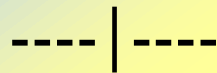

a presentation of
benjamin bratton's essay,
the black stack



this talk will contain:
my responses, project research, cited references
&
will culminate in a discussion within the group...

defining the stack:

'instead of seeing the various species of contemporary computational technologies as so many different genres of machines, spinning out on their own, we should instead see them as forming the body of an accidental megastructure.'

nomos [this idea comes from carl schmitt's work *the nomos of the earth*]:

land, sea, air - & now 'cyber' (the term originating from US military terminology and the NSA)

‘today, as the nomos that was defined by the horizontal loop geometry of the modern state system creaks and groans, and as “seeing like a state” takes leave of that initial territorial nest— both with and against the demands of planetary-scale computation—we wrestle with the irregular abstractions of information, time, and territory, and the chaotic de-lamination of (practical) sovereignty from the occupation of place. for this, a nomos of the cloud would, for example, draw jurisdiction not only according to the horizontal subdivision of physical sites by and for states, but also according to the vertical stacking of interdependent layers on top of one another: two geometries sometimes in cahoots, sometimes completely diagonal and unrecognizable to one another.’

a computational stack -

'the stack which is to come'

'it is to the stack what the shadow of the future
is to the form of the present.'

'the black stack is less the anarchist stack, or the death-metal stack, or the utterly opaque stack, than the computational totality-to-come, defined at this moment by what it is not, by the empty content fields of its framework, and by its dire inevitability. it is not the platform we have, but the platform that might be. that platform would be defined by the productivity of its accidents, and by the strategy for which whatever may appear at first as the worst option (even evil) may ultimately be where to look for the best way out. it is less a "possible future" than an escape from the present.'

the cloud

'this is a clash between two logics of governance, two geometries of territory: one a subdivision of the horizontal, the other a stacking of vertical layers; one a state, the other a para-state; one superimposed on top of the other at any point on the map, and never resolving into some consensual cosmopolitanism, but rather continuing to grind against the grain of one another's planes. this characterizes the geopolitics of our moment (this, plus the gravity of generalized succession, but the two are interrelated).'

'the cloud polis draws revenue from the cognitive capital of its users, who trade attention and microeconomic compliance in exchange for global infrastructural services, and in turn, it provides each of them with an active discrete online identity and the license to use this infrastructure'

two possibilities where the cloud is concerned:
firstly, the state is 'cored out' and simply
becomes an ever increasingly symbolic
authority.

or

the cloud is only the state, that it equals/equates
to the state and that its totality is intrinsically
totalitarian.

'looking toward the black stack, we observe that new forms of governmentality arise through new capacities to tax flows (at ports, at gates, on property, on income, on attention, on clicks, on movement, on electrons, on carbon, and so forth). it is not at all clear whether, in the long run, cloud platforms will overwhelm state control on such flows, or whether states will continue to evolve into cloud platforms, absorbing the displaced functions back into themselves, or whether both will split or rotate diagonally to one another, or how deeply what we may now recognize as the surveillance state (US, China, and so forth) will become a universal solvent of compulsory transparency and/or a cosmically opaque megastructure of absolute paranoia, or all of the above, or none of the above.'

the user

'like theseus's paradox—where after every component of a thing has been replaced, nothing original remains but a metaphysical husk—the user is confronted with the existential lesson that at any point he is only the intersection of many streams. at first, the subject position of the user overproduces individual identity, but in the continuance of the same mechanisms, it then succeeds in exploding it.'

'ask yourself: is that user "Anonymous" because he is dissolved into a vital machinic plurality, or because public identification threatens individual self-mastery, sense of autonomy, social unaccountability, and so forth? the former and the latter are two very different politics, yet they use the same masks and the same software suite. given the schizophrenic economy of the user—first over-individuated and then multiplied and de-differentiated—this really isn't an unexpected or neurotic reaction at all. it is, however, fragile and inadequate.'

'are all proxy composite users one User? Is anything with an IP address a User? if not, why not? if this throne is reserved for one species—humans—when is any one animal of that species being a User, and when is it not? is it a User anytime that it is generating information? if so, that policy would in practice crisscross and trespass some of our most basic concepts of the political, and for that reason alone it may be a good place to start.'

the black stack

'it is drawn, I believe, by an inhuman and inhumanist molecular form-finding: pre-cambrian flora changed into peat oil changed into children's toys, dinosaurs changed into birds changed into ceremonial headdresses, computation itself converted into whatever meta-machine comes next, and stack into black stack.'

passing on

from the as yet fully unrealised, obsolete system,
a type of 'passing on' is taking place.

therefore, the next fight will determine -

'who gets what' & 'what is done with it'

tam hare, november 2015
