



Benjamin Bratton

Blur: On The Stack
and The Stack-to-Come

FallSemester

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The Stack we have means: borderlines are rewritten, dashed, curved, erased, automated; algorithms count as continental divides; the opposition of chthonic versus geometric territory is collapsed by computation; interfaces upon interfaces accumulate into networks, which accumulate into territories, which accumulate into geoscapes (territories comprising territories, made and so entered into, not entered into and so made); the embedded is mobilized and the liquid is tethered down into shelter and infrastructure; the flat, looping planes of jurisdiction multiply and overlap into towered, interwoven stacks; the opaque is transcribed and the transparent is staged, dramatized, and artificialized; irregular allegiances are formalized (the enclave and exclave, for diasporic and satellite expatriates); both futurist and medievalist scenarios confiscate, one from another, the program of supercomputational utopias; and the incomplete(able) comprehensiveness of Earth's archives is folded back on itself as a promiscuous, ambient geopolitics of consumable electrons.

These are predicaments that condition us, but design is out of sync with them at present. Some design appears in advance of



Photo: Luis Eligio; Photo on the screen: Bruna Mori

what it wants to describe, while other designs lag behind what has already arrived but may not be recognized and named. The Stack-we-have does both, and so The Stack-to-come is drawn by a geoaesthetics and a geodesign that is, at best, seen now in a kind of double exposure: one future that is anonymously present with us, arrived but unnamed, and one that is already named but not yet here. To grasp that other geography, our attention is split between these two concurrent images that we must hold in mind at once, even as they blend into the other, both with and without our control.



The unseen-and-arrived is interlaced with the seen-and-delayed, the blur is precisely this oscillation between 'what is' but does not yet have a name, and 'what might become' because we can give it name in advance of its arrival. The challenge requires imagination but also enforcement, the establishment of foundations, the techniques of strategic position and material fabrication, such that they can form one another and form us through them. To hold the two images in mind is also to bring into focus the variables of their interpolation and to trace the pixelated translation between them. At the same time, the

sorting of any single User-subject effect, yours or mine, is also an arc of decay, marked for itself only in passing, such that any entry point into The Stack is fixed by what we exchange among one another in passing: money, carbon, electrons, affect, law, territory—one serving as the referent standard for the other without final grounding. Its scope is global, but the interfaces into the machine, and the visible diagram of the work that it does, are always only partial.

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