THESIS INTRO

What is the right way to think about computation at planetary scale?

It is now commonplace to acknowledge that the Cloud is influencing or will soon influence all aspects of individual and societal life. But granting the proposition begs the question of what the Cloud is and how we may understand, and perhaps shape it.

Several ways of seeing the Cloud have emerged in response to this gap in our conception of the world. Some argue that cloud computing, along with the proliferation of sensors and computers of all sizes advances the basic proposition of modernity: Both increase the empirical throughput into systems of cognition and interpretation, which in turn allow for fine-grained analysis and control, bolstered by advanced technology and understanding.

Others see the Cloud as a dataphagic entity colonizing time and space for its own profit, disrupting businesses with no regard to any qualities of human life that are not included in its algorithmic setup.

These and other ways of seeing the Cloud may all be right in their own way, but it's clear that the Cloud is more than the sum of its parts (or the sum of its critiques). Without a way of talking about the totality of the Cloud, we're bound to mistake the trees for the forest.

Before the emergence of computation at planetary scale, a herculean effort of world-making cohered the world into a single concept: The Westphalian state, an arbitrary yet powerful drawing on the map, is based on an original appropriation of land which constitutes the basis for all further legal and other codes, and remains the primary point of reference in our present world of multi-layered international and sub-national governance.

A key question then becomes if the Cloud can be seen as a technological extension of Westphalian geopolitics, as for example the Chinese conception of a cyberspace completely subjected to national sovereignty seems to imply. Or does the advent of planetary-scale computation herald a new geopolitics with its own morphology and rules?

In what follows, I will examine the proposition that computation at planetary scale constitutes a global megastructure, fully enveloping our world horizontally and vertically. My point of departure is Benjamin Bratton's model of *The Stack*, which describes six layers that constitute this structure: The *User*, the *Interface*, the *Address*, the *City*, the *Cloud* and the *Earth*.

A full response to or articulation of the model is beyond the scope of this work. Instead, the implications of each layer are unpacked by comparing it to one specific contemporary situation that might support it. I hope to see whether there is compelling evidence for a Stack as a geopolitical superstructure *sui generis* coming into being, or already being in place.