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# CLOUD PUNKS AND THE CHALLENGES OF E-SOCIETY

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**ABSTRACT:** The computer changed the world. Then the network, and currently it is the cloud. This paper aims to depict the characteristics of a new social figure we see as the Cloud Punk. Our context is cyberculture, digital media and communication theory. In this context we may say that in this day and age the Cloud Punks have a critical position and an attitude towards information and knowledge that differ from the digital masses that become the new normal in Internet Culture, which are more passive and more social media prone. More than just showing empirical results, this paper aims to be a visionary theoretical framework that introduces the reader to the problem at hand (the digitization and searchability or the cloud-based access for all things), and we expect to make the reader think with these concepts and ideas to improve reflection and thought on today's current digital media scenario surrounding us.

**KEYWORDS:** Cloud Punk; cloud; e-Society; Internet; Digital Culture; Mobile Media.

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## Introduction

**A**UTHORS such as Manovich (2001) think we live in a “meta-media society”. But we shall simplify it as “e-Society”. Thus, this would mean that a meta-medium would exist, an all-encompassing form of media, one system, one form of streaming data. The other side of this issue is that the cloud is basically becoming this, but thankfully, at first, we also have characters such as the Cloud Punks that are notorious for thinking

systematically and mastering what one could call cloudware, the systems and devices acting accordingly to provide optimal user experiences to cement good purchase behaviors. The question is what defines the Cloud Punks and what are today's e-Society's challenges for them?

## 1 Context

In our time much of our access to the Internet and to the cloud has become a primary utility. Something we cannot live without. In this new e-Society, there are new cultures thriving online regarding the usage of apps, the purchase of electronic equipment, but the major trend is that everything is becoming either a super-equipment (e.g., a smartphone) or a service (a cloud service). The separation between online and offline faded away. One picture or document may exist away from the cloud but eventually it will end up there. What we are facing is a digital fifth wave, one in which new characters surface, like

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the Cloud Punks, sometimes on the corporations side, and also sometimes outside the grid, downloading every file they can from pirate web sites. In the meantime most users of the digital space tend to become user-consumers, for they exist online as long as they consume. And here consumerism has nothing to do with purchase of real items but especially with services. We are now subscribers of online services and smartphones have become the remote control in our lives to access the data that is more conveniently stored online on cloud servers. The real question is which Cloud Punks will remain after this digital fifth wave, this digital culture revolution, has passed away? There will be people relying on and defending the cloud, and there will be people against the cloud, since our digital devices serve less and less purposes once they are disconnected from the grid.

## 2 Space

The spaces we tend to be in are spaces of consumption, we purchase online, chat, download files, upload pictures, we post online. We are in spaces designed for authorized consumers. That is what we are: authorized consumers. And in these spaces information flows as we need to be wired. We just need more information. We do not want the void or the emptiness. We want full access. Having total access to the information means to better understand our past and to be hopeful about the future. For the Cloud Punks cities, databases, cultural and technological institutions are the core of society, of e-Society's digital heritage for future generations. And also, it just so happens that for Cloud Punks the Internet is the first medium for all generations, regardless of age, citizenship, religion, politics and identity. In the space of the cloud age the final user has a connection with the system that was designed to harvest the best information out of him, so he feels in the same way, he needs to collect and download data from this system. Cloud Punks use digital space in pursuit of a major connection. In the meantime, brands and corporations weave bridges to understand user-consumers. The new space of e-Society is this realm in which a strategic layout of brands and technology clusters know so much about us, like Amazon, Facebook, Alphabet and Apple, for instance. A new macro-culture emerges that is the same in almost every country we come by. And as for the cloud, it becomes a history-medium, since everything we do online is stored, examined, explained, understood and used for profiling us with Artificial In-

telligence (AI). We are becoming history. We just have to accept or uprising towards the cloud. After all, the cloud is the new organizing metaphor for computers. As Kevin Kelly puts it: "flows, tags and clouds" (Kelly, 2016, LOC 968-5810) are the new foundational units of this third regime of digital culture.

We have to accept that data is the new capital. Every app, system, corporation, military-grade organization is looking for this capital. Brands and commercial entrepreneurs do too. However, things are only findable in the cloud because once there was direct digital production or a process of first digitization. In this new digital space, e-Society's biggest feature is search-capital. If things are easy to find, that is good. If we want to be found, and then we are, that is good too, but Cloud Punks in some cases rather want to stay in the dark.

Let's not forget that much as the analog music player Sony Walkman changed cities and their users (Gibson, 2012, 13), the same thing happened with the Apple iPod. But by the time the Apple iPhone was introduced back in 2007 something different took place. The smartphone began to be our remote control for online access. The cloud age had begun. Of course there still are mass media, and we still speak of space, place, and mental zone, but the cloud is a hybrid spot that seems fascinating, it is what powers social media and Microsoft Office, pirate download web sites and e-commerce giants as Alibaba and Amazon. Since we are talking of space, one has to separate two distinct concepts: first, there is connections (what we have on Facebook), and secondly, there is relationships. We need the second ones, but the first ones make it easier for us to get there.

## 3 Characters

The new Cloud Punks ultimately want free access to all information or foremostly full access to the biggest amount of information in a single digital handheld device, like a smartphone, or a tablet, but still with a laptop in most cases. We want the power of the cloud in our hands, even in offline mode, reclaiming what once was defended by the Electronic Frontier Foundation, that "information wants to be free". Today, one Cloud Punk alone may have as much power as a corporation. One Cloud Punk may behave as a legion, he is thinking as system that wants to enable social change based on the cloud. Cloud Punks are archivists, they store data, they run collections and examine their data for future purposes, whether they be aca-

democratic, artistic, cultural or political. In the long run, Cloud Punks are resembling tribes of One, as Sherry Turkle points out (2015, 4). And these new characters of e-Society also reveal themselves as being great information managers. What happens from here is that we are witnessing the emergence of new characters that are typical to a post-device or post-computer phase. And in the future this will just be labelled as the cloud age. We will be laughing that once we used computers offline. What would be the point of that? And now, we cannot live without being wired to the grid as the smartphones, tablets and laptops are always connected devices.

We also seem to become more isolated, despite all the social media usage. For Turkle we are but “network pilots”, isolated with our digital devices, regardless of age or generation (2015, 29). There was a time when the portal to the web was the computer. Now the portal is the smartphone, and the cloud is the new thing, a stream of streaming services that only authorized and legitimate users happen to subscribe. Everything became a process, no gear or service is totally finished. All things resort to upgrades and updates, so we get to be lost in a never-ending presentness. Again it is not a “no future” from the punk era (late 70s), but it is a “new no future” from the 21<sup>st</sup> century stigma. We are too concerned with the vast amount of information we have to deal with in such short notice. Information is released on a never-ending pace.

We know that the computer gave birth to all of this thanks to the triumph of “anarchic exploration” as underlined by Turkle, but what we have before us now is something bigger, it is both a web of changes as well as it is a macro-service. Take for instance an app as WeChat. There is a world of things a user could do with this super-app. The trend that follows the cloud is the super-apps. People will not be in several media or apps or services. They will use one simple thing. And again this takes us back to the tension between the TV viewer with a single channel and his relation with the broadcast content. Today we still feel differently, we want even more access to information, and even if the cloud and the whole web becomes a single device, app or web site, we will still have characters fighting for more access to information. This is where the Cloud Punks come in. They want more. They do not think as a single-channel or a mono-tasking person. They are omni-channel people and perform as multitaskers.

We face an expanding datification of every-

thing. And the Cloud Punks are the new pilots, the new legion, the new pure e-Society members. French philosopher Gilles Deleuze once said that there is a war machine and that there are also nomads. The nomads are ultimately internalized by the war machine. The problem is that “there is no more periphery” (2004, 260). And the periphery is where nomads used to come from. This means that characters that seem to be more politically leaning to left-wing (like the nomads) tend to become absorbed by the capitalistic war machine of right-wing. Another interpretation is that the cloud wants to integrate the Cloud Punks. Some Cloud Punks are hackers, others are activists. But both these types are cultural capital that the major corporations find to be good assets to their operations. While most users are obliged to subscribe services, the Cloud Punks have more options. Cloud Punks do not want to be digitally suppressed. They want to change the system much as the cyberpunks wanted to do between the 1980s till the 2000s. However, since the 9/11 events on the World Trade Center that the cloud become more than a commercial venue, it became a structure of political control and a form of examining e-Society’s behavior in order to predict its future through social media surveillance. Services are a challenge for Cloud Punks anyway. If Kelly is right, and “products will become services and processes” (2016, LOC 120-5810), then everything that the web represented is turning into a subscription service. Information, after all no longer wants to be free.

## 4 Challenges

More information and products will be available in an online-only basis. Also users of digital media will be locked in ecosystems, highly dependent on “commitment devices” (Goldstein, 2011). An Apple iPhone is an example of a commitment device, since it locks the user in a cloud of services of one corporation. This seems to have triggered a global trend among digital media manufacturers and cloud service providers and in e-commerce giants as well, like Amazon, once an online bookstore and now a cloud and hardware provider.

As the word “computer” sounds backward, there is also an issue regarding cloudware: there is no such thing as naïf connections. All connections and links have a purpose. And uploads and downloads will be replaced by time streams. We will have to be always connected to a media system, regardless of the brand of it. The cloud is a challenge as it marks the birth of a sort of a connector-event

and Cloud Punks are the new original information-gatherers fighting for the users. Social media, for instance, like Facebook are "machine-zones" (Turkle, 2015, 72). Its model spreads and so we all integrate the macro-narrative of the history-medium that it is the cloud and the streaming services. Swipe on the touch-screen is not an innocent task as it seems.

Cloud Punks are like a new tribe of e-Society, they retrieve movies, pictures, music, documents and other data from the cloud. They are the new hunters. The answer lies back in the computer and the early world wide web. The digital media have "retribalized" us much as Marshall McLuhan had predicted (1994) regarding the then called "new media". For the corporations we are digital masses, meso-segments or market niches.

Another crucial aspect is that when someone is talking to a Cloud Punk, he is actually talking to world. Hierarchy is over. Cloud Punks are media people, they think as a system and they have a power of their own, they master the web sites, the computers, the mobile media and the cloud. But then again, the computer was never just a computer. The computer was designed to aspire for the network. Same thing happens with Cloud Punks, they were never just users, they were more than just actors in the network. And they work, think and perform in a Matrix-like manner.

## Conclusion

As the cloud and the corporations take over control of the world, Cloud Punks seem to respond, with technology, with people, with messages, making data available. Should we forget the WikiLeaks case, which happened be linked to negative behavior, the Cloud Punks think more in creative ways of democratizing culture and knowledge and information to the digital masses right away. Although we might take the digital media for granted, it is a fact that never in history, even in the history-medium that is the cloud, so many people have produced so much content. YouTube created the YouTuber, Twitter created the Twitter deck, much as MTV had created the Video-Jockey or the Radio created the Disc-Jockey. The cloud has created the Cloud Punk. The cloud has its own audience, and knows it, tracking it in every bit and every move. The interpretation that this e-Society makes from space is different. Being logged on all the time abolishes boundaries between leisure and work, weekends and working days, but ultimately we are lucky to have access to a vast amount of data. Manovich assures that "the computer is cen-

tral to the meta-media society" (2000). And the computer is still the key-gear in all the systems that surround us, the computer preceded the network, the smartphone and the cloud. Within this context, one cannot find odd that Cloud Punks may behave purely against ignorance. Cloud Punks realize that information and knowledge are turning into a commodity and they happen to think differently in an e-Society where the new normal is to become part of the digital masses. In the meantime, the concept of "device" disappears, all that is left for us is search-capital, cloud usage, cloud storage, and especially mindspace. We need digital space to rethink our culture.

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