The large-scale distribution of warm ionized gas around nearby radio galaxies with jet-cloud interactions

C.N. Tadhunter\(^1\), M. Villar-Martin\(^{1,2}\), R. Morganti\(^3\), J. Bland-Hawthorn\(^4\) & D. Axon\(^5\)

\(^1\) Department of Physics, University of Sheffield, Sheffield S3 7RH, UK
\(^2\) Institute d’Astrophysique, 98bis Boulevard Arago, F-75014, Paris, France
\(^3\) NFRA, PO Box 2, 7990 AA Dwingeloo, The Netherlands
\(^4\) Anglo-Australian Observatory, PO Box, 296 Epping, NSW 2121, Australia
\(^5\) Division of Physics and Astronomy, Department of Physical Sciences, University of Hertfordshire, College Lane, Hatfield, Herts AL10 9AB, UK

Abstract Deep, narrow-band H\(\alpha\) observations taken with the TAURUS Tunable Filter (TTF) on the 4.2m WHT telescope are presented for two nearby radio galaxies with strong jet-cloud interactions. Although the brightest emission line components are closely aligned with the radio jets — providing nearby examples of the “alignment effect” most commonly observed in high redshift \((z > 0.5)\) radio galaxies — lower surface brightness emission line structures are detected at large distances (10’s of kpc) from the radio jet axis. These latter structures cannot be reconciled with anisotropic illumination of the ISM by obscured quasar-like sources, since parts of the structures lie outside any plausible quasar ionization cones. Rather, the distribution of the emission lines around the fringes of the extended radio lobes suggests that the gas is ionized either by direct interaction with the radio components, or by the diffuse photoionizing radiation fields produced in the shocks generated in such interactions. These observations serve to emphasise that the ionizing effects of the radio components can extend far from the radio jet axes, and that deep emission line imaging observations are required to reveal the true distribution of warm gas in the host galaxies. We expect future deep imaging observations to reveal similar structures perpendicular to the radio axes in the high-z radio galaxies.

1 Introduction

Powerful radio galaxies are frequently associated with extended emission line nebulosities which extend on radial scales of 5 — 100 kpc from the nuclei of the host early-type galaxies (Hansen et al. 1987, Baum et al. 1988). The morphological and kinematical properties of these nebulae provide important clues to the origins of the gas, and the origins of the activity as a whole. The study of such gas is, for example, important for our understanding of the building of galaxy disks and bulges by infall since their epoch of formation. Therefore, it is crucial to determine the extent to which the observed emission line properties reflect the intrinsic distribution of the warm gas in the haloes of the host galaxies, and the extent to which they reflect the effects of the nuclear activity and interactions with the extended radio sources.

In most low redshift \((z < 0.2)\) radio galaxies the optical emission line regions are broadly distributed in angle around the nuclei of the host galaxies, the correlations be-
tween the optical and radio structural axes are weak, and the gas kinematics are often quiescent, with line widths and velocity shifts consistent in most cases with gravitational motions in the host early-type galaxies (Tadhunter, Fosbury & Quinn 1989; Baum, Heckman & van Breugel 1990). However, optical observations reveal a dramatic change in the properties of the nebulosities as the redshift and radio power increase: the emission line kinematics become more disturbed (compare Tadhunter et al. 1989 with McCarthy, Baum & Spinrad 1996) and the optical/UV structures become more closely aligned with the radio axes of the host galaxies (McCarthy et al. 1987, McCarthy & van Breugel 1989). The most recent high resolution HST images of \( z \sim 1 \) radio galaxies show that the structures are not only closely aligned with the radio axes, but they are also highly collimated, with a jet-like appearance (Best et al. 1996). The nature of the “alignment effect” is a key issue for our general understanding of powerful radio galaxies, of particular relevance to the use of radio sources as probes of the high redshift universe.

Of the many models which have been proposed to explain the alignment effect, the two which have received the most attention are the anisotropic illumination and the jet-cloud interaction models.

In the case of anisotropic illumination it is proposed that the gaseous haloes of the host galaxies are illuminated by the broad radiation cones of the quasars hidden in the cores of the galaxies (e.g. Barthel 1989), with the emission lines resulting from photoionization of the ambient ISM by the EUV radiation in the cones (e.g. Fosbury 1989), and the extended optical/UV continuum comprising a combination of the nebular continuum emitted by the warm emission line clouds (Dickson et al. 1995) and scattered quasar light (Tadhunter et al. 1988, Fabian 1989). The alignment of the obscuring tori perpendicular to the collimation axes of the plasma jets then leads to a natural alignment of the extended nebulosities with the radio axes. The best evidence to support the anisotropic illumination model is provided by polarimetric observations of powerful radio galaxies at all redshifts which show evidence for high UV polarization and scattered quasar features (e.g. Tadhunter et al. 1992, Young et al. 1996, Dey & Spinrad 1996, Cimatti et al. 1996, Cimatti et al. 1997, Ogle et al. 1997). It would be difficult to explain these polarimetric results in terms of any mechanism other than scattering of the anisotropic radiation field of an illuminating quasar or AGN. However, despite the success of the illumination model at explaining the polarization properties, a significant fraction of radio galaxies — comprising \( \sim 30 – 50\% \) of radio galaxies at \( z \sim 1 \), and a smaller proportion of lower redshifts — are dominated by jet-like UV emission line structures, which are more highly collimated than would be expected on the basis of the 45 – 60° opening half-angle illumination cones predicted by the unified schemes for powerful radio galaxies (Barthel 1989, Lawrence 1991). Moreover, the highly disturbed emission line kinematics observed in many high-z sources are also difficult to reconcile with quasar illumination of the undisturbed ambient ISM of the host galaxies.

Jet-cloud interactions have the potential to explain many of the features of powerful radio galaxies which cannot be explained in terms anisotropic quasar illumination. Although the jet-cloud interactions are likely to be complex, at the very least the clouds

\[ ^1\text{We use “jet-cloud interaction” as a generic term to describe interactions between the warm ISM and the radio-emitting components, which could include the radio lobes and hot-spots, as well as the radio jets.} \]
will be compressed, ionized and accelerated as they enter the shocks driven through the ISM by the jets. Therefore, jet-cloud interactions provide a promising explanation for the high-surface-brightness and extreme emission line kinematics of the structures aligned along the radio axes of high-z sources. Indeed, recent spectroscopic observations of jet-cloud interactions in low redshift radio galaxies provide clear observational evidence for the acceleration and ionization of warm clouds by the jet-induced shocks (e.g. Clark et al. 1998, Villar-Martin et al. 1999). Moreover, theoretical modelling work has demonstrated that jet-induced shocks are a viable, if not unique, mechanism for producing the emission line spectra of radio galaxies (e.g. Dopita & Sutherland 1998).

It is clear that no single mechanism can explain the emission line properties of radio galaxies over the full range of redshift and radio power; some combination of AGN illumination and jet-cloud interactions is required, with the jet-cloud interactions becoming increasingly important as the redshift and/or radio power increases. However, a major problem with such a combined model is that, while the polarimetric results demonstrate that quasar illumination is important in many high redshift sources, the extended structures are often dominated by highly collimated jet-like structures, with no sign of the broad cone-like emission line distributions predicted by the unified schemes for powerful radio galaxies.

How do we explain this dearth of broad cones in the objects with the most highly collimated structures? Possibilities include the following.

- The gas structures are intrinsically aligned along the radio axes of the high redshift sources, so that the emission line nebulae reflect the true distribution of warm/cool gas, rather than the ionization patterns induced by the jets or illuminating AGN. For example, West (1994) has proposed that a general alignment of the gas structures along the radio axis may be a natural consequence of the formation of giant elliptical galaxies in a hierarchical galaxy formation scenario, although it is not clear that the structures formed in this way would be quite as highly collimated as those observed in the high-z radio galaxies.

- The nuclei of the host galaxies do not contain powerful quasars, and the ionization of the extended gas is dominated by the jets: either by direct jet/cloud interactions, or by illumination by the relativistically-beamed jet radiation. This scenario is supported by the discovery at low redshifts of a class of powerful radio galaxies with weak, low ionization nuclear emission line regions (see Laing 1994, Tadhunter et al. 1998). However, at least some high-z radio galaxies with highly collimated UV structures show direct evidence for powerful quasar nuclei in the form of scattered quasar features in their polarized spectra, so this explanation cannot hold in every case.

- The broad-cone radiation of the buried quasars does not escape from the nuclear regions of the host galaxies, because of the absorbing effects of circum-nuclear gas. In this case the ionization of the extended gas in the aligned structures is likely to be dominated by jet-cloud interactions, but quasar or beamed jet radiation may also contribute along the jet axis, if the jets punch a hole in the obscuring material. Direct evidence for requisite obscuring material in the central
regions is provided by the relatively high occurrence rate of associated CIV and Lyα absorption line systems in the UV spectra of radio-loud quasars (e.g. Anderson et al. 1987, Wills et al. 1995), the relatively red SEDs of steep spectrum radio quasars (Baker 1997), and the detection of significant BLR reddening in a substantial fraction of nearby broad-line radio galaxies (e.g. Osterbrock, Koski & Miller 1995, Hill et al. 1996).

- The dearth of broad ionization cones in the high-z sources is a consequence of an observational selection effect: most of the existing emission line images of the high-z sources have been taken in the light of the low ionization [OII]λ3727 line which is emitted particularly strongly by the jet-induced shocks (e.g. Clark et al. 1997, 1998), but is relatively weak in the more highly ionized quasar illumination cones. Thus, given that the published ground-based images of the high-z objects are relatively shallow and have a low spatial resolution, while the published HST images have a higher resolution but are insensitive to low surface brightness structures, the existing images are likely to be biased in favour of the high-surface-brightness shocked structures along the radio axes. In this case, we would expect deep emission images to reveal gaseous structures outside the main high surface brightness structures aligned along the radio axes. If the gas away from the radio axis is predominantly photoionized by quasars hidden in the cores of the galaxies we would expect the extended low surface brightness structures to have a broad distribution, consistent with quasar illumination. Detection of such emission line morphologies in the objects with the most highly collimated structures would lead to a reconciliation between the anisotropic illumination and jet-cloud interaction models, thereby resolving the outstanding uncertainties surrounding the nature of the alignment effect.

In order to test the latter possibility it is important to obtain deep emission line imaging observations for the objects with closely aligned radio and optical structures. We report here pilot observations of two intermediate-redshift radio galaxies — 3C171 (z = 0.2381) and 3C277.3 (z = 0.08579) — which are nearby prototypes of the high-z radio galaxies, in the sense that they show high surface brightness emission line structures which are closely aligned along their radio axes. The results challenge some commonly-held assumptions about the ionization of the extended gaseous haloes around powerful radio galaxies.

2 Observations

Emission line and continuum observations of 3C171 and 3C277.3 (Coma A) were taken using the Taurus Tunable Filter (TTF) on the 4.2m WHT telescope at the La Palma Observatory on the night of the 27th January 1998. A log of the observations is presented in Table 1, while a full description of the TTF is given in Bland-Hawthorn & Jones (1998a,b). Use of the f/2 camera of TAURUS with the Tek5 CCD resulted in a pixel scale of 0.56 arcseconds per pixel; and the seeing conditions were subarcsecond for the observations reported here. The faintest structures visible in the images for both objects have an Hα surface brightness of $\sim 1 \times 10^{-17}$ erg cm$^{-2}$ s$^{-1}$ arcsec$^{-2}$. 
Because of ghosting effects in the flat field images, no flat fielding of the data was attempted. However, comparisons between images taken with different filters and/or with the objects placed in different positions on the detector, demonstrate that the ghost images of stars and galaxies in the field do not contaminate the images of the main target objects described below.

The reduction of the images consisted of bias subtraction, atmospheric extinction correction, flux calibration, sky subtraction and registration. From the comparison between the measurements of the flux calibration standard stars taken at various times during the run it is estimated that the absolute flux calibration is accurate to within ±30%, and the Hα emission line fluxes agree at this level with the long-slit spectroscopy measurements in Clark (1996). For the emission line images, the TTF was tuned to the wavelength of Hα shifted to the redshift of the emission lines in the nuclear regions of the galaxies. However, velocity structure in the haloes of the host galaxies may result in the emission lines in the extended structures not being exactly centred in the TTF bandpass, which has a Lorentzian shape. We estimate that, at maximum, this will result in the fluxes being underestimated by a factor of two for components with extreme ±600 km/s shifts, but this will not affect our main conclusions which are based largely on the emission line structures, rather than the emission line fluxes.

In order to facilitate comparison between the radio and optical structures, radio images were obtained for both sources. The radio and optical images were registered by matching the positions of the core radio sources with the positions of the continuum centroids in the optical continuum images, with the pixel scale and rotation of the optical images calibrated using the known positions of stars in the CCD fields.

The radio image of Coma A was made using data taken with the VLA A-array configuration at 1.4 GHz (20cm). This gives a resolution for the final image of 1.14x1.13 arcseconds in p.a. -72. The data, which were extracted from the VLA archive, were originally presented and discussed in great detail by van Breugel et al. (1985). We therefore refer to that paper for all the radio information about Coma A.

The radio image of 3C171 was kindly provided by K. Blundell. The image was made with the VLA at 8 GHz with a resolution of 1.3 arcsec FWHM. More information about the radio characteristics of this source can be found in Blundell (1996).

3 Results

3.1 3C277.3 (Coma A)

Previous spectroscopic and imaging observations of 3C277.3 by van Breugel et al. (1985) and Clark (1996) show the presence of a series of high surface brightness structures along the radio axis. These include: a high ionization emission line region associated with knots in radio jet some 6 arcseconds to the south east of the nucleus; an enhancement in the emission line flux close to the hotspot in the northern radio lobe; and an emission line arc which partially circumscribes the northern radio hotspot. Although the kinematic and ionization evidence for a jet-cloud interaction in this source is less clear than in some other radio galaxies (e.g. 3C171: see below) — the ionization state is relatively high and the emission lines relatively narrow — van Breugel et al. (1985) found evidence for a jump
in the emission line radial velocities across the northern radio lobe, while Clark (1996) noted that the ionization has a minimum, and the electron temperature a peak, at the position of the northern radio hotspot. Note that there is no clear evidence for a powerful quasar nucleus in this source: the nuclear regions show no evidence for scattered quasar light, and the nuclear emission line region has a relatively low luminosity and ionization state compared with the brightest extended emission line regions along the radio axis.

Our deep H$\alpha$ images (Figure 1a) show that the emission line regions along the radio axis form part of a spectacular system of interlocking emission line arcs and filaments, which extend almost as far perpendicular as parallel to the radio axis. Of particular interest is the fact that the brightest arc structure wraps a full 180$^\circ$ around the nucleus, with enhancements in the emission line surface brightness where the arc intercepts the radio axis to the north and south of the nucleus. The spatially integrated H$\alpha$ fluxes of the bright knots along the radio axis (including the nucleus), the extended low surface brightness filaments, and the nebula as a whole are $2.5 \times 10^{-14}$, $1.6 \times 10^{-14}$ and $4.1 \times 10^{-14}$ erg s$^{-1}$ cm$^{-2}$ respectively. For our adopted cosmology the corresponding H$\alpha$ emission line luminosities are $8.6 \times 10^{41}$, $5.6 \times 10^{41}$ and $1.42 \times 10^{42}$ erg s$^{-1}$ respectively.

The fact that the main arc and filament structures are not visible, or are considerably fainter, in the intermediate-band continuum image (Figure 1b) — which is at least as sensitive to continuum structures as the narrow-band H$\alpha$ image — demonstrates that they are predominantly emission line structures. However, a number of faint galaxies and continuum structures are detected within 100 kpc of the nucleus of Coma A, and at least some of these continuum structures (highlighted by arrows in the figure) are intimately associated with the extended H$\alpha$ filamentary structures.

Overall, the Coma A system has the appearance of an interacting group of galaxies: the H$\alpha$ filaments bear a marked resemblance to the HI tails detected in 21cm radio observations of interacting groups (e.g. the M81 group: Yun et al. 1994); and it is plausible that the faint continuum structures represent the debris of interactions/mergers between the dominant giant elliptical galaxy and less massive galaxies in the same group. The X-ray luminosity of Coma A ($L_{0.5-3kev} < 8.1 \times 10^{42}$ erg s$^{-1}$: Fabbiano et al. 1984) is also consistent with a group environment.

Figure 2 shows an overlay of the emission line image and the 6cm radio map. This reveals a striking match between the emission line and radio structures. As well as the high surface brightness features along the radio axis, the brightest arc to the north of the nucleus closely follows the outer edge of northern radio lobe. The emission line structures appear to bound the radio structures: the brighter emission line features have a similar radial and lateral extent to the radio features. It is notable, however, that fainter, more diffuse emission line structures are detected well outside the radio lobes on the northern and eastern sides of the galaxy.

The detection of arc structures circumscribing radio lobes is not without precedent: the intermediate redshift radio galaxies PKS2250-41 (Clark et al. 1998, Villar-Martin et al. 1999), 3C435A (Rocca-Volmerange et al. 1994) and PKS1932-46 (Villar-Martin et al. 1998), the high redshift radio galaxies 3C280 (McCarthy et al. 1995) and 3C368 (Best et al. 1996), and the central elliptical galaxy in the cooling flow cluster A2597 (Keokemoer

$^2H_0 = 50\text{km}s^{-1}\text{kpc}^{-1}$ and $q_0 = 0.0$ assumed throughout.
et al. 1999), all show evidence for arcs associated with radio lobes. In many of these cases there is also spectroscopic evidence that the emission line gas extends beyond the radio lobes.

### 3.2 3C171

3C171 is another example of an object in which high surface brightness emission line structures are closely aligned along the axis of the radio jets (Heckman et al. 1984, Baum et al. 1988). The spectroscopic evidence for a jet-cloud interaction in this source is strong: the emission line kinematics along the radio axis are highly disturbed; and the general line ratios and ionization minima coincident with the radio hotspots to the east and west of the nucleus provide strong evidence that the emission line gas has been compressed and ionized by jet-induced shocks (Clark et al. 1998). A further possible consequence of the jet-cloud interactions is the highly disturbed radio structure, with the radio lobes showing a greater extent perpendicular- than parallel to the jet axis, giving an overall H-shaped appearance (Heckman et al. 1984, Blundell 1996).

Our deep Hα and continuum images of this source are shown in Figure 3, while an overlay of the optical emission line image and the radio map is presented in Figure 4. From the continuum-subtracted Hα image we measure spatially integrated emission line fluxes of $2.12 \times 10^{-14}$, $6.2 \times 10^{-16}$ and $2.63 \times 10^{-14}$ erg s$^{-1}$ cm$^{-2}$ respectively for the high surface brightness structures aligned along the radio axis (including the nucleus), the faint filament to the north, and the nebula as a whole. The corresponding Hα emission line luminosities are $6.6 \times 10^{42}$, $1.9 \times 10^{41}$ and $8.1 \times 10^{42}$ erg s$^{-1}$ respectively.

Although the emission line structures in 3C171 are clearly different in detail from those detected in Coma A, there are important general similarities. Most notably, as in Coma A, the highest surface brightness emission line features are closely aligned along the radio axis, yet lower surface brightness structures are also detected in the direction perpendicular to the radio axis. The emission line structures have a similar radial extent in the directions perpendicular and parallel to the radio axis. Away from the radio axis, the most striking emission line feature is the filament which extends 9 arcseconds (45 kpc) north of the nucleus. This feature lies along the fringes of the western radio lobe, just as the arc to the north of the nucleus in Coma A skirts the outer edge of the northern radio lobe in that object. A further similarity with Coma A is that, in the radio axis direction, the radio structures are confined within the emission line structures, which have a similar radial extent. We also find evidence for emission line gas that is not clearly associated with radio structures: the faint, diffuse Hα emission to the south east of the nucleus lies well to the south of the extended eastern radio lobe. However, 3C171 is different from Coma A in the sense that the radio lobes extend further than the emission line structures in the direction perpendicular to the radio axis on the northern side of the galaxy.

### 4 Discussion

The main aim of the deep emission line imaging observations was to attempt to detect the broad emission line cones outside the main aligned structures, and thereby reconcile
the AGN illumination and jet-cloud interactions models. The unified schemes predict illumination cones with opening half-angles of 45-60°. Although the extended emission line nebulosities in low redshift radio galaxies rarely show the sharp-edged cone structures observed in some Seyfert galaxies (e.g. Pogge 1988, Tadhunter & Tsvetanov 1989), the emission line distributions are generally consistent with broad cone illumination of an inhomogeneous ISM (Hansen et al. 1987, Baum et al. 1989, Fosbury 1989). The detection of similar emission line distributions in 3C171 and Coma A would support the idea that the extended ionized haloes are photoionized by quasars hidden in the cores of the galaxies.

The deep imaging observations presented in this paper have confounded our expectations in the sense that, while they do show extended emission line gas well away from the radio axis, the emission line distribution cannot be reconciled with any plausible ionization cone model. Not only do some of the features wrap through a full 180° in position angle around the nucleus of Coma A, but there are no sharp boundaries in the surface brightness of the structures, corresponding to the edges of an ionization cone. It is possible for the emission line distributions to appear broader than the nominal 45-60° cones predicted by the unified schemes if the cone axes are tilted towards the observer. However, in order to explain the emission line distributions in 3C171 and Coma A in this way, the cones would have to be tilted to such an extent that the observer’s line of sight would lie within the cone and we would see the illuminating AGN directly. Clearly this is not the case, and it appears highly unlikely that the extended filaments away from the radio axis are photoionized by a central source of ionizing photons.

The most plausible alternative to quasar illumination is ionization by the shocks associated with the expanding radio jets and lobes. The emission lines could be produced as the warm clouds cool behind the shock fronts or, alternatively, as a consequence of photoionization of precursor clouds by the ionizing photons produced in the cooling, shocked gas. In either case we would expect a close morphological association between the radio and optical structures, just as we observe in 3C171 and Coma A. By adapting equation 4.4 of Dopita and Sutherland (1996), and assuming a shock speed through the warm clouds of 200 km s⁻¹, we estimate that the rate of flow of warm ISM through the shocks would have to be at least 1.9×10⁴ M⊙ yr⁻¹ for 3C171, and 3.2×10³ M⊙ yr⁻¹ for Coma A, in order for the emission line luminosities of the nebulae as a whole to be produced entirely by shock ionization. Energetically, the shock ionization mechanism appears to be feasible in the sense that the total emission line luminosities of the sources are <10% of the bulk powers of the radio jets (Clark 1996, Clark et al. 1998)³.

However, it is not possible to rule out some contribution to the ionization of the extended structures by a central photoionizing source. As discussed in the introduction, some radio sources with relativistic jets may not have powerful quasar nuclei. If this is the case, the narrow beams of radiation emitted by the jets could contribute to the ionization of the structures along the radio axis, although the ionization of the more extended filamentary structures would continue to be dominated by interactions with the radio lobes.

One further possibility is that the structures are photoionized by young stars associ-

³In order to derive this result we have scaled the results of Clark (1996), who considered only the emission line components along the radio axis, to the total emission line fluxes for the nebulae as a whole, as derived from our Hα images.
ated with the filaments. This is supported by the presence of faint continuum structures associated with the Hα filaments (see Figure 1(c)), and the spectroscopic detection of excess UV continuum emission to the north and south of the nucleus along the radio axis above the level expected for the nebular continuum emitted by the warm gas (Clark 1996). Without further information on the nature and spectrum of the extended continuum structures it is difficult to test this model at the present time.

An open question for both 3C171 and Coma A is the extent to which the structures reflect the true distributions of ionized gas in the haloes of the host galaxies, and the extent to which the structures are distorted by their interaction with the radio components. It is possible for shock fronts to sweep up material into shell-like structures. However, given that the clouds are likely to be destroyed by hydrodynamical interactions with the fast, hot wind behind the shock fronts within a few shock crossing times (e.g. Klein, McKee & Collella 1994), and given also the presence of diffuse Hα emission well away from the radio structures in both Coma A and 3C171, it seems more plausible that these represent pre-existing gas structures. Cloud destruction by shocks may also lead to a relative absence of warm gas in the lobes, further enhancing the shell-like appearance of the emission line structures. In the case of Coma A it is likely that we are seeing the results of interactions between between the radio-emitting components and the gaseous remnants of mergers/interactions in a group of galaxies.

Clearly, detailed measurements of the kinematics, line ratios, and continuum spectra of the filamentary structures are required in order to resolve the outstanding issues concerning the physical state, ionization and origins of the warm gas.

5 Implications for high redshift radio galaxies

Our observations demonstrate the presence of extended gaseous structures well away from the high-surface-brightness structures aligned along the radio axes in two nearby radio galaxies. Given that Coma A and 3C171 are similar to the high redshift radio galaxies in the sense that they show high-surface-brightness emission line structures closely aligned along their radio axes, as well as evidence for disturbed emission line kinematics, it seems likely that similar extended gaseous structures also exist in the high-z sources. In this case, the highly collimated structures visible in the existing images of some $z \sim 1$ 3C radio sources may reflect more the ionization pattern induced by the radio jets than the true distribution of warm/cool gas in the host galaxies.

Note, however, that 3C171 and Coma A have radio and emission line luminosities that are an order of magnitude lower than 3C radio galaxies at $z \sim 1$. Furthermore, the radio lobes in 3C171 and Coma A extend further in the direction perpendicular to the radio jets than is typical in high redshift 3C radio sources. Therefore, it is difficult to predict the detectability of the extended low surface brightness structures in the high-z radio galaxies ($z > 1$) based on a straightforward extrapolation of the properties of 3C171 and Coma A. Given the smaller lateral extents of the radio lobes in the high-z sources, the ionization effects associated with the lobes may be less effective at large distances from the radio axes in such objects. In addition, the structures in the high-z sources will be subject to $(1+z)^{-4}$ cosmological surface brightness dimming which will make
them more difficult to detect relative to nearby sources for similar intrinsic brightness levels. However, set against this is the fact that, in contrast to Coma A and 3C171, there exists good polarimetric evidence that many of the high-z radio galaxies contain powerful quasars hidden in their cores. Provided that the ionizing photons in the broad ionization cones can escape the nuclear regions (but see discussion in introduction), illumination by the quasar cones will enhance the surface brightnesses of the extended structures and render them more easily detectable.

The extended low surface brightness structures may already have been detected spectroscopically in at least one high-z source: deep, long-slit Keck spectra taken along the radio axis of 3C368 \((z = 1.135)\) by Stockton, Ridgway & Kellogg (1996) show the presence of a faint emission line region well outside the main high surface brightness emission line regions closer to the nucleus. The relatively narrow lines and high ionization state measured in this faint, low-surface-brightness region are consistent with quasar illumination of the undisturbed ambient medium of the host galaxy.

Some encouragement may also be drawn from the detection of large Ly\(\alpha\) haloes around radio galaxies at \(z > 2\) (e.g. Adam et al. 1997). Although the Ly\(\alpha\) in these haloes may not be formed by direct photoionization by an AGN, but rather by resonant scattering of Ly alpha photons produced in the extended regions around the nuclei (Villar-Martin et al. 1996), these observations at least demonstrate the presence of extensive haloes of cool ISM surrounding the host galaxies of some of the highest redshift radio galaxies.

Thus, we expect future deep emission line imaging of \(z \sim 1\) radio galaxies to reveal the true distribution of the extended ionized gas in the host galaxies, and to provide clues to the origins of the gas and the evolution of the host galaxies.

6 Conclusions

Deep emission line imaging observations of two nearby examples of the radio-optical alignment effect have revealed extensive low-surface-brightness emission line structures well away from the radio axes, thus demonstrating that the intrinsic distribution of warm gas is more extensive than previously suspected.

The general distribution of the gaseous structures is incompatible with the standard quasar illumination picture, while their association with the extended radio structures provides clear evidence that they are interacting with the radio lobes, hotspots and jets. These may be objects in which the ionization of the extended emission line regions is entirely dominated by shocks induced by interactions between the radio plasma and the ISM.

It is often assumed that broad distribution of ionized gas observed in low redshift radio galaxies without clear signs of jet-cloud interactions imply illumination by the broad ionization cones of quasars hidden in the cores of the galaxies. These new observations suggest that this may not always be the case, and that the lobes as well as the jets may have a significant ionizing effect.

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| Object    | Blocking Filter(Å) | Etalon(Å) | Exposure Time(s) | Seeing(“) | Comments       |
|-----------|--------------------|-----------|------------------|-----------|----------------|
| 3C171     | 8140/330           | 8124/28   | 1800             | 0.95      | Hα + Continuum |
|           | 8570/400           | —         | 900              | 0.95      | Continuum      |
| 3C277.3   | 7070/260           | 7124/19   | 2×900            | 0.98      | Hα + Continuum |
|           | 7580/280           | —         | 900              | 0.98      | Continuum      |

Table 1: Details of the TTF imaging observations for 3C171 and 3C277.3. The second and third columns give the central wavelengths/bandwidths for the blocking filters and the etalon respectively.
Figure 1: TTF images of Coma A (3C277.3): (a) Hα+continuum; (b) pure Hα; (c) continuum ($\lambda_c = 7580\text{Å}$). In the continuum image the arrows point to faint continuum features associated with the extended Hα filamentary structures, the “G” symbols indicate galaxies, while the “S” symbol indicates a faint star (unresolved in HST images).
Figure 2: Overlay of the Hα+continuum image for Coma A (greyscale) with the 6cm radio map of van Breugel et al. (1985) (contours).
Figure 3: TTF images of 3C171: (a) Hα+continuum; (b) pure Hα; (c) continuum ($\lambda_c = 8570\text{Å}$). The symbols have the same meaning as in Figure 1.
Figure 4: Overlay of the Hα image for 3C171 (greyscale) with the 6cm radio map of Blundell(1996) (contours).