument of personal picture-making, the drone hovers overhead, capturing self-portraits of the young mother as she lays in her garden, the remote control cradled in her hand. Such images encourage us to understand the hobbyist drone as a more opulent iteration of the now ubiquitous selfie stick, a contraption Muse expertly wields earlier in the spread. Noting her "throwback glasses and retro geometric print," the caption of one photograph, titled "Selfie Sufficient," recalls the staid fifties housewife of the past in order to contrast her with the economically and erotically self-sufficient homemaker of the present (138). If the experience of being monitored and assessed constantly for everything from one's parenting ability to one's appearance is a familiar one for women today, then these photos seem to suggest that, equipped with consumer technology, a woman can control how she is seen and even scandalously derive pleasure from her image in the process.

Yet the drone's work in the domestic imagination also exposes the supposedly safe space of the home as one prone to precarity. The series of photographs harbors a darker narrative of vision from above, one in which state and patriarchal power operate to undermine the woman's sense of independence. Following Rosalind Gill's account of a postfeminist sensibility, the indulgent scenes of self-surveillance can be understood as visions of a newly militarized postfeminism in which the disciplinary regime of the drone's gaze is fully internalized by the woman who takes the pictures.⁷ Despite the fact that only Muse and her son appear in the photos, this vision of single motherhood also seems haunted by the dominant familial structure of postwar America: the nuclear family. Rather than celebrate single parenting, "Here's Looking at You" resuscitates a conservative vision of heteronormative kinship, one that implies this domestic scene is missing its man of the house. Patriarchy finds its place here through small domestic details like a conspicuously unattended barbecue. In other moments it manifests through point of view: for example, in one image, mother and son are surveilled from above as they stride down a gravel walk flanked by low hedging. The lower right corner of the scene is unevenly framed by a windowsill to reveal that whoever inhabits this perspective is situated inside the family home. By placing the image alongside aerial drone shots, "Here's Looking at You" mines the sinister implications of its title: an anonymous, omniscient perspective is available to man and drone alike. And just as we don't see who watches Muse and her son from the upstairs window, we don't see who operates the many hovering drones in these pages either. The controls of the unmanned vehicles that surround the young mother must be manned by someone, and yet, just as Foucault reminds us in his critique of institutional methodologies of surveillance, the efficacy of the apparatus derives from the impossibility of knowing with certainty who is watching.

Vogue's captions cheerily insist this state of persistent surveillance trained on the young mother at home is the effect of the ubiquity of social media rather than heightened national security. While the editorial's explicit narrative conveys the pervasiveness of new media, an analysis of the wordplay in these captions uncovers the imperialist discourse of drone warfare. "A loose pant under a graphic top is a *striking* ensemble from any angle," asserts one (134; emphasis added), while another reads, "a patterned trouser-and-dress mix guarantees a snap worth *buzzing* about" (136; emphasis added). Although I hesitate to call them puns, these ill-advised synonyms inflect women's clothing with the language of signature killings and the distinctive sound of state surveillance issued by the military drone without speaking these atrocities by name.⁸ Another caption assumes

the tone of a domestic manual, quipping that the prevalence of visual surveillance can be countered by diligent garden management: "when there's an aperture on every tablet, a sky-high hedge—and a strong graphic wardrobe in contrasting tones—is all that stands between you and viral infamy" (137). While hedges and gates have traditionally served as a standard means by which suburban gardeners partition off private space, the drone's aerial mobility renders such terrestrial demarcations inconsequential. The incongruity of the captions and the images of drones ranging freely over the home highlights that the conventional understanding of the domestic space as a safe space in the era of drone warfare is insufficient. If Martha Stewart has domesticated the militarized gaze of drone warfare, Klein mingles domestic surveillance practices with imperial ones to inject an element of danger into the domestic scene. In linking the targets of drone-sighting at home to those abroad, however, these photographs make clear that, while the suburban dangers of transgressed borders and online exposure can offer a kind of masochistic pleasure to white women at home, such pleasures are denied to those abroad where danger takes the form of a drone that kills with impunity.

With its roving drones, "Here's Looking at You" intimates that airspace is an extension of the domestic sphere. "The drone counters the terrestrial forms of territorial sovereignty, founded upon the enclosure of land, with the continuity of the air above," writes Chamayou of the military drone's exploitation of airspace (53). In *A Theory of the Drone*, he points out that the practice of continual overhead sighting established by drone surveillance expands the space of power along the vertical axis: "It now becomes a matter not so much of occupying a territory as of controlling it from above by ensuring its mastery of the skies" (53). This "verticalization of power," according to Chamayou, means that "sovereignty is no longer flatly territorial but instead volumetric and three-dimensional" (54). The three-dimensional airspace of drone surveillance emerges in the two-dimensional photographs of "Here's Looking at You." Invisible to our eyes, air is difficult to picture. In fact, as spectators of the visual arts we often ignore its presence; it is merely the transparent medium through which we see. But in the photograph entitled "View Finder," the drones—suspended in air—draw attention to the height and depth of the backyard garden's airspace. While the solitary woman stands at the pool's edge some distance away, two drones occupy the foreground of the scene: one flies slightly below our angle of view while the other, just a blur of black plastic and orange rotors, bleeds over the top left corner of the page. Taken at this height, Klein's photograph gives visual form to the space between earth and sky. It also strives to portray depth on the page's two-dimensional surface:

the extreme close-up of the distorted drone before us establishes physical proximity at the cost of visual definition, while the focused image of the woman and the greenery beyond stake out a sense of distance. These visual markers draw our attention to the seldom acknowledged vertical dimension of domestic space located in the volumes of air hanging above the backyard.

Managing aerial sovereignty over the domestic space of US homes and gardens is not just the stuff of fashion magazine fantasy. Starting in 2013, photojournalist Tomas van Houtryve produced the "Blue Sky Days" project, a series of black-and-white aerial photographs of American domestic life that document what Teju Cole calls "[t]he slippage between the domestic and the threatening aspects of aerial surveillance." In one of Houtryve's images, the residential homes, yards, and streets that surround a park in a middle-class suburban neighborhood are subject to the drone's unrelenting gaze (fig. 1). Located in Montgomery County, Maryland, the park's circular design ominously resembles a bull's-eye, a ready target for hypothetical aerial attacks. But as Houtryve reveals in an accompanying essay, the design is insignificant relative to the legal designation of the air above the park. According to Federal Aviation Administration records obtained by the Electronic Frontier Foundation, both the National Institute of Standards and Technology and the US Navy have requested authorization to operate drones in Montgomery County's airspace, hence the photograph's ominous title, "Authorized Overflight Zone." Around the world, green space is already under the shadow of the drone: as recently as October 2012, Pakistani primary school teacher Rafiq ur Rehman testified before Congress that a US drone strike in North Waziristan killed his mother as she picked okra in her garden (McVeigh). In his photographs, Houtryve casts the drone's shadow over domestic spaces, illustrating how the coming militarization of the air on a global scale will include the space above America's homes and gardens.

The drone's focus on the air above the grassy park in Houtryve's image recalls not only the domestic garden of "Here's Looking at You" but also the long history of militarizing the airspace above foreign vegetation. In Vietnam, for example, the US military sprayed chemical defoliation agents on acres of dense jungle canopies and mangrove forests and then set them on fire with incendiary bombs in an effort to destroy the foliage that provided natural camouflage for insurgents on the ground. Best known for its deployment of the toxin Agent Orange, the US military's herbicidal warfare program—or "Vegetation Control," (Martini 267), as the military's Advanced Research Project Agency called it—aimed for nothing less than the alteration and control of the landscape of Southeast Asia in order to



Figure 1. Tomas van Houtryve, "Authorized Overflight Zone," 2013. Photo credit: Tomas van Houtryve / VII.

"make it easier to locate and attack" guerrilla forces (265). America's defoliation of the Vietnamese landscape is only one example of the impact of US imperialism on the natural environment.⁹ Often referred to as Edens of the Pacific, the tropical islands of the Bikini Atoll were the site of the American military's first public atomic tests in 1946.

While it's virtually impossible today to imagine the confluence of garden islands and nuclear devastation in terms of aesthetic beauty, this hasn't always been the case. The color saturation in Klein's photographs—what one caption calls its "squares of citrine-green and amethyst foliage" (141)—points back to an earlier moment in the history of American visual culture that indexed a vision of the country's manifest destiny secured through a sublime vision of atomic warfare. In the years following World War II, the Eisenhower administration launched "a campaign of re-education concerning the atom bomb" that ignored the terror inflicted on the civilian populations of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and "intentionally emphasized the bomb's positive aspects" instead, effectively aestheticizing the mushroom cloud in popular representations and transforming it "into a modern American version of the sublime" (Nilsen 93). Documentaries and Hollywood films of the period celebrate what Peter Hales has called the "atomic sublime" through intensely vibrant and unnatural colors that emphasized the visual impact of radiation (13). Documentary footage

that captured the extreme coloration of nuclear test explosions in the Pacific "were often shot with the specific purpose of highlighting the spectacular beauty of the events" (Nilsen 101), while the 1958 film *South Pacific* seemed bathed in a lurid polychromatic glow one unnamed critic described as "egg yellow, turtle green—and sometimes phosphorescent fuchsia" (qtd. in Nilsen 100). Despite the nod to Instagram's capacity for color alteration—one exclamatory caption reads, "Filter, caption, post!" (133)—the ambient technicolor light that illuminates "Here's Looking at You" bespeaks an eerie nostalgia for the atomic age.

The stylized backyard featured in "Here's Looking at You" thus encodes the imperialist landscapes of the Bikini Atoll islands, Vietnam, and Waziristan. In these photographs, war has returned home, saturating the domestic space of the American garden. From this analytical perspective, we might liken the spatial collapse of foreign devastation and domestic tranquility into a single image to the political critique of mass media achieved by feminist artist Martha Rosler through her use of photomontage techniques. For the series *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful* (1967–72) and, more recently, *Bringing the War Home: House Beautiful, New Series* (2004), Rosler famously splices together pages of *House Beautiful* with *Life* magazine's images of foreign conflict. The montage eliminates the implied natural division between the devastating effects of US policy abroad and the American home (Mann). As one critic puts it, Rosler's work asks the viewer: "Could you enjoy your car, your TV, your painting in precisely the same way knowing someone died for your enjoyment? This is the central question to those who enjoy the spoils of post-colonial imperialism" (Cottingham).

We might wonder at the woman and child in the set of *Vogue* photographs who seem to enjoy calling a place such as this home. There is no evidence to suggest that they are scrambling to undo the condition they find themselves in. They make no move to brace for or escape from the disasters to come. Both seem, despite the sense of impending catastrophe, to be enjoying and even luxuriating in their toxic backyard paradise. The final image in the spread is one of mother and son reclining on an outdoor lounge before a platter of "oceanic creatures" (143)—mussels, oysters, and lobsters that glow in unnatural hues of red and blue. The neatly dressed boy sits by his mother's side, pacified by his virtual reality headset. The woman of the house has succeeded in making it all look easy. She is a picture of the revitalized imperial subject, at home in a state of perpetual war.

Citizens of Drone States

According to Rosler, "[t]he Federal Aviation Agency has been forced to reveal the locations of 63 active drone launch sites around the U.S. The government hopes to normalize drone use by 2015. By 2020, at least 30,000 drones are projected to be operating here, serving public and private and governmental and corporate concerns." These revelations regarding the Federal Aviation Agency's (FAA) long-range national drone plan occupied one panel of Rosler's recent installation piece "Theater of Drones," a public banner that hung from a 56-foot wall in downtown Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2013. Charlottesville became the first city in the United States to adopt a resolution to regulate the use of drones in its municipal airspace in a preemptive effort to shield its citizens from scenarios including police agencies "utilizing drones outfitted with anti-personnel devices such as tasers and tear gas" and "the government using data recorded via police spy drones in criminal prosecutions" ("On the Front"). Given the object of her critique, Rosler's decision to produce a site-specific installation rather than a mass-media photomontage seems particularly apt. Standing before the work of art requires the viewer to also stand with the contested airspace looming directly overhead.

Rosler's shift away from mass-media photography to critique the FAA's plans to integrate public, civil, and corporate UAS into the skies above the territorial United States invites viewers to consider the medium's limitations as a tool of political critique in the age of drone warfare. The aerial home and garden photography that circulates in mass-media women's publications has a relatively uncritical relationship with the prospect of drone ubiquity. On *The Martha Blog* and in the pages of *Vogue*, the domestic drone is envisioned as a tool for the already privileged, an imaging system that reaffirms consumer choices and revises the scale on which one might control one's image and one's home. To make sense of this newfound access to an aerial point of view, the experience is equated with seeing like a sovereign, aligning the distant and more recent imperial pasts with the empire of the home. Despite their functional differences from the militarized variety, then, the hobbyist drone remains troublingly circumscribed as an instrument of the sovereign will in these popular media depictions.¹⁰

With their unselfconscious enjoyment of drones as domestic tools, Martha Stewart and the well-heeled woman depicted in the *Vogue* fashion spread embody their status as "citizens of drone states"—a status Paul Saint-Amour has used to describe those whose states deploy weaponized drones abroad. As citizens of a drone state we tacitly accept that the burden of living daily under drones falls disproportionately on those who live outside the territorial borders

of the United States. And, as Saint-Amour points out, drones impact the people who live under them even when no aerial bombardment occurs. One 2012 study found that among Pakistanis living in over-flight zones, the psychological burdens of the drone's daily presence included "sleeplessness, bad dreams, loss of appetite, fainting, amplified startle reactions, outbursts of anger and emotional breakdowns" (Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knucky, qtd. in Saint-Amour). The domestic figures depicted in women's media thus also lay claim to the privilege of experiencing a drone hovering above their homes and bodies as a pleasure. It is precisely this position of privilege that allowed Stewart to write the following sentence in *Time* magazine about her first encounter with a drone, in prose markedly free from either dread or terror: "In near silence, the drone rose, hovered, and dove, silently and surreptitiously photographing us and the landscape around us."

Notes

1. Feminist scholars point out that Bush relies on a static vision of Afghan culture to make sense of women's oppression in the region. Abu-Lughod argues that relying on a cultural explanation ignores "the history of the development of repressive regimes in the region and the U.S. role in this history" (784). This perception of Afghan culture's treatment of women allows Bush to mobilize the figure of an Afghan woman in need of liberation as a justification for US intervention.
2. In 2016, a drone home security system promising to detect motion and patrol private property became available for preorder (Dormehl).
3. "Amazing Aerial Photos of My Farm" can be found at <http://www.themarthablog.com/2014/07/aerial-photos-of-my-farm.html>. "Here's Looking at You" can be viewed at <http://www.artpartner.com/artists/image/steven-klein/vogue-us-here-s-looking-at-you-august-2015/>. All mentions of *Vogue* in this essay refer to the US edition.
4. In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Rancière defines the "distribution of the sensible" as "the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the parts and positions within it" (12). While the American domestic sphere and foreign nations now have drone overflights in common, this essay will point to the delimitations that exist within this shared experience.
5. Stewart's newest venture is *Martha and Snoop's Potluck Dinner Party*, a celebrity cooking show that debuted on VH1 in 2016 and has been renewed for a second season (Nededog).

6. Hensley attributes this reordering of agency to two aspects of drone warfare. First, militarized drones introduce the asymmetry of non-reciprocal violence into the theater of war. He cites an Air Force pamphlet that describes this condition as "the 'freedom *from* attack' combined with the 'freedom *to* attack.'" Second, drone action is dispersed across geographies and human-machine complexes. Based on visual information, drone pilots might initiate a strike in Afghanistan from an Air Force base in Nevada. In light of this redistribution of military activity, Hensley points out that "heroic action must now be recast to include sitting at a desk and pushing buttons."
7. See Gill 151-53.
8. In Zubair Rehman's 29 October 2013 testimony before Congress regarding a 2012 civilian drone strike, he confirms that the circling machines are known for their distinctive buzzing sound, "a methodical *zung, zung, zung*, he says": "'It's something that even a 2-year-old would know,' he said in Pashto, speaking to Al Jazeera through a translator. 'We hear the noise 24 hours a day'" (Khan).
9. For the coupling of national security with environmental concerns more broadly, see Marzec.
10. Hensley relates the US military's operation of drones to the Foucauldian figure of the sovereign in this way: "If we take seriously the fact that empire is best understood not as a culture or as a discourse but as the monopoly on putatively legitimate violence—the stretching of the state's power over life and death past the boundaries of its 'own' populace—then the power of sovereign decision crystallized in globally operated, remote assassination machines is the very essence of empire: its telos, or end."

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