

# The Terraforming

We are pleased to announce  
The Terraforming, the new Strelka  
education program beginning in 2020,  
directed by Benjamin H. Bratton.

The Terraforming refers both to the terraforming that has taken place over the last century and millennia over the course of urbanisation, and to the terraforming that must now be planned and conducted as the planetary design initiative of the next century if true catastrophes are to be prevented. The term 'terraforming' usually refers to transforming the ecosystems of other planets or moons to make them capable of supporting Earth-like life, but the looming ecological consequences of what is called the Anthropocene suggest that in the decades to come, we will need to terraform Earth if it is to remain a viable host for Earth-like life.

The next Strelka education programme will explore the implications of this proposition for urbanism at planetary scale, a venture that is full of risk—technical, philosophical, and ecological. We will explore a renewed Copernican turn, and how the technologically mediated shift away from anthropocentric perspectives is crucially necessary in both theory and practice. The Copernican turn is also a trauma, but this is one that demands more agency, not less.

The research programme will consider the past and future role of cities as a planetary network by which humans occupy the Earth's surface. Planetary itself comes into focus through orbiting imagining and terrestrial modeling technologies (satellites, sensors, servers in sync) that have made it possible to measure climate change with any confidence.

The implications of the shift to urban planetary are perhaps counterintuitive. Instead of reviving ideas of 'nature', we will reclaim 'the artificial'—not as in 'fake', but rather 'designed'—as a foundation which links the mitigation of anthropogenic climate change to the geopolitics

of automation. For this, urban-scale automation is seen as part of an expanded landscape of information, agency, labor, and energy that is part of a living ecology, not a substitute for one. As such, the focus of urban design research shifts toward the governance of infrastructures that operate on much longer timescales than our cultural narratives. What kind of urbanism will the programme propose? An urbanism that is pro-planning, pro-artificial, anti-collapse, pro-universalist, anti-anti-totality, pro-materialist, anti-anti-leviathan, and anti-mythology and pro-egalitarian distribution. It starts with a different set of assumptions: the planet is artificially sentient; climate collapse mitigation and pervasive automation can converge; the concept of 'climate change' is an epistemological accomplishment of planetary-scale computation; automation is a general principle by which ecosystems work; necessary fundamental shifts in geotechnology are likely to precede necessary fundamental shifts in geopolitics; 'surveillance' of carbon flows is a good thing; energy infrastructures based on long term waste cycles are desirable; for ecological carrying capacity 'culture' costs more than science; planetarity requires philosophy in and of outer space; speculative design must focus on what is so deeply functional as to be unlikely; and that, finally, the future becomes something to be prevented as much as achieved.

The vast and quickly changing expanse of Russia's territory is our site condition. From here, we look up out into space and from there back down to the Earth to orient what planetarity should mean. The questions of geotechnology, geoeconomics, geonomos, and geoecology are situated between the world as it appears to us and how we appear to the world as it gazes back at us through the technologies we've made.

The Terraforming is planned as a three-year research cycle, with three cohorts joining us in central Moscow at the Strelka Institute campus for a five-month intensive curriculum with our faculty where we will develop original research projects in collaboration. Our faculty is mostly a reboot from *The New Normal*, both because our research focus is different and because we want to explore a different kind of research outcome and to discover again what form that can take. The cohorts are model urban design practices but are far more heterogeneous than most other programs. Half will be architects and urbanists who think and work at planetary scale, and half will be philosophers, filmmakers, coders, scientists, and various geniuses of peculiar origin. Half will be Russian and half will be international; half will be men and half will be women. As ever, the programme has no tuition, which allows us to admit those who will benefit and benefit from the programme the most.

Our work is trained on Russia and the complexities, trials and opportunities of this deeply strange and amazing country. Here, our contributions to the artificial plan will take shape, and here we will venture into areas that in another context might be unthinkable, too strange or too superproblematic. Some semantics, protocols and formats of planetarity-to-come may come from our most angelic efforts and some may emerge from darker places—and that is allowed for. In the meantime, the question bears repeating as often as needed: if the planet is a camera, *where should the cities go?*

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