Automatic Warfare

Introduction

Nine days after the attacks on the World Trade Center, George W. Bush announced that America had begun a "War on Terror." He described the enemy – the terror organisation Al Qaeda – as a "radical network of terrorists", and stated that the war would "not be like the war against Iraq a decade ago, with a decisive liberation of territory and a swift conclusion." (Bush, 2001) Bush's speech placed subtle emphasis on the assymetric politics at the core of the conflict, communicating to the American people that this war would occupy a perhaps unfamiliar form. The War on Terror's cultural impact is vast. It can certainly be considered as a linguistically productive war, with a lexicon of new terms now firmly implanted in early 21st century popular culture. It is also likely that the ambiguities of the conflict's definition acted as a catalyst in the formulation of a surveillance state. The War on Terror produced a new enemy who was both 'other' *and* familiar – a dichotomy at the core of the strong political arguments for the creep of complex technologies of control into the psychogeography of the urban landscape. While the post-war emergence of information-based economies appeared to be leading the west toward this conclusion, the attacks on the WTC on September 11, 2001 rapidly sped up the socio-political evolution that Gilles Deleuze calls the control society. But to step outside of the civil mindset and examine the altered systems of the military, we can begin to critically engage with the supposed new paradigms of control triggered by the War on Terror. If the conflict produced a new concept of the enemy, "a stateless enemy, prone to shifting operations from country to country" (Holder, CFR), has this had an impact on the traditional institutional apparatuses that encode the behaviour of the soldier?

This paper begins by discussing the historical argument for the centralisation of power in the military institution, through reference to Machiavelli's writing in *The Art of War.* At a time when there was a divergence in the professional and civil militaries, Machiavelli argued for the latter, stressing the importance of the authoritarian *sovereign* role in encoding obedient behaviour. These ideas are brought read through the frame of 20th century systems theory, in particular Norbert Wiener's development of cybernetics and its engagement with human-machine behaviour in information terms. While Wiener ultimately saw cybernetics' ideal applications to be humanist, its roots lie in military strategy, and it is a useful framework for exploring how power functions within a regimented social system such as a military institution. The second section of the text, titled *Material Power: Protocols for Capital Punishment* introduces a pamphlet titled *Procedure for Military Executions*, dated from 1944 and published by the US Department of the Army. As its title suggests, the pamphlet describes with clinical precision the legal and ethical protocols for a military execution – specifically an *Execution by Musketry*, and an *Execution by Hanging*, both methods deemed to fulfill an ethical and legal requirement at the time but which have no legal basis in the present US Army. I have chosen to analyse this document as an execution is, I will argue, the most confrontational of institutionalised violence in the military, especially as it is generally committed against a soldier from one's own army. Consequently, it is important to place this document in its rightful context: the US Army began to halt its use of capital punishment in the decade or so following the publication of this pamphlet, and so it can be surmised that these protocols were in operation during a transitionary period where their internal ethics were brought into

question. Finally, the text introduces the concept of *Automatic Warfare* – that is, the increasing role of technology as an operator of military technologies, and the resulting reduction of the role of the human to that of an *observer of a process* – exemplified in the targeting of suspected terrorists with Unmanned Aerial Systems in the WANA region. But despite its use of the most advanced technologies, does the War on Terror truly introduce any new parameters into the apparatuses that encode military obedience? While this style of warfare certainly has its roots in the Cold War, I will explore if it can be considered to be emblematic of a shift in strategy bundled with the abstractions of the War on Terror.

Producing Obedient Subjects

The notion of a disciplinary system is inextricably linked with the military throughout recorded history, featuring in the works of countless scholars from Ancient China to the modern era. Protocols, laws, penal codes, and various other procedural/judicial systems have seeming always formed the basis for military institutions. Why is it necessary for behaviour to be regulated so intensely in a military context? One of the most influential scholars that deals with the topic is Niccolo Machiavalli – and indeed fitting that his surname is synonymous with the ability to surreptitiously manipulate and control others. His text *The Art of War*, published at the height of the Renaissance and with a lasting influence still felt today, is comprised of a series of fictionalised debates in which the protagonists argue over the fine points of their contemporary Florentine military strategists. In particular, Machiavelli argues for the importance of a citizen army and the formation of a strict republican hierarchy, contrary to the popular alternative of a professional mercenary force. Power is centralised in the sovereign, reflective of what Foucault refers to as the societies of the sovereign where the role of authority was "to tax rather than to organize production, to rule on death rather than to administer life." (Deleuze, 1991) In Christopher Lynch's introduction to his translation of the text, he summarises Machiavelli's belief that the strategies of recruitment are key to a successful army. The military unit should be populated by soldiers who go to war for patriotic reasons, and who remain obedient to the upper strata of the military hierarchy out of fear. The system of control is implemented from the very beginning of the conscription process – the soldiers are selected by the *prince* - prince in this instance meaning a royalist or republican figure of authority, rather than the army being formed out of volunteers or a blanket conscription policy. Lynch writes: "Machiavelli is entirely averse to any form of military professionalism, for professionals, like mercenaries, are presumed to be motivated by the desire for personal profit." (2005: xxi) Writing in his book *The Machiavellian Moment*, J.G.A. Pocock takes this idea further, elaborating on how the professional mercenary can become a dangerous disruption to an established hierarchy: "Because the citizen has his own place in the body politic, he will understand that the war is being fought to preserve it; a mercenary with no home but the camp may become the instrument of tyranny over the city he was hired to defend." (1975: 200-201) Thus, Machiavelli's selected conscription system breed obedience to a political authority rather than an economic authority, throught the establishment of the citizen-soldier and a subordinate of the prince. The citizen's consent should neither be overtly forced, nor entirely willing, but in any case given out of fear and respect for the prince's authority.

To return to the question of necessity of behavioral regulation I introduced at the beginning of this section, we can say that to fight a war is to somehow challenge an instinctual and fundamental human desire for self-preservation. While this idea is disrupted today through the new networked technologies of warfare which will be described in detail later in the text, the historical fact of the matter was that a soldier had to fight in the physical space of combat – i.e. the 'theatre' of war. Christopher Lynch writes: "At the basis of a soldier's military service is an ambivalence of will that is brought about by, on the one hand, his aversion to present pain, and, on the other hand, his fear of a prince's disdain." (2005: 203) In a conscription system such as the tupe Machivelli advocated, many civil-soldiers fought a war reluctanctly, and so some apparatus must be in

operation in order to maintain a state of obedience in the army. For Machiavelli, this power was manfested in fear of punishment from the sovereign.

Fear of punishment alone may not be enough to hold a vast army in a state of obedience. The typical brute-force view of military conflict follows that a larger army has a greater chance of overthrowing a maller-scale opponent, and so military population becomes an important tactical consideration. It is not so simple as to just obtain more conscripts though – an increase of military population also increases its potential state of disorder, and so an organisational system must be put in place to maintain homeostasis. To explore this notion of the military as a system with an entropic potential, it is helpful to briefly explore the research of Norbert Wiener during the Second World War. While stationed at MIT in the early 1940s, Norbert Wiener began work on an anti-aircraft gun he called the AA Predictor. The novel feature of the gun design was its precognitive capacity: it would assist the accuracy of its human operator by 'learning' the characteristics of the pilot of the target aircraft, so it could guess the position of interception between the firing of the artillery shell and the target's flight trajectory. To do this, Wiener worked with the concept of feedback: that is, by using the output of the system to modulte its own input. He describes this implementation of feedback in his book *Cybernetics: Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*.

> When we desire a motion to follow a given patten the difference between this pattern and the actually performed motion is used as a new input to cause the part regulated to move in such a way as to bring its motion closed to that given by the pattern. (1965: 6-7)

As Wiener further expanded his research of these feedback loops into a science he called cybernetics, the AA Predictor experiment grew to have more profound philosophical implications about human behaviour. He re-conceptualised his view of the human: the complexity of desire and action became information, governed by measurable feedback loops and statistical probability, and thus readily controllable and perhaps even predictable. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was precisely these qualities that made cybernetics a valuable tactical science for the US Cold War strategists. Cybernetics permeated into a diverse range of applications often in competition with each other, from the countercultural revolution to corporate business theory, and of course the development of computers and network technologies as part of the US national defense budget. [source]

To return to cybernetics capability to measure human behaviour as information, we can situate the military structure within a cybernetic context. An army becomes an assembly comprised of agents that act as *generators* and *receivers* of information. A message – a miltary order, for example – must be firected and communicated to its recipients in a functional manner, so that its containing information retains its state of organisation as it is broadcast downward through the military ranks. Such a concrete hierarchical structure contributes to the maintentance of an army's obedience in an equilibrium state. In *The Human Use of Human Beings*, Wiener states: “Indeed, it is possible to treat sets of messages as having an entropy like sets of states of the external world. Just as entropy is a measure of disorganisation, the information carried by a set of messages is a measure of its organisation.” (1989: 21) We can then posit that the organisation of information is maintained through its medium of transmission: the hierarchy of military ranks. Obedience is encoded in the structure of a message's transmission. A message might be sent from an 'authority', through the ranking

system of subordinate authorities, eventually arriving at the lowest rank of soldiers. It is imperative that this message maintains its resolution with each broadcast to the subsequent lower rank, otherwise the entropy will increase. So, when thinking of the transmission structure of the military hierarchy, where each rank defers power to those above and holds power over those directly below, it is apt to think of Marshall McLuhan's aphorism “the medium is the message”. In a military, the medium is the hierarchy, the message is an order - both communicated through and comprised of the institutional apparatus. This hierarchical structure is so embedded in the military that it exists not only in the transmission of information but also in the very language used to communicate this information. This language, what I will refer to as a military vernacular, is clearly apparent in military documents, one of which will be examined in detail in the following section.

Material Power: Protocols for Capital Punishment

> *It was the effect, in the rites of punishment, of a certain mechanism of power: of a power that not only did not hesitate to exert itself directly on bodies, but was exalted and strengthened by its visible manifestations; of a power that asserted itself as an armed power whose functions of maintaining order were not entirely unconnected with the functions of war; of a power that presented rules and obligations as personal bonds, a breach of which constituted an offense and called for vengeance; of a power for which disobedience was an act of hostility, the first sign of rebellion, which is not in principle different from civil war; of a power that had to demonstrate not why it enforced its laws, but who were its enemies, and what unleashing of force threatened them; of a power which, in the absence of continual supervision, sought a renewal of its effects of its individual manifestations; of a power that was recharged in the ritual display of its reality as 'super-power'.* (Foucault, 1995, 57)

In his book *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault introduces the idea of the disciplinary society, an emergent form of social organisation formed of multiple identifiable spaces of enclosure which the citizen passes through over the course of their life. Beginning with the family, then the school, then the workhouse, and so on, each enclosure informs civil behaviour through the application of its own social codes. One of the disciplinary society's defining characteristics is the method of producing civil obedience through public displays of power, often acted out as violent reminders that the locus of control resides with the sovereign. In a disciplinary society, Foucault explains, punishment is a public spectacle and a warning to its spectators: an act of power that performs the hierarchical structure of authority. These systems of violence make up what Foucault refers to as a *dispositif*, an “apparatus” that enforces a particular distribution of power through a collective assembly of ideas and structures of control. The various ways in which the apparatus of power makes itself tangible provides a revealing insight into the ideology of the authority. Foucault's descriptions of 18th and 19th century torture are visceral and grotesque – it is almost impossible to imagine how such violent corporeal power could make up part of a contemporary state-sanctioned discipinary system. While atrocities perpetrated by the western nations considered to have a stable political status are invariably reported from time to time, these instances are often deliberately disguised from public view and do not reflect the sovereign forces of social control described by Foucault. For example, the leaking of imagery that sparked the Abu Ghraib prison scandal was not a conscientious display of US military force, but rather a political crisis that resulted in an international humanitarian outcry. Over the course of the 20th century, the policies that facilitated the commission of disciplinary acts of violence were brought into question in many states that considered themselves to have an advanced juridicial and political system. Yet, this distancing of the sovereign from the act of violence was already apparent in the disciplinary society, where the sovereign was manifested in the act of punishment through symbols, ceremonies, and rituals – a “material and awesome force” executed through proxies. (Foucault, 1995: 50)

In the military institution, obedience is regularly encoded through similar systems of ritualised

biopower – that is, the “set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species [becomes] the object of a political strategy.” (Foucault, 1978: 16) In the US military of the 20th century, biopower materialised overtly through capital punishment, but also a more subtle yet omnipresent strategy of control - the establishment of an order of language, or a military vernacular. This vernacular, apparent in procedural pamphlets and field documents, encodes a degree of obedience through its selective vocabulary and emphasis on ceremonial tradition as a justification for certain tasks. To emphasise the idea introduced in the previous section, the simple act of communication is intertwined with the institutional dispositif, and thus the lower-ranked soldier suffers a loss of control over the act of speech – what is in the United States a most fundamental constitutional right. Furthermore, the application of language reinforces uni-directional hierarchies: the word 'message' might be replaced by a more authoritarian synonym, such as an 'order', a 'directive', or a 'duty', bundled with the assumption of consent. In this way, control of the voice becomes a vital instrument of the dispositif. Such a control deconstructs possibilities for dissent or organised mutiny and subsequently contributes to an automation of behaviour – orders will be duly carried out as anticipated. While the vernacular undoubtedly has an intense power, it is so interlaced within the institutional logic of the military that it gains a subtlety through its normalisation. That other form of biopower mentioned previously - the most direct form where it impinges on the mortal capacity of the body itself - holds a more threatening and less accepted place in the contemporary military dispositif, as proven by the fact that the US army's last execution was in 1961. (DPIC)

Further to its integration within the systems of communication, obedience is also encoded within the traditions and rituals that form the foundation of military service, with capital punishment being an obvious example. Various execution methods have been employed throughout the history of armed conflict, although only a small number – those that we still may consider to be somewhat 'humane' – survive as modern forms of capital punishment. The firing squad, now a mostly antiquated form of execution in the armies of the more 'advanced' militaries around the world, is emblematic of how obedience can be mediated through protocol and an institutional logic of rules and rituals. In the following paragraphs, I will describe a specific case study – a military pamphlet titled *Procedure for Military Executions*. Before I begin to discuss its contents in detail, it is useful to place this document in its appropriate historical context. The specific edition I will refer to was published just before the end of the Second World War (1944) by the US Department of the Army, and has been superceded by multiple updated editions since. By cross-referencing the statistics reported by the US non-profit organisation the Death Penalty Information Center, the pamphlet would have been frequently referred to in the last year of the war and the immediate post-war years as the US Army dealt with a number of war crimes committed by their soldiers. The pamphlet outlines two methods of execution: *Execution by Musketry* and *Execution by Hanging* , of which the latter appears to have been the most frequently used method during the immediate post-war period. Despite the fact that the last US military execution occurred in 1961, the pamhlet I will be quoting has been superceded many times since, with the specified methods in the 1944 edition having been predictably phased out in favour of the more controllable and clinical

lethal injection. The pamphlet certainly makes for harrowing reading, but it is important to critically engage with the power of the institutional rituals it describes. The specificity of protocols outlined in the document – detailed references to color, spatial positioning, uniform, and even music – becomes a part of the *machinery* that facilitates the act of execution. A copy of selected extracts from the pamphlet is included in Appendix A of this paper.

The pamphlet wastes little time in providing a strict definition of the hierarchical roles in the procedure, outlining the responsibilities and protocological interactions between the various strata of the chain of command. As the army has its own legal institution separate from the civil juridicial system, the sentence and form of execution is designated by a court-martial. An officer is also designated and charged with either arranging the execution and ensuring the correct protocol is followed, or delegating this responsibility to a subordinate officer. In the case of calls for a stay of execution, for example if the person to be executed – referred to as “the prisoner” throughout the document - is pregnant or deemed insane, the decision to call for an exception is ultimately deferred to the President. Carl Schmitt's definition of the sovereign - “he who decides on the state of exception” (Agamben, 2005: 1) is reinforced in this pamphlet in its allocation of power to the President to not only decide who should be executed, but also whose execution should be excepted. Comparing Foucault's analysis of the *spectacle of the scaffold* with the precise duties outlined in the pamphlet highlights some interesting parallels. In both instances, sovereign power is symbolically manifest by proxy of hierarchical structures bound by law and protocol, yet a disparity emerges between the distributions of power and responsibility: power of defining the exception is ultimately centralised in the sovereign and channeled through his/her hierarchy of representatives, whereas the responsibility rooted in the physical act of punishing is distributed amongst the guards. In this way, the hierarchy becomes an automative machine, lubricated by the top-down delegation of orders, designations, and duties that implicitly presume consent. In the firing squad, this division of responsibility is particularly apparent: according to the US Army Pamphlet, Section II *Execution by Musketry*, the officer charged with the execution will “cause twelve rifles to be loaded in his presence. Not more than four nor less than one will be loaded with blank ammunition. He will lace the rifles at random in the rack provided for that purpose.” (US Dept Army, 1944: 6) And so, when the execution actually takes place, the riflemen are unsure of the extent of their role in the execution as a result of this protocological abstraction of accountability.