

**AS ABOVE, SO BELOW:
TRIANGULATING DRONE CULTURE**

Rob Coley and Dean Lockwood

SITE A. *The first point on what will be a triangular diagram: fifteen miles north of the city of Lincoln, UK, lies the Kirton in Lindsey airfield, disposed of by the Royal Air Force in 2013 and now home to a gliding club. RAF Kirton was used by 33 Squadron during the First World War and, as a Fighter Command Station, it was a base for Defiant and Spitfire Squadrons during the Second World War until it was assigned to the United States Air Force in 1942. After the war, the base was used by RAF Flying Training Command. One of the young men undergoing basic training there in 1954, ostensibly with a view to becoming a pilot of a nuclear V bomber, was James Graham Ballard, who was eventually to become a writer associated first and foremost with New Wave science fiction. Of what was, by his own account, a highly enjoyable time weapons training, square-bashing, learning navigation skills and officer's etiquette, Ballard wrote in his fictionalized autobiography that 'the real elements of my life were coming together. I was preparing myself, in the most practical way, for the third world war' (Ballard, 2008: 106). Flight was a major force in the formation of Ballard's imagination. For him, flight typically figured as escape; it represented 'a means of transcending one's own particular time and space and moving to a radically different realm' (Ballard, 2012a: 242). Ballard appears to have fully subscribed to the future, to the sense, in the years immediately after the war, of all things accelerating, of time racing, the rule of speed. However, by the end of the fifties, in the aftermath of the explosion of hydrogen bombs, 'the future somehow lost its hold. I think it died'. Just as Ballard prepared for take-off, the mission, so to speak, was aborted. What remained was a retreat from the future into the fabulation of the present, a cataclysmic present cast 'in the dying twilight of tomorrow' (Ballard, 2012b: 25).*

Communicating Drone Culture

This issue of *Culture Machine* on Drone Culture is part of a project initiated in response to inescapably military circumstances. As editors of this issue we write from Lincolnshire UK, a flat landscape that played host to hundreds of Lancaster bomber aircraft during the Second World War and has been branded 'bomber county' ever since. Today, the culture of the county is wholly entangled with bombing, a relation flaunted in everything from the local Bomber County ale to the Barnes Wallis Academy, a school named after the inventor of the bouncing bomb. Most oppressively, a commemorative spike, newly erected on a hill overlooking the city of Lincoln, stands at a height of 102ft, the wingspan of a Lancaster bomber (BBC News, 2015). The county is, though, increasingly associated with drones or, in military parlance, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, machines that since 2013 have been remotely piloted from a base just outside Lincoln. The drone, as Benjamin Noys suggests in his contribution to this issue, is 'the signature device of... contemporary power' and, as a consequence, bomber county is now also a site of symbolic protest (Fig. 1).

The terms of popular debate concerning the drone and drone power have been quickly established. Debate typically centres around a set of issues which include: the diffusion of the conventional battlefield and the muddying of 'territory'; the supposed precision of surgical strikes or, as the US military has it, 'putting warheads on foreheads' (Chamayou, 2015: 141); and the system of seeing and killing from thousands of miles away, with the accompanying debates concerning, on one hand, the invulnerability of drone operators (Benjamin, 2012) and, on the other, the various psychological disorders suffered by these same operators (Power, 2013). There are now familiar, officially sanctioned images to accompany such issues, too: images of the drone pilot's control room with its multiple screens, and images of the Predator drone aircraft soaring above unfamiliar terrain. These images serve to illustrate the fact that such debates have a tendency to focus either on the political subject (the civilian, the soldier, the terrorist), or on the technical object (the drone, or Unmanned Aerial Vehicle). What then of drone *culture*? What of the fundamental weirdness of the drone that can be felt beyond its military operations and that refuses reduction to a set of standardized discourses? This edition of *Culture Machine* has been convened in order to confront what is missing from such debates, namely 'the bit in the middle, the media between object and subject' (Wark, 2015: 122). It is, we contend, vital to address this *middleness*

precisely because it is where drone culture, in all its weirdness, is situated. For the purposes of this introduction, the circumstances local to Lincolnshire make us well placed to offer a rabbit hole into this labyrinth of myth and fantasy.



Fig.1 'Ground the Drones' protest, Waddington, Lincolnshire, 27th April 2013. (Image by Rob Coley and Adam O'Meara)

So what is it that is so weird about the drone? It is of no small significance that the issues briefly outlined above, upon which popular debate is focused, are activities, expressions, and symptoms of a form of power that – to most of us, at least – remains largely invisible, for political as much as technical reasons. In other words, all the discussion, argument and deliberation derive from a certain paradox central to drone culture: the drone is redacted, hidden in

plain sight, present but opaque. To call upon the idea of 'excommunication' explored collectively by Alexander Galloway, Eugene Thacker and McKenzie Wark (2014), we might say that the apparent invulnerability of the drone conceals an unforeseen vulnerability: it communicates more than it should. Images of this phenomenon, entangled in a rhetoric of 'precision', in fact produce contagious collateral, inadvertently communicating the invisibility of what takes place behind and beyond them. The drone combines banality and mystique; as it withdraws, it magnetizes us to its hiddenness. It fascinates. Yet it is difficult to apprehend. There is, from the beginning, an aura of the hermetic about the drone. We are dealing with secret transmissions, recondite knowledge. The middle-ness or mediality of the drone that we have identified is inseparable from the question of the metaphysics of the drone, even the mysticism of the drone.

Benjamin Noys's contribution to this issue discusses the drone in the light of a line of enquiry implicit in Paul Virilio's work on the military and technology. In Virilio's essay, *Speed and Politics*, we find what Deleuze and Guattari would call a 'conceptual persona' in the figure of the warrior-monk. Virilio claims that monasticism was a 'military invention' (2006: 90). Every soldier, he says, is a 'perverted priest' (91). But the kind of monk that particularly interests Virilio is not the monk who cloisters himself away in a place of silent devotion: it is the *gyrovague* (80). The *gyrovague* was an early medieval phenomenon – the wandering monk, a vagabond who moves aimlessly from place to place, begging food and lodgings where he may, often reviled (as by St. Benedict, for example) as a parasite and confidence trickster, a mocker of discipline. But, for Virilio, the *gyrovague* is a crucial object lesson for military power. Drawing inspiration from this figure, the military revives the virtues of the ancient concept of metempsychosis, the soul's migration from body to body as it moves between successive cycles of existence (Noys, 2014: 42). Here is conceived a distinction between the weak soul, the soul fixed in place, trapped in a particular body, bound to the natural, material world, and the powerful soul, inspired by the *gyrovague*, which is the soul capable of 'boarding' bodies as it desires as vehicles of convenience (Virilio, 2006: 75-6). (In the original French a pun turns on this, because the word for boarding, as Virilio's translator explains, is *arrondissement*, close to *raisonnement* or 'reasoning' (159), so that the migration of the soul is a power of reason, a rational operation.) The powerful, military soul is a force of deterritorialization, tied to no body and free to occupy and deploy all bodies, whether metabolic or technological. All

bodies become 'empty houses', evacuated of subjects (88). All bodies become 'war machines' (90). In *Plastique Fantastique's* contribution to this issue, they similarly refer to the 'becoming drone' of the body.

This metaphysic has strong resonances with Gnosticism – Noys makes explicit a 'Military Gnosticism' intimated by Virilio (2014: 42-3). Gnosticism was a heretical, Platonist form of early Christianity in which the natural, material world was conceived as the inferior creation of a demiurge, a deity subordinate to God, the Supreme Being. For the gnostic, matter, nature and ecological entanglement is all mess and noise, obstructing access to gnosis (spiritual knowledge). Gnosis, which requires the training and skill of an adept, involves locating the spark of the Pleroma, that is, the divine or the fullness that pre-existed the material world. Humans preserve this spark within themselves in the form of their essential souls (see Davis, 2015: 92-3). But it must be expertly kindled, igniting self-divinization and transcendence, which in Military Gnosticism, as Noys suggests in his contribution to this issue, is translated into a 'projectile philosophy' of the elect, a philosophy of *acceleration*. The Pleroma might be understood as a vectoral phenomenon, a matter of vectors of speed. Re-entering the Pleroma necessitates, to borrow Noys's phrase, a "pure" acceleration of the soul, an exodus from the burden, the weight and ponderousness of the metabolic vehicle. It is a post-biopolitical logic of boarding and flight which lends the soul greater and greater mobility and speed. Further, in Virilio's later work, the war machine is superseded by the vision machine, conceived in terms of light and sight rather than speed and mobility. At the speed of light, 'sighting' approaches the condition of *inertia* (see Lash, 2002: 58). The drone is, of course, often metaphorized as the 'eye of God' (Chamayou, 2015: 37-8), panoptical, omniscient and omnipresent. To become drone realizes the dream of an ultimate speed at which mobility is surpassed. To become drone is to become light, to achieve illumination. It is pure signal, an inert 'point' or 'terminal', going nowhere because it is everywhere (Lash, 2002: 58).

The warrior-monk's experience of illumination, the dream of the drone, equates to a dream of pure, transparent communication, of the absolute sufficiency of mediation, mediation accelerated unto the point of immediacy. However, it is worth bearing in mind that gnostic illumination is bound up with a certain adeptness. This is a difficult path to follow: 'Self-divinization requires great intellect, mystical insight, and hard labour' (Partridge, 2005: 157). This

labour can be understood as a hermeneutic work, a heretical practice of interpretation which reads the text of nature against the grain to trace correspondences between the demiurge's prison-world and the spiritual world. Like a hacker, the gnostic seeks exploits, buried seeds of the divine, vulnerabilities in nature, by which she might awaken to her divinity. As above, so below. As Christopher Partridge puts it, writing of this connection between gnostic correspondences and cyberspace: 'Hidden codifications (*as above*) are carried in mundane artefacts (*so below*)' (158). The gnostics were obsessed with secrecy, the clandestine. This was a paranoid hermeneutic in that it was driven to look within the most base, unsuspected places. The divine signal is conceived as deeply buried within noise. In the Garden of Eden, where others see in the figure of the serpent the great deceiver, Satan, that is precisely where the gnostic finds Christ (Davis, 2015: 97-8).

Erik Davis' *TechGnosis* is a seminal influence in tracking the continuity of metaphysical and mystical discourses, and particularly Gnosticism, in contemporary information culture (2015: 77-8). Davis makes a distinction between the positions of the father of cybernetics, Norbert Wiener, and the information theorist, Claude Shannon (80-91). In 1940s information theory, information was understood as message or signal emerging in opposition to background noise. Wiener's cybernetics was preoccupied with protecting information from noise, ensuring the maximal conditions for the transmission of meaningful messages through study of how the output of a system feeds back into that system in ways which can be manipulated to encourage the system's self-adjustment. Cybernetics extolled the reflexivity and dynamism of self-organizing systems. For Wiener, the process of self-organization, governed by a hygiene of feedback loops, was tantamount to a spiritual awakening, finding form, pattern and coherence and transcending noise and chaos. However, Shannon's position was somewhat different. For him, information was predicated upon and inseparable from noise. Information was bound up with novelty – without an element of uncertainty, unpredictability, of chaos let us say, there is no true information, only mere repetition. Shannon saw information as entropy. Entropy named the idea that systems inevitably lose form over time as their energy decays. The more a system decays, the more unpredictable and chaotic it becomes – but also the more information it yields. As it happens, Wiener's spiritual hygiene came to dominate the field, yet even he was haunted by that which it repressed: 'Wiener could not ignore the dark gnostic mythos that saturates the postwar world' (91). Here is a paradox: unpredictable

systems, advanced in decay, can be said to be both very noisy and very rich in information. Philosophically speaking, we have here moved beyond dualism. With Deleuze, we might describe the entanglement of signal and noise as one of ‘disjunctive synthesis’, a holding together of differences which is also a holding apart, in serial rather than binary fashion: ‘one can be this or this or this, *and* this *and* this *and* this’ (Colebrook, 2005: 78). Theologically speaking, we might say that noise is both demonic – in its formlessness, it confuses, it deceives – and sacred: it is the matrix of signal and communication.

Interestingly, Shannon’s position foreshadows the idea of ‘excommunication’ in the work of contemporary media theorists Galloway, Thacker and Wark. Here is, they say, a ‘theory of mediation adequate to our present condition’ (2014: 21): a present of techno-fetishism, and a condition that can be characterized in terms of the ‘nonhuman turn’. Traditional media studies, they say, ‘generally understands media along two interconnected axes: *devices* and *determinacy*’ (7); ‘media are, in short, determinative devices, and they are thus evaluated normatively as either good influencers or bad influencers’ (or media are devices shaped socially according to supervening necessities). This occludes a crucial question: ‘what is mediation?’ What particularly concerns these authors, in essaying first steps towards an answer, is to problematize the temptation to begin from successful communication. They are interested in the ‘insufficiency of mediation’, observing that ‘every communication harbors the dim awareness of an excommunication that is prior to it, that conditions it and makes it all the more natural’ (10). Here is a ‘theory of mediation as excommunication’ (11). Thinking mediation as excommunication attempts to meet the brief of a theory of mediation adequate to the non-human turn, and it is in this context that we approach the drone.

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SITE B. *To the second point of our diagram now, to Tealby, 19 miles north east of Lincoln: ‘dear, lovely old-world village, nestling deep ‘mid rustic lure of Lincoln’s time-worn wold’ (Dudley, 1946). To the 2050s, and to events which open Christopher Priest’s recent novel, The Adjacent (2013). The first part of the book details the journeys of a war photographer, Tibor Tarent, initially back to his homeland of England from Anatolia after the death of his wife during conflict there, and then, finding London also devastated by some mysterious attack, north to*

Lincolnshire for debriefing at a farm in Tealby which houses an office of the Intelligence Department of the Islamic Republic of Great Britain. In this Britain of the near future, terrorist attacks are routine, and they exploit the effects of so-called 'adjacency' techniques. Quantum physicists have developed the phenomenon of the Perturbative Adjacent Field, hailed as 'an infallible weapon of passive defence' (Priest, 2013: 162). Through the creation of such a field, physical matter can be 'diverted' to an adjacent dimension, effectively ceasing to exist. At its inception, it was speculated that the technology heralded a future in which such fields would be employed to protect any valued area, object or persons by displacing any physical threat into another realm. It would effectively end war. It is, however, a Pandora's Box. Rendered portable, adjacency was rapidly put to aggressive use. Operated from above, dropped, fired or thrown towards the desired target, the device creates a virtual tetrahedron with a triangular base. Anything within the triangle vanishes. It seems that the common use of adjacency has thrown everything into an in-between state, instituting an overall hauntological condition in which reality is riven with absences or switches.

The novel shuttles us off to other periods, other dimensions or realities, more or less similar to Tarent's present. In each, there are peculiar resonances between people, alternate Tarents, alternate romantic partners, and resonances between encounters and accidents, the forks in the path that mark any timeline. Adjacency, once invented, throws everything between, into the indeterminate middle. Characters in the book are always in motion, travelling, and, specifically, we seem ceaselessly to be moving between wars as one section of the book gives way to the next. One part takes us near the trenches in France in 1916, where a stage magician, Tommy Trent, has been drafted in to employ his expertise in rendering allied aircraft invisible to the enemy. His suggestion is to create a triangle of planes in which two of the planes effect 'an adjacent distraction' (Priest, 2013: 102) which enables the third to surreptitiously photograph the battlefield below. Later, we are spirited back to Tealby, only now it is RAF Tealby Moor, during World War Two, home of the Spitfire XI (used mainly for photo-reconnaissance missions). Here in Tealby, Kirton and their quantum environs we have a confluence of magic, mediation, flight and warfare. We have weird events and ensuing spatio-temporal ramifications. We are making a triangle, our own Perturbative Adjacent Field, and soon we will arrive at our third point.

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Fabulating Drone Culture

If the officially sanctioned images we mentioned at the beginning of this introduction simply underline the invisibility of what takes place behind and beyond them – if they are essentially failures – then perhaps we can find different kinds of failure in different cultural expressions of the drone. Perhaps we can find images that are less interesting for their attempts to represent a hidden object and more interesting for the extent to which they draw attention to hiddenness *in itself*. Noys points out that the dream of the drone is impossible. Drone metaphysics needs failure, it needs the noise of materiality, of ecology, ‘as the site to subject to constant transformation’. For Noys, critiques of the drone typically fall back into the dualism of either the material or the transcendent. Instead, we must ‘trace and displace’ the paradoxical space of the drone. This space is not to be understood as one in which something is hidden, but rather as a space of hiding as such, which is to say, as a medial space, an excommunicative space.

Here, let us dwell a moment upon Thacker’s contribution to this theory of mediation, specifically his notion of ‘dark media’. Where usually we think of mediation as existing ‘between two points within a single, shared consensual reality’ (Thacker, 2014: 131), he proposes a thought of mediation between two realities, two different ontological modes, wherein an unknown reality is brought to human knowledge (or rather frustrates the will to know). Thacker, we might say, *theologizes* media theory. We tend to conceive media in terms of messages received and interpreted – angels come to us and we engage in an angelic conversation. But demons intervene in this ethereal zone and disrupt this union, hacking the conversation and introducing babble and discord. Dark media at their darkest, most demon-ridden, which Thacker calls ‘weird media’, are a black illumination, a redaction, the message of mediation’s impossibility. What they communicate is that there is an uncrossable gulf between ontological modes. Weird media disconnect. They are opaque, mute. Nothing crosses over, nothing that we can grasp or know, nothing that we can bank. We lose ourselves, become possessed, become ourselves weird media. However, it is in this possession, in the vague impression or shadow left by anomalous, irruptive events, narratives or images, that we confront what lies within and beyond the paradox. It is here that any attempt to map the middleness of a phenomenon that is simultaneously invisible and utterly visible must take place.

This was the point of departure for a day long colloquium at the University of Lincoln, organized last year in the hope that such collaboration might afford brief and necessarily peripheral glimpses of unfamiliar realities.¹ Much of the event concerned faint afterimages of the drone's weirdness, the backwash of a certain drone zeitgeist. Amidst somewhat predictable narratives concerning sports pitch invasions (Temperton, 2015) and near disasters (Pigott, 2014), these more speculative images can be found in pop videos, marketing campaigns and political advertisements. They are generated in the fever dreams of entrepreneurs and come with brand names like 'PrimeAir', as in Jeff Bezos's latest vision for Amazon, or 'Project Wing', as Google have named their rival plans. In these commercial ventures, the lifeworlds of hobbyist and maker cultures intersect with military technologies, something that Maximilian Jablonowski explores in his ethnographic contribution to this edition of *Culture Machine* on Drone Culture. He detects in the drone something singular and multiple, a 'fractionally coherent object' in John Law's terms, meaning that there are many drone cultures, and many drone stories to tell.

Other images intensify and accelerate this zeitgeist, such as the video for the song *Double Bubble Trouble* by M.I.A. (2014). In a frenetic Tumblr inspired mashup of 3D printed weapons, anti-face-recognition veils, slogans like 'YES WE SCAN' and '1984 is now', the video includes a loosely choreographed sequence in which fluorescent peace-drones circle a group of dancers in a tower block courtyard (Fig. 2), and brief flashes of a 'Drone Survival Guide' (Pater, n.d.). Here, the drone is not simply a technical object; it is an expression of the struggle for control over media systems and relations. Anthony McCosker's essay in this issue focuses on such relationality. Employing a form of radical empiricism, McCosker maps an unstable and unclear culture of wireless networks, distributed modes of visibility and mediated perception, rendered in terms of 'a shifting camera consciousness'. For him, any attempt to theorize drone culture requires close attention to the perceptual experience of life within human-nonhuman assemblages. Ramon Bloomberg's article also offers a diagrammatic survey of the drone 'as a political and historical assemblage, rather than a discrete device.' He brings the remotely piloted vehicle into an encounter with its various discursive formations, presented in a constellation of literature, Western musical tradition, and terminological politics. In Bloomberg's account, the drone emerges as a technique that marks out and organizes social life, perhaps even the future. It is in this sense that the video for *Double Bubble Trouble* does more than just

amass a set of internet memes and viral phenomena – it diagnoses a weird future immanent to the present and exposes what is at stake. Interspersed between the articles that make up this edition, we include some short speculative provocations that seek to do something similar, together with some perspectives on drone culture that de-westernize such diagnoses.²



Fig.2 *Double Bubble Trouble* (2014), M.I.A. & The Partysquad
(fair use)

Questions concerning how trajectories of the future might be imagined, manipulated or accelerated provide the focus for several contributors. Cormac Deane conceives drone culture as the manifestation of a ‘techno-aesthetic’ form of political power, one that preemptively instils a state of alert, terror and crisis, instantiated in the highly mediated space of the control room itself. By excavating the material history of the control room, as depicted in numerous cinematic examples, he demonstrates the fundamental inseparability of these fictional and actual spaces, and traces how the former accelerates the present reality of the latter.³ Crucially, Deane identifies the political crisis produced by transformative technological acceleration, a crisis in which newly complex modes of power neutralize established notions of resistance. As Noys argues, the search for alternatives can be dangerous. Alternate modes of resistance, especially those that seek to utilize the ostensibly radical potentials of frictionless excess freed up by such transformation, in fact remain trapped in the ambit of drone metaphysics. In his account, negative thinking acts as rational corrective to the libidinal appeal of accelerationism, to the perils of aesthetically inhabiting the object of critique. Yet other contributors argue that rationality does

little to confront the real paradox of drone culture. They begin from the position that any genuine encounter with the drone must creatively challenge what Simon O'Sullivan (2014b) calls a 'myth-system', in which contemporary power mobilizes and exploits the potential of fiction in various ways – Trevor Paglen's *Symbology* project (2008) testifies to such strategies.

The role and efficacy of fiction does not go unnoticed by those seeking to delineate drone culture. In his recent book for the Object Lessons series, Adam Rothstein (2015: 113-16) briefly surveys what he calls 'drone fiction', his examples of which include Teju Cole's Twitter-based *détournement* of the opening lines of literary classics, and James Bridle's revelation that an authoritative and frequently circulated image of the Reaper drone is in fact computer rendered. Fiction also plays a key role in Noys's essay, taking as his starting point an analysis of the literary components of drone discourse. Many of the contributions that make up this edition of *Culture Machine* not only include some reflection on Noys's text but also draw on their own fictional examples. Mike Neary, for instance, responds to Noys's call to rehabilitate negative thinking, arguing that it is only possible to confront the violence of the military drone by challenging, with forms of 'collective negative agency', the system of capitalist work that supports it. Neary outlines powerfully how the drone is the latest instantiation of capitalist state violence, the effects of which can be seen and felt in processes of academic labour, wherein the marketization of education in general, and the removal of funding from the arts, humanities and social sciences in particular, 'amounts to... a war against critique and negative thinking'. Taking the practical example of the Social Science Centre, a Lincoln based cooperative that organizes free higher education, Neary argues that negative agency can be rendered in terms of withdrawal and forms of invisibility, 'or subversion in full view' – a position he ultimately explores by turning to the weird fiction of China Miéville.

Elsewhere in the issue fiction serves a more occultural purpose. In their contribution, Dan Mellamphy and Nandita Biswas Mellamphy draw on the writings of nineteenth century occultist Alexandre Saint-Yves d'Alveydre and his myth of Agartha, a secreted subterranean system of power that controls all knowledge and governs all that is above. In drone culture, they argue, this kind of 'planetary regulation' is subject to a weird inversion: having taken on algorithmic form an Agartha now looms above rather than below. Dane Sutherland explores similar territory in his essay, referring to a monstrously protean regime of computationally mediated power,

again calling on Miéville – and particularly the novelist’s reference to a ‘tentacular novum’ – to emphasize the weirdness of drone culture. For Sutherland, such power does not function outside of human labour and human subjectivity but, as the manifestation of a myth-system, extends into and directly exploits human thought, perception and communication. Drone culture, as theorized in these contributions, has radical consequences for the human, above and beyond anthropocentric perspectives on planetary crisis. Yet, for Sutherland at least, the drone can also be a performative stratagem directed against such systems.



Fig.3 *Myth-Drone* performance by Plastique Fantastique, As Above, So Below, University of Lincoln, 24th May, 2014 (Image by Andrew West)

It was with such a performance that Plastique Fantastique, O’Sullivan’s artistic collaboration with David Burrows and others, brought the Lincoln colloquium to a close (Fig. 3). Their *Myth-Drone* was an audiovisual incantation described that evening as a ‘counter-drone system’, a communication of and with the drone in its own terms. For O’Sullivan, modes of critique, including critical art and media practice, which simply engage with ‘the world *as-it-is*’, with the actually existing world, renounce the real power of critique. As he puts it elsewhere, ‘the more engaged it is, the more it must mirror, however critically (or negatively), its object’ (O’Sullivan, 2014a: 2). At best, this becomes an act of archiving – gathering together, naming, conceptualizing, but never really transforming. By contrast, Plastique Fantastique experiment with a form of ‘other-worldly’ practice, by which they do not advocate an escape or

withdrawal from the world, but rather the probing of the world-as-it-is for modes of communication that operate beyond that world's dominant codes. In the visual essay they contribute to this issue, the group reflexively probe the basic codes of drone culture – its 'cut-up' methods of information gathering, deciphering and pattern analysis. Beyond drone fiction, this is an act of drone fictioning, an act that might be said to function in the mode of what Deleuze (1995: 174), after Bergson, called 'fabulation'.

In Bergsonian terms, a myth-system is that which mediates and programmes habitual patterns, installing itself into the bodily processes of perception and action. It is a system through which future activity is fictioned forth along 'geometric' trajectories (Deleuze, 1995: 133). But for Deleuze, the vectors of such images and narratives can be falsified by means of a radical fictioning. It is a practice that locates itself in the middle space between perception and action, a space of friction from where it is possible to recover the heterogeneity of the negative, to exceed myths of the near future and recuperate the unseen, the unknowable, the impossible. Such techniques, as O'Sullivan makes clear, 'will not be easy to understand', will most likely frustrate or infuriate, rather than adhering to our expectations of rational, efficient communication. Thacker similarly points to the importance of a kind of critical practice that does not simply aim to 'help a person understand something', a mode that, by any conventional academic criteria, operates in an 'unhelpful' register (2013: 386). Yet as O'Sullivan emphasizes, fabulatory techniques are powerful because they can generate a *feeling* of something different to the world as-it-is, beyond human rationality. What is communicated by this mode of frictive fictioning 'is a message not to you but to something within you' (O'Sullivan, 2014a: 9). In other words, *Plastique Fantastique* formulate different affective criteria by which critical communication and understanding can take place. Their practice accelerates the myth-making strategies of power so as to transform and organize its own world, just as it feels the contours of the world from which it sets out. It is in these terms that this issue of *Culture Machine* sets out to fabulate drone culture as much as analyse or identify it.

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SITE C. 4 miles south of Lincoln, RAF Waddington is the third angle comprising a space within which we, in Lincoln, might be 'diverted' into

another realm. In July of this year, British Prime Minister David Cameron gave assurances that, even in a time of austerity, the military budget for expanding the RAF's provision of armed Reaper drones would be protected (Wintour, 2015). Less than three years earlier, the remote piloting of British UAVs was conducted exclusively at Creech Airforce base in the Nevada desert, close to Las Vegas. Now, though, 13 Squadron, newly reformed as the Remotely Piloted Aircraft Squadron, operate surveillance and combat missions from RAF Waddington. Waddington has been a bomber base since 1937, but the history of 13 Squadron stretches back further, to the First World War when its activities epitomized the concurrent development of air and informational power. Here, in this final act of fictioning, we turn to Tom McCarthy's novel *C* (2010), in which the early development of remote wireless power is mapped in relation to its future anterior, to a vectoral power of networked communication that transforms spatio-temporal conditions. *C*, a kind of postmodern coming-of-age, concerns Serge Carrefax, whose early 20th century experiences traverse a haunted ether of radio transmissions, intersect abstract trajectories of aerial flight paths, and inhabit the speculative promise of an Imperial Wireless Network. McKenzie Wark similarly pinpoints the emergence of vectoral power to the development of the telegraph, a technology that is distinctive because it ushers in 'a regime of communication where information can travel faster than people or things', a scenario that transforms the relation of information 'to those other movements and to space itself... No longer a space of places, we move on to a space of flows' (Wark, 2012: 34). The emergence of this 'third nature', as he calls it, marks the enclosure of both first nature and the second nature of built forms – the geography of our towns, cities and villages – by a media and communications layer. As above, so below.

This is a hermetic maxim, often associated with the symbol of the magician, with a figure who inhabits a space beyond the dualism of actual and virtual, commanding instead a space in which the world's multiple processes are mediated into a 'singular rhythm', a 'continuous feed' (Wark, 2012: 33), a space 'where every trajectory... is potentially connected to every other trajectory' (35). In McCarthy's novel, a population newly attuned to such a space exhibits occult belief in the power of wireless technology to commune with the dead, while imperial powers strive to establish globe-spanning networks of telecommunication to allow remote control of its dominions. And indeed, 'action at a distance', a common definition of magic, as in Aleister Crowley's occultism, is also how Wark chooses to define a crucial property of third nature's informational vectors, along with 'telesthesia', or perception at a distance. More significantly, at the outbreak of the First World War and

under the influence of his godfather, a government cryptographer, Serge becomes an observer in the Royal Air Corps. We might imagine him assigned to 13 Squadron, whose motto is *Adjuvamus tuendo*, or 'We assist by watching', and whose focus on tactical reconnaissance was established at this time. In his role as observer, Serge attains Futurist-like synchronicity with 'relational pathways, circuits, frequencies' (51), with the microphysics of vectoral links. Serge acts as relay between the target and the troops firing mortar rounds on the ground, communicating via Morse code from a biplane above the battlefield. 'Everything seemed connected, disparate locations twitch and burst into activity like limbs reacting to impulses sent from elsewhere in the body' (McCarthy, 2010: 141). Serge lives up to his name and seizes upon the new vectors of technological time, entirely preoccupied by an accelerated and accelerating sense of the world's connections, of patterns of life. In this weird media archaeology of the drone a theatre of operations is delineated, a culture in which the human is always already networked, always in communication with something nonhuman, something inaccessible.

Notes

1. 'As Above, So Below', a colloquium on drone culture, took place on 24th May 2014 at the University of Lincoln.
2. These perspectives are intended to support *Culture Machine's* dialogue with critical communities beyond the English-speaking academy. Thanks to Gabriela Méndez Cota for commissioning two of these pieces.
3. Cormac Deane's contribution to this issue is accompanied by a video essay, *A Short History of the Cinematic Control Room, 1971-2015*, available here: <https://youtu.be/hswm-1wkODw>.

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