

MINUTES OF THE SOCIETY FOR ONTOFABULATORY RESEARCH

Report from the Committee for Aeronautical Psychogeography¹

Context

It is now almost a year since the RAF's Remotely Piloted Aircraft Squadron first began operating a fleet of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, located in Afghanistan, from their base in the Lincolnshire village of Waddington. Since the earliest experiments with ballooning, Lincolnshire has been an 'airminded' county, a phenomenon initially expressed through belief in the socially transformative potential of flight, but one that is expressed today in a celebration of the colonial, defensive and administrative authority of air power, made explicit in efforts to brand Lincolnshire as Bomber County. As home to the drone pilot, whose job it is to manage information presented on a multiplicity of screens (charts, patterns and other streams of data), the county is also a laboratory for experiments in what James Der Derian has called virtuous and virtual warfare.² Though details about the British use of UAVs is even less forthcoming than American activity, we do know that between 2007 and 2012, 1429 civilians were killed by the 'surgical strikes' of drone attacks in the area of Waziristan alone.³ More broadly, though, drone *culture* is a symptom of what McKenzie Wark has called vectors of telesthesia, a third nature of topological power constituted by flows of information which exploits perception at a distance.⁴ What is revealed, in his examination of this carefully controlled space of flows, is the inseparability of the development of air power, from the development of informational power, from systems of communication. Wark does, though, speculate on 'a delirious future', one in which 'every trajectory is potentially connected to every other trajectory, where all trajectories are potentially equal and equally rootless.'

The Society's response to the Committee

1: The Committee for Aeronautical Psychogeography – recommendation

The Committee takes its lead from Ivan Chtcheglov's proto-situationist writing and the Letterist International's tactical *dérive*.⁵ We propose that experiments are conducted to map the 'psychogeographic contours' of this vectoral space and, in doing so, map the new trajectories of drone culture. Though we acknowledge that such techniques emerged in response to a disciplinary picturing of the world – enabled by the aerial view – we contend that aeronautical psychogeography can now function to reveal the strategic contours of a space in which divisions

between *here* and *there* have collapsed. Our attempt to map this space will involve flying over the Lincolnshire landscape but doing so by following an aerial chart of Waziristan, a turbulent trajectory that intersects this site of contemporary conflict with the various historical sites of our county, from the location where the first flight was made to the place where the first bomb hit. It is, then, by hijacking Lincolnshire's visual culture that we aim to seize upon a newly collective situation in which front lines are dissolved.

1.1 The Society agrees with the Committee's recommendation

Recommendation implemented.

1.2 It was the music critic, Greil Marcus, who coined the phrase 'old, weird' to describe a temporality in which a calculated drift through past images can reveal present potential, weird because such forces cannot be contained or explained by our conventional narratives.⁶ Sukhdev Sandhu identifies a similar tendency in essay films which often 'exhibit a quality of vagrancy and drift, as if they are not wholly sure of what they want to say or of the language they need to say it, which may stem from their desire to let subject matter determine – or strongly influence – filmic form.'⁷ Here, though, the object is not simply rumination, it is an act of re-processing flows of information which vectoral power has rendered continuous. Accordingly, the Society proposes that this encounter should occur in the manner of a system error, one that produces a temporary reset, a glitch from which automatic procedures might generate chance emergences and new connections.

1. The film essay *Airminded* (2013) was produced by Rob Coley, Joanna White, David McSherry and Graham Cooper. It was presented to the delegates at *Radical Space*, CCSR at UEL, Saturday 19th October 2013, by Dr Rob Coley (School of Media, University of Lincoln: rcoley@lincoln.ac.uk).

2. James Der Derian (2009) *Virtuous War: Mapping the military-industrial-media-entertainment network*. Routledge.

3. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism cites Chief Justice Dost Muhammad Khan, of Peshawar High Court, as the source of this figure.

4. McKenzie Wark (2013) *Telesthesia: Communication, Culture & Class*. Polity Press.

5. Ivan Chtcheglov (1953) 'Formulary for a New Urbanism'. In McKenzie Wark (2011) *The Beach Beneath the Street: The Everyday Life and Glorious Times of the Situationist International*. Verso.

6. Greil Marcus (1998) *Invisible Republic*. Picador.

7. Sukhdev Sandhu (2013) 'Vagrancy and drift: the rise of the roaming essay film' *The Guardian*. 3 August.