

Sensing War at the Interface



This talk sets out the motivating questions and initial analytic framing of my research in progress on the problem of ‘situational awareness’ within contemporary forms of (particularly U.S.) warfare. My focus is on the interfaces that configure war fighters to achieve ‘recognition’ of relevant subjects and objects, including the discriminations of us and them that are prerequisites for defensible killing. I’m interested more specifically in the logics and material practices of remotely-controlled weapon systems (particularly armed drones and weaponized robots), and military training simulations. These configurations reveal the

complex relations of mediation and embodiment, distance and proximity, vulnerability and impunity that comprise contemporary warfare, as the virtual is infused with real figurations with their own material effects, and the real environments of war fighting are increasingly virtual. The primary empirical basis for this research is the archive of Flatworld, an immersive training environment developed between 2001 and 2008 as the flagship project of the University of Southern California's Institute for Creative Technologies. I read the project through a frame inspired by Judith Butler's theoretical analysis of figuration's generative agencies, to try to articulate further the training simulation's discursive and material effects.

Thursday, November 6 | 3:00 pm

University Club, Ballroom B

Reception to follow

Lucy Suchman

Lucy Suchman is Professor of Anthropology of Science and Technology in the Department of Sociology at Lancaster University, and Co-Director of Lancaster's Centre for Science Studies. Before taking up her present post she was a Principal Scientist at Xerox's Palo Alto Research Center, where she spent twenty years as a researcher. Her research includes ethnographic studies of everyday practices of technology design and use, and critical engagement with projects in the design of humanlike machines, informed by feminist science and technology studies. She is the author of *Human-Machine Reconfigurations* (2007) and *Plans and Situated Actions: The Problem of Human-Machine Communication* (1984), both published by Cambridge University Press. In 2002 she received the Benjamin Franklin Medal in Computer and Cognitive Sciences, in 2010 the ACM Special Interest Group for Computer-Human Interaction (SIGCHI) Lifetime Research Award, and in 2014 the J.D. Bernal Prize for Distinguished Contribution to the Field from the Society for Social Studies of Science (4S). Her current research extends her longstanding critical engagement with the field of human-computer interaction to contemporary warfighting, including the figurations that inform immersive simulations, and problems of ‘situational awareness’ in remotely-controlled weapon systems.