

## AAA CARGO

[Cha Cha / Been Sheen]

Point A and Point B are now unobstructably linked  
things move quickly  
distributed and managed by standardised formats  
and factories dotting its regions  
with every road built a promise of access  
but state infrastructure passes through  
and quickly forgets



[Paralogistician I]

Our Chinese railway system used to have four horizontal and four vertical lines across the country  
now there are eight horizontal lines and eight vertical lines  
the railway is very dense  
there are lines which are just for goods  
and lines for passengers  
each are separated and do not conflict with one another  
the railways which transport products run direct lines  
To Europe and Kazakhstan  
straight

[Paralogistician II]

And when did this start?



[Paralogistician I]

from around two years ago  
that it started  
transporting oil  
cotton  
president Xi brought out the Belt and Road  
and started it all

## The Strange Stack Geography of AAA Cargo

In AAA Cargo, Suess follows a group of 'paralogisticians', a new generation of precarious workers, consigned to the construction of the Belt. Its trace is one of *nomos* and *nonsoels* (Tsing, 2015) : machine as state (Bratton, 2016) , Belt as lineament (Toscano, 2014) , logistician as cheap, scaleable, unit. For the paralogisticians, the Belt is the weight of the world (Bourdieu, 1999). Yet, their conscription to the earth is not without hope. As the government in Beijing presses on to accelerate the terraforming machine, a nomadology of minor resistances coagulate to speak of other possible worlds: unruly sands hacked up by katabatic currents off the Loess Plateau disrupt project schedules, downtime opens up for the paralogisticians to carve out different interiors of poesis, transnational guanxi and friendship within the cargo-holds and passenger carry-ons of the logistical fleet.

AAA Cargo documents from these many interiors, recording the minor narratives and conversations [Paralogistician I] [Paralogistician II] that unfold and then re-fold into the concrete, accelerationst *nomos* of the Belt. Suess writes: 'these minor narratives regularly seep into the dominant forms of governmentality - of new transnational regulation, labour management and security measures - slowly disaggregating its solidity.' AAA Cargo she writes is 'part-fiction, part ethnographic' documentary. Yet, 'part-fiction' is also somewhat of a misnomer. The sense begins to emerge that lens and script are not adjuncts to this reality but machines computing it, all too real-ly (MacKenzie, 2006). Emic and etic begin to curve indistinguishably on the vertical moebius of a strange stack geography, solidarities of transnational guanxi resonate on dis-placed interface. For Bratton, this paralogistic condition is planetary in scape:

geographies that were comfortable and toxic are now transient and alien, inhabited uncannily. But even as strange geographies corrugate, fracture, and smear worldly scale and tempo, the group isn't somehow evaporated into virtual information flux; to the contrary, we are brought to a certain end of nonplace. For this, a different kind of placefulness is reestablished, one that is not the organic inverse of artificial abstraction, but an experience of place as one resonant scale within a much larger telescoping between local and global consolidations (Bratton, 2015)

Lens, script, mobile phone (w.s.p - where-signal-permits) overlay in a vertical, sectional stack, its topography curved by the multiplication and superimposition of layers of sovereign claims over a paralogistic oikos that is overdetermined by external relations and networks, platform immanent, vibrative. Out of: the group of Paralogisticians - the roadbuilders, Suess, Ming Lin, Feola, ChaCha, Been Shen, Sundaram, Chua, Reyhé - emerge in, on, and through the 'operational images' (Paglen, 2014) and cargointerials as co-conspirators in an alternative design. In this strange geography of AAA Cargo, the Belt then begins to weigh the world not only through its oceanic involution and regurgitation of concrete, steel, mineral, biota, elements - but through the oversaturation of its meta-design in images, plans, utopias, totalities, that, all dissensual in position and held in tensile strength co-occupy it and thereby co-compose it. As Bratton writes:

geopolitics are driven instead by a general fissiparousness, and so while any given interfacial image map [AAA Cargo] may be (part of) a total image, the cumulative incongruity of multiple totalities renders every whole only partial. The geoscape stages these incommensurate projections, including those that deny the legitimacy or even existence of other projections with which they share the same physical location, and it is that incompatibility, the noisy grinding of incompatible terms for addressing things, events and territory, that is, in practice, the engine of geopolitical design

To frame as so the engine of geopolitical design in its general fissiparousness, its oversaturation of partial and dissensual totalities, ballooning, involuting 'for space' (Massey, 1999) rotates the dimensional frame of inquiry to the thick verticality (Weizman, 2012) and bulbous ecology of apparatuses. It also then radiates out in resonant scale the possibility for alternative designs: 'tweaks' (Paralogisticians, 2016), leaks (ICCJ, 2017) and doubles. The essay-cum-proposal that follows rejoins the New Silk Road, obliquing the totality-building machine of AAA Cargo, for the paralogistic oikos of a Sino-futurist (Lek, 2017) protocol-platform SEZ, of automatons, huaxi and Octopus 2.0.

## Keywords

**Nomos:** the primary act of territorial inscription that gives rise to its subsequent formalisation and structural logic in accordance; it is a making of a territorial order through the execution of a territorial claim and physical occupation that precedes it. It is essential for any political geographic architecture to identify the individual sites, fields, instances, and actors within its jurisdictional field, such that any of these would be communicable as part of a regular and governable flow of information through those spaces. The terms of the *nomos* are also the shape of that space as configured by the flows that fill up. *Nomos* is described as prior to every legal, economic, and social order. It is constituted by appropriation, distribution and production and only through this can it move from the particular to the universal: from arbitrary territorial capture, to representations of spatial delineation, to a geopolitical order.

**Nonsoels:** elements of the social landscape removed from formative social relations: nonsocial landscape elements

**Machine as State:** The Stack is less a new medium of governance than it is a form of governance in and of itself, less the machine of the state than the machine as the state. Its agglomeration of computing machines into platform systems not only reflects, manages, and enforces forms of sovereignty; it also generates them in the first place. States and non state platforms compete directly not only over the generation of Stack geographies but also for the dominion over those spaces once they are mapped.

**Geoscape:** a contested terrain of contested terrains, a shifting landscape made up of shifting landscapes: image maps, projections and plans, irredentist land claims, borders and jurisdictions, strata and striations, imagined worlds, macroeconomic forecasts, projected homes and homelands, addressing systems and various terra incognita. All of these can, but need not necessarily, enter into irregular public exchanges whereby contrasted spatializations are both supplied and demanded according to a panoply of capitals. Geoscapes comprise both sacred and secular projections, as they are in relation to one another: exceptional territories, patchworks of the enclave, and exclave zones overflowing competing totalities. In turn, the inscriptions of the *nomos*, drawing and framing sovereign interiors, can find traction to the extent that the surface on which it writes is recognised by its neighbours.

The geoscape extends in all possible directions at once and is held only by the tensile strength of the imagined geographies that compose it by their co-occupation. One geography on another, interfacial regimes interlace but cannot ultimately resolve into any last instance. Their geopolitics are driven instead by a general fissiparousness, and so while any given interfacial image map may be (part of) a total image, the cumulative incongruity of multiple totalities renders every whole only partial. The geoscape stages these incommensurate projections, including those that deny the legitimacy or even existence of other projections with which they share the same physical location, and it is that incompatibility, the noisy grinding of incompatible terms for addressing things, events and territory, that is, in practice, the engine of geopolitical design

**The Weight of the World:** In *The Weight of the World* and related essays, Pierre Bourdieu proposes that we construe the state not as a monolithic and coordinated ensemble, but as a splintered space of forces vying over the definition and distribution of public goods which he calls the "bureaucratic field." The constitution of this space is the end-result of a long-term process of concentration of the various species of capital operative in a given social formation, and especially of "juridical capital as the objectified and codified form of symbolic capital" which enables the state to monopolise the official definition of identities, the promulgation of standards of conduct, and the administration of justice (Wacquant on Bourdieu, 2016)

**Lineament:** noun. GEOLOGY. A linear feature on the earth's surface, such as a fault.

**Logistical state:** As the state becomes increasingly occupied by the logistical problems of stocks and flows, we cannot think of it as concentric, centripetal or centrifugal. Though it is inseparable from effects of

centring and centrality, it is capable of considerable dissemination and multiplicity, as well as internal contradiction, if not proper difference. Logistics, broadly construed, is a critical field for the reproduction of the relations of production, in which the state intervenes as producer of capitalist space. This logistical imperative – to lay out the space of stocks and flows for the optimal reproduction of capitalist relations – involves the state precisely to the extent that reproduction is not a matter of logic, but of strategy

**The Stack:** a transformation in the technical infrastructure of global systems whereby planetary-scale computation has so thoroughly and fundamentally transformed the logics of political geography in its own image that it has produced new geographies and new territories that can enforce themselves. Unlike modern political geography, which divided up horizontal maps, Stack geography also vertically layers spaces on top of one another [from this], stack perspectives erupt uninvited and unintended. The verticality of flattened systems is seemingly uncontainable. While world maps render space in x- and y- axes, no linear geometry without thick verticality could represent the most entrenched geopolitical conflicts, rational and irrational alike. Consider Israeli architect Eyal Weizman's multidimensional maps of the overlapping and interweaving claims of sovereignty in Israel-Palestine, showing that no horizontal cartographic linear delineation, or any regular vertical elevation all by itself, can finally describe, let alone govern, the multidimensional violence of that particular jurisdiction-intensive politico-theological matrix.

**Sinofuturism:** 'Sinofuturism' (1839 – 2046 AD)' (2016) interrogates how Western media, the BBC and Infowars particularly, schematise Chinese society. Sinofuturism is 'a science fiction that already exists... a massively distributed neural network focused on copying rather than originality.' Lek identifies seven clichés about Chinese society – computing, copying, gaming, studying, addiction, labour and gambling – and uses them to argue for Sinofuturism as a self-interested artificial intelligence that employs deep-seated cultural qualities like Confucian filial piety and agrarian-industrial labour capacity to spread itself across the planet in a Darwinian conquest of ideas; it is an agent of meme warfare. Sinofuturism's seven core components are visually reflected by media reports such as a BBC documentary on internet gaming addiction and paranoid rants on the dangers of globalism from the far-right talk show Infowar, representing China as an alternate, alien universe, depicting it, by turns, as an Orwellian nightmare, an apocalyptic smogscape and a fully automated world of tomorrow.

The emergent narratives of Sinofuturism propose an alternate temporality by which to politicise the present. Throughout the 20th century, art, music and literature now assembled under the banner of Afrofuturism sought to decentre the cosmologies of the West by reclaiming the techno-cultural agency of black bodies precluded by Western modernity. In contrast, Sinofuturism – like its Arab cousin, Gulf futurism (as theorized by artists Fatima Al Qadiri and Sofia Al Maria in 2011) – feels less of an emancipatory movement than the timely framing of a geopolitical aesthetic. Just as Gulf futurism describes the vacant hedonism of oil-rich youth culture amongst the glittering spires of Abu Dhabi and Dubai, Sinofuturism takes its cues from the LED-lit blur of contemporary China. Whether or not the 21st century turns out to be China's, a new set of global conditions is emerging. What is at stake in Sinofuturism – as a dream, a nightmare or an impending reality – is not only the decentring of Euro-American cultural hegemony, but also the narrative of futurity as a historical (modern) aesthetic, which China might recast in its own image. Sinofuturism is hardly a utopian project, but it presents a geopolitical opportunity: how might 'orientals' take control of the narrative of orientalism?

**Nomadology:** The nomad is a tendency towards deterritorialization, Deleuze and Guattari argue, that can be found to some degree in all phenomena. Their project consists in identifying this tendency wherever it can be located and finding ways of amplifying it. Nomadology is the study of wandering subjectivities, of beings that drift from pre-determined or normative paths, particularly those paths determined and regulated by apparatuses of the state. Nomadism is a form of life that is shaped by continual embarkation on lines of flight - that is, modes of escape, moments of transformation, ways of becoming other-than-normative, and ways of acting in excess of, or insubordinately in relationship to, repressive forces.

## Eastern, Hemispherical Stack

'Let us imagine one fictional scenario: a new status is given to Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, now a Special Economic Zone (SEZ). Flexible borders absorb trade, commerce, and human labor, shortening truck and shipping routes through real-time optimisation sensors and "single-window" customs clearance. 4K facial recognition technology is integrated into Chinese telecom manufacturer Huawei's newest tablet phone, the Huawei Mate 12, generating new forms of e-citizenship. The Great Wall of China is no longer the only planetary landmark visible from space; instead, a pulsing swarm of electromagnetic frequencies circles from Xi'an to Moscow to Rotterdam and back, forming a glowing, red swathe on Google Earth' (Bratton, 2017)

Lens opens on a plateau and cuts to a cyborg - species: *minimus paralogisticianus* as he lifts eight split-end alloyed tendrils out of his stomach and loops them westward. An encroacher - species: sandstorm - katabicises on the sorry, splayed-gut venture as a soundtrack begins to doppler overhead, of radioactive material popping in corrugated spectrum. The cyborg's contact lenses kick in, reactively closing. 12 milliseconds earlier - 900miles east, an encroacher.monitor hurtling on a high-speed train to the Mongolian megalopolis identifies a disequilibrating surface condition of the epidermis and signals the closure of all contacts in a 300mile radius from the front-tendrill of W.12 G.9 (Westward Line 12, Guaxi District 9). Eyes locked, he dreams of being watched over by gods of loving grace.

Sinofuturism is 'a science fiction that already exists... a massively distributed neural network focused on copying rather than originality.' (Lek, 2017). *Horgos: The First New City of the New Silk Road Emerges As A Robot Manufacturing Hub (Forbes, Jan 09 2017)*. *A Look at the 7 New Cities Along the New Silk Road (Forbes, Sept 20, 2017)*. *Beijing's New Silk Road Project serves as a Highway for 'Smart Cities'*. (South China Morning Post, 27 Sept 2017). *Ports, Pipelines and Geopolitics: China's New Silk Road is A challenge for Washington (TIME, 2017)*.

*As 1/3 of the Belt and Road Economies follows the Muslim-faith, the first application of our Electronic-ID Dispute Resolution Process is to provide Shariah-compliant provenance for the trading of Halal-Products along the Belt and Road (an open Halal Blockchain that implements Mudaraba, Musharaka, Murabaha, Ijara, Istisna'a and Salam Islamic financing techniques). Additionally the Consortium will assist with Digital Green Finance to support greening of the Belt and Road Initiative Together they define a Halal and Green Blockchain (The Belt and Road Blockchain Consortium, One Belt, One Road, One Chain, 2017)*.

The Belt and Road Initiative forms a distributed economic platform and geopolitical strategy: to forge—and even strong-arm—financial and cultural cooperation between the Asian, European, and African continents and their seas. It is also a strategy to deal with surplus: China hopes it can export its excess cement, steel, and machinery to poorer, neighbouring countries, while developing higher, more lucrative technical standards in construction, engineering, and telecommunication. A driving social force behind the initiative is to address the growing wealth disparity between mega-metropolises like Moscow and Shanghai and the poverty-stricken rust belts or "hinterlands" of agrarian Eurasia. Less explicit is the power and gamesmanship underlying this geographically-expansive initiative, including the desire to attain 'superpower' status and access to strategic ports, which can be used as naval bases by the Chinese military for its missions in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.'

'What kinds of urban systems and prototypes will result from The New Silk Road? How can we fathom megastructures or total systems when they are no longer contained in a single building envelope but are rather discontinuous? How will logistical infrastructures become zones of exception, and how can we bend this toward more interesting outcomes?'(Strelka Institute 2017)

New aesthetics will need to emerge to portray and narrativise the strange and new lived experience of this Eastern, Hemispherical Stack.

## All Watched Over by Machines of Uncanny Jurisdictional Intricacy

Thinking the strange stack geographies of AAA Cargo, a future Ulaanbaatar or Horgos elides a diverse field of scholarship across urban and architectural theory (Lefebvre, 1999, Brenner et. al, 2014; Bratton, 2015; Weizman, 2010), postcolonial practice (Lek, 2017; Vukovich, 2012) and inter-scalar (Hecht, 2016; Tsing, 2015) and object-oriented inquiry into infrastructure (Easterling, 2014; Bennett, 2004; Neilson and Rossiter, 2010), and logistics (Mezzadra et. al, 2012). Joining Bratton's call for a 'new aesthetics' of the lived experience in an Eastern, Hemispherical stack - and locating between the *reflexive* forensic practice of MARA and the *projective* design practice of the Strelka Institute<sup>1</sup> - this proposal draws together an ambition to undertake collaborative<sup>2</sup> site research at an emergent city along the New Silk Road. The questions it might pose encircle notions of the Stack, protocols, platforms, rules, logics, logistics, borders, zones, exclusions, inclusions, exceptions, futurity, poesis, promise, access, design, power and irony.

What binds these disparate terms into a field I propose is a sociological analysis of the lived experience of the 'weight of the world' (with all its connotative Bourdieuan structure/agency ether) in zones of *governmentality* (governmentality defined as the immanent discourses, techniques and architectures that constitute the objectivity of the modern paralogistic subject<sup>3</sup>) where the morphology of the state - 'capable of considerable dissemination and multiplicity, as well as internal contradiction, if not proper difference' - is logistical, machinic, and reproductively concerned with *aménagement*: the reproduction of the means of production and of production relations, for organizing the "environment" of firms, for setting out a "puzzle" of cities and regions, for spatially organizing life itself.' (Toscano, 2014). For Bratton, confronting this contemporary condition:

'the authority of states, drawn from the rough consensus of the Westphalian political geographic diagram, is simultaneously never more entrenched and ubiquitous and never more obsolete and brittle. In the emergence of The Stack, it is not that the state declines per se, but that our contemporary condition is qualified both by a debordering perforation and liquefaction of this system's ability to maintain a monopoly on political geography, and by an overbordering, manifest as an unaccountable proliferation of new lines, endogenous frames, anomalous segments, medieval returns, infomatic interiors, ecological externalities, megacity states, and more. These zones fold and flip-flop on top of one another, interweaving into abstract and violent spatial machines of uncanny jurisdictional intricacy (Bratton, 2015 p. 7)

### For remainder of Section I:

Vukovich (need for non-western sinological narratives of China)

Border as Method, or the Multiplication of Labour

The Conflict Shoreline: Colonization as Climate Change in the Negev desert

Slow Violence (Rob Nixon)

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<sup>1</sup> Reflexive/Projective: See Svetlana Alexievich's (Chernobyl Prayer) writing on the 'zone' on page 28 of CP in *contradistinction* to Kelly Easterling's writing on the 'zone' in *Extrastatecraft*. Differences in method.

<sup>2</sup> Naiza for example expressed a similar site interest - New Silk Road - and has a broad practice in Karachi where 'plans include the \$62 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a rhizomatic network of waterways, highways, wind farms, and power plants which will begin in Xinjiang, an autonomous region in Western China, and end with the deepwater Port of Gwadar in the province of Baluchistan, Pakistan'; Patrick expressed an interest in geospatial software and protocological systems of control which might align with a sinofuturistic gamification of Bratton's fictional e-citizenship Ulaanbaatar; Clive expressed an interest in the politics of sound and the vibrative wave-territoriality of land-mines that might doctor into a sonic poetics of the container and port as a sinofuturistic parody of a western Infowars propaganda machine that captures the sound of the new Silk Road as clanking Sino-swarm.

<sup>3</sup> Here governance itself is articulated and configured through the specific technologies and techniques with which it produces its own subjects and objects. It may justify enforcement according to the content of laws, but that governance it itself just as much invented by those techniques as the things that it governs. It is an effect as much as it is a cause of how certain machines and mechanics organise bodies over time.

Gabrielle Hecht - 'Interscalar vehicles for the African anthropocene

## **Section II. Art Practices, Contacts, Leads**

Logistical Nightmares || Checkpoints and Chokepoints || New Normal Programme || Unknown Fields Division || Light Logistics || Concrete Flux Collective || The Apartheid Society of the Political Others: Piraeus Port as Entry Point of Global Capitalism || Sinofuturism || Solveig Sues || Lawrence Lek || Wade Shepherd || Richard Mosse || MARA || 'Material Witness' || Forensis

## **Section III. Propositions, Techniques**

Documentary || Sinofuturist screenplay || Utopia/dystopia/heterotopia  
STS anthropology of mobile phone || OOO Philosophy/Sociology of Strange Stack Geography of Automated Alphaville Container Port || Mobile ethnography of an Accelerationist noms

## **Section IV. Next Steps to Refining Propositions**

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Aiwa Ong -

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