

Frequently Asked Questions

Trans* Feminist Counter Cultural Action

The Institute for Technology In the Public Interest



Frequently Asked Questions

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Frequently Asked Questions about Trans* Feminist Counter Cloud Action ✨

This text was imported and adapted from the collectively written and edited FAQ for the
International Trans*Feminist Digital Depletion Strike (March 8, 2023)



Why Trans* Feminist Counter Cloud Action? ✨

Too many aspects of life depend on The Cloud. The expansionist, extractivist and financialized modes of Big Tech turn all lively and creative processes into profit. This deeply affects how we organise, and care for resources. Many public institutions such as hospitals, universities, archives and schools have moved to rented software-as-a-service for their core operations. The interests of Big Tech condition how we teach, make accessibility, learn, know, organise, work, love, sleep, communicate, administrate, care, and remember. Counter Cloud Action calls for a hyperscaledown of extractive digital services, and for an abundance of collective organising. we understand this fight to be about labour, care, anti-racism, queer life and trans★feminist techno-politics.

Especially now our dependency on Big Tech Cloud seems intractable, it is time to reclaim space for renegotiating what might be *possible*. We want to imagine different infrastructures for collective life with and without computation. By calling for cloud resistance, we want to center slow trans★feminist, anti-racist and anti-imperial server practices. We want local digital storage, self-hosted videocalls, and collaborative server hosting. We want antifa-infras, low-energy graphics and queer circuits. We want accessible development, sustainable tech-maintenance, and feral supply chains. We want the end of work conditioned by Big Tech, and ultimately, the end of work. We want systemic, joyful, techno-political change.

We mobilize from many places: self-managed projects, community centers, public institutions, cultural organisations, businesses and other constellations. Counter Cloud Action could mean to try withhold from using, feeding, or caring for The Big Tech Cloud. We invent, propose, translate and mirror local modes of Counter Cloud Action. We party in the ruins of Big Tech whilst descending and dissenting from the cloud. We experiment with minimizing our use of cloud-based applications, discuss the implications of the cloud regime, document the depletion of community resources by Big Tech infrastructure, remind our organisations to organise digital infrastructures in our interest, dream up alternative methods of otherwise exuberant joyful survival, and imagine local networks for transnational modes of communicating and operating in transversal solidarity.

The Cloud

What is The Cloud? ✨

The Cloud is a term for centrally managed computational power, with a promise to optimize for flexibility or agility. The Cloud brings huge amounts of computers together, and then offers smaller and larger bits of computation as a service. The Cloud we want to resist is run by Big Tech companies such as Amazon, Google and Microsoft, who rent out processing power to other companies or organisations.

The Big Tech Cloud is not just other people's computers. It consolidates a software paradigm that counts on continuously updated software-as-a-service, with scalable computational infrastructure and lots of smartphones, and the political economy of publicly traded Big Tech companies. The profits of Big Tech Cloud count on the extraction of energy, minerals, data and racialised labour.

What is up with The Cloud? ✨

Because Cloud companies (Amazon, Alphabet, Meta, Microsoft) are owned by shareholders, they need to prove growth year on year. This means that they should always become more efficient and expedient, to allow for their shareholders to profit. Once digital processes are in place, they need to be expanded into new areas continuously, which increases the need for more computation, or more Cloud services. What's often called MORE COMPUTE!

Cloud services are designed to scale up. This means that we expect always more of them, in terms of availability, speed and reliability. As technological infrastructures expand, they are less and less things that can be taken care of by ourselves, as a community (for example, we see groups trying to run email servers without cloud services, finding it nearly impossible because of the complexity/speed etc. expected). It is no longer an option to develop, implement or even pick digital technologies and modes of maintenance.

Individuals, public institutions and collectives depend on these services for their core operations. As IT departments close one after the other, our skills, desires and affordances are resources to be extracted, while the agile logic of Big Tech transforms healthcare, education, activism, communication, information – even dating. Inventive, grounded and unorthodox practices are depleted or become unimaginable. It is a vicious cycle: the more we cannot take care of the tools that we use daily, the more reliant we are on companies to provide answers to even simple issues. And technologies that are needed for accessibility and as disability organising tools, time and again, fail to center the needs of those who can only participate with their operations.

This false paradigm of efficiency renders us useless and destroys our resilience. As a ‘user’ there is no need to worry, our desire to be efficient is managed and we do not need to think. Reducing subjects and communities to ‘user’ or ‘user groups’ distracts us from thicker and more complex conditions and relations.

Governments increasingly count on The Cloud, and often collaborate with Big Tech to provide essential material infrastructures such as electricity networks, water-supplies, roads,

land, cables, etcetera. The Big Tech Cloud in this way depletes public infrastructures and public goods, but avoids paying taxes.

Huge amounts of energy and materials are needed to run server farms: toxic chemicals to clean water for cooling, minerals for chips and components and metals for server racks are produced under exploitative labour conditions. Enormous amounts of energy, provided by fossil fuels or extractive large scale renewables keep them going. This extraction follows colonial faultlines and depends on racialised labour.

How do I know if I am using The Cloud? ✨

Most things done online today depend in some shape or form on the Big Tech Cloud.

As digital infrastructures are about computed relations, the answer to this question also involves asking: Are my family and friends on The Cloud? Are my working conditions organised by The Cloud?

Things that depend on cloud processing:

- Most things you do with your Smartphone: using apps and synchronisation services (eg. calendar, contacts, photos).
- When you sign up to an online service (like Zoom, Spotify, Netflix or WhatsApp) or platform (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Tinder, Twitter).
- Using free communication infrastructure like Gmail. Increasingly, institutional email services are also provided through cloud services like the Microsoft Cloud (Exchange accounts), see below.
- Any agreement that you make to store your files and access them remotely, like photos, or documents (for example:

Wetransfer, Dropbox, Google Drive / Google Docs, Microsoft 365).

- AI tools (like ChatGPT, DALL-E, Midjourney et. al).
- Digitally managed supply chain processes (like ordering via Amazon, or delivering via DHL).
- Locally running cloud based software on your computer (like Microsoft 365, Adobe Creative Cloud, Dropbox...).
- Anything in communication with someone who is using cloud services (like a Gmail address).

(Digital) things that do not need to depend on The Big Tech Cloud:

- Information stored, and processes run on in-house servers, on distinct computers elsewhere or on harddrives and USB sticks.
- Communication protocols, like email sending/receiving do not need to depend on cloud, but might (think: Gmail)
- Accessing a file on a local server with a browser

Nextcloud (sic!) and Big Blue Button are Free Software applications that allow people to host their own instances, so they are not part of the Big Tech Cloud. But even if these tools are part of very different political economies and ecosystems, they continue the software-as-a-service paradigm, and are sometimes (not always) hosted on Amazon or Google Cloud.

How do I know if my working conditions are organised by the Cloud? ✨

See above, plus if two or more of the following situations apply to your situation:

- The organisation you work for operates with a cloud logic - offering services, focused on growth, land grabbing.
- The organisation uses online storage for exchanging and storing files such as microsoft or google drive.
- Heater vs Cloud, Switching on an extra heater or boiling three kettles at once regularly brings down all the infrastructures you use for your work
- When the server is down, work stops.
- Your care work demands you use microsoft sway, google drive, whatsapp and you are encouraged never to turn it off.
- There is no more IT department, or there is no way to speak to a person on site.
- The IT department does not support your specific set-up and the default programs are cloud based such as adobe, microsoft etc.
- You had a phone on your desk and you don't anymore.
- Your journey, route or timetable is updated and communicated through a calendar app such as outlook or google calendar or lcal....
- You often can't participate because your phone isn't new enough, smart enough, without enough data.
- Meetings are by default taking place in a microsoft teams or zoom room.
- You have to sign in to a cloud based HR software to view payslips, to send invoices, to get reimbursed.
- The servers have better conditions (temperature control, protection, maintenance) than most workers.
- For on-line accessibility, your company defaults to zoom and otter AI-captions.
- You are asked to use eventbrite for events you organise.
- The preferred supplier for most items is amazon.
- Volunteers are paid in amazon vouchers.

- Welfare is calculated and paid out through an online cloud infrastructure - what would an example be?
- You are asked to have a smart phone to authenticate your communications.
- It is expected that you have cloud profile on cloud based social media.

Many of these situations are not anymore in the hands of organisations and companies. Cloudification is also actively encouraged by local, national and European governments through ongoing investments in on-line tax management, transformation of digital administration for welfare, reduction of cash payments, and increased reliance on digital identification.

Isn't The Cloud contributing towards Net Zero?



The promise of Net Zero has become a seductive argument for organisations to move to The Cloud, especially now they are increasingly asked to prove how they are reducing carbon emissions. Computation is always resource intensive, but The Cloud promises to do more with less environmental impact.

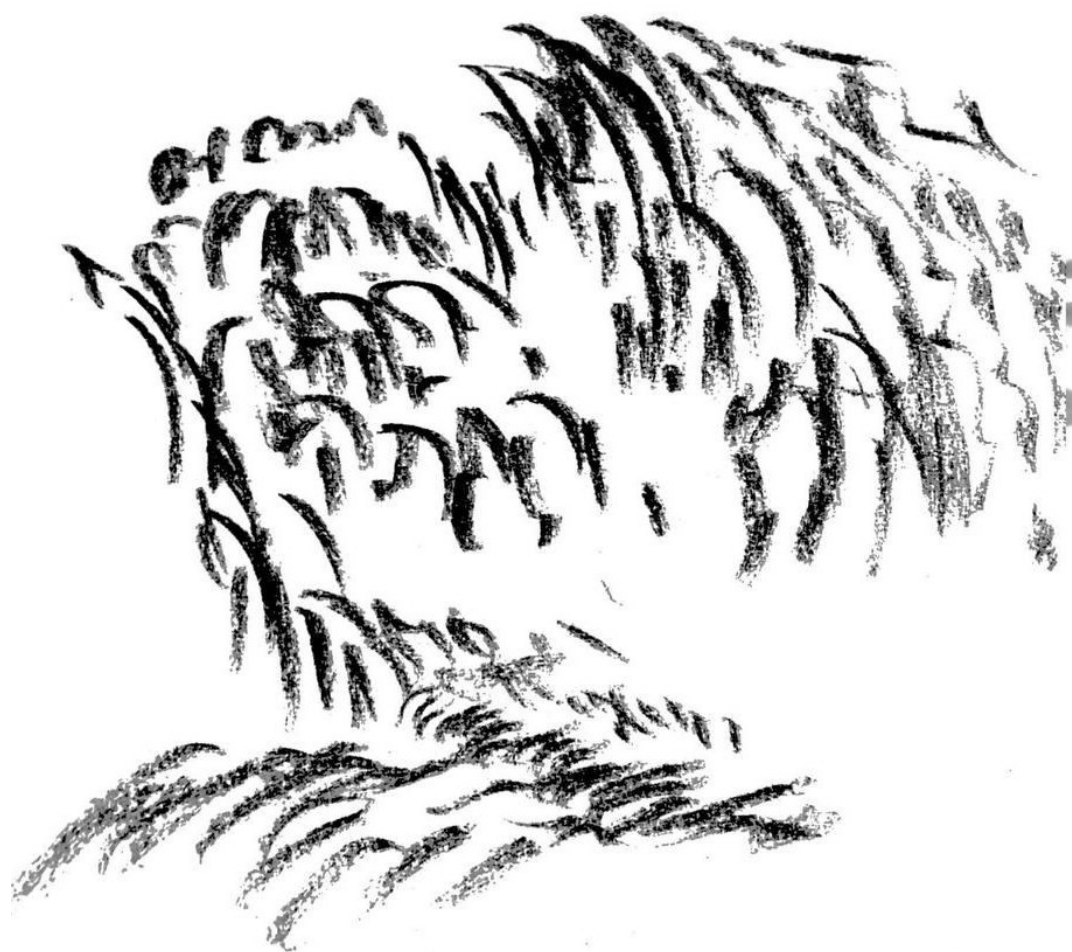
The Cloud actually goes towards more compute, never less. In line with that, Big Tech proposes that the only way to address climate urgencies is through scaling up in order to increase efficiency, and thus actually drives further depletion and extraction.

We do want public institutions and collectives to be accountable and to actively transform themselves. And we also need accountable solidarity infrastructures to support each other to make small, local changes with real possibilities for transformation

also on a global scale. Relying on privatised Big Tech to provide solutions to carbon emissions won't work.

One issue seems to be that self-hosted projects or local service providers do not have the capacity, training or resources to measure and deliver the required analytics with equal authority. But we think they do have the capacity to develop more intelligent modes of dealing with computing within limits, rather than banking on the promises of Net Zero.

Through focusing on administrative and quantified solutions, the work of coming to terms with the possibility of climate collapse, and the feelings of grief and desperation that might be necessary to transform our actions, are minimized. This dynamic undermines transnational solidarity and the understanding of the need for interlinked struggles.



Counter Cloud Action

*What does trans*feminist mean? ✨*

This strike is called “trans*feminist” to bring out some of the necessary intersectional and intrasectional aspects around the star (*). The term thickens the complexity of feminisms, in solidarity with fights about labour, care, anti-racism, ableism, ageism, queer life and techno-politics. In non-Anglo-Saxon cultures, especially in Spanish speaking contexts, the term “trans*feminist” is used instead of the English term “queer” which often remains untranslated, and therefore exclusive. Because the day of the strike – March 8th – has a strong binary and essentialist tradition, we felt it was extra important to be explicit about the general transversality of struggles, as well as to side with trans-gender struggles specifically.

Why are so many (cultural) organisations involved in Counter Cloud Action? ✨

Most of the initial organizers are organisations with a long-term commitment to everyday trans*feminist technoscientific cultural politics. They have been sharing concerns about the take-over of cultural practicing by Big Tech in various conversations, collaborations and intertwined networks.

But Counter Cloud Action does not rely on public institutions only. Public institutions are complicit in upholding nation-states or wider structures of population government. This is why we are ready to mobilize on both sides to reclaim a stake on what kind of infrastructuring takes place around us. And it includes rejecting

the ways in which institutions contribute to the modern, colonial, commercial and patriarchal regime.

Why bring trans feminism and digital depletion together? ✨*

Collectives, organisations and individuals convoked a strike on March 8 2023. Historical feminist care strikes are addressing infrastructures for caretaking and maintenance, and these issues apply strongly to technological infrastructures as well.

Feminism is and will always be anticapitalist by default. All objections and twists to that affirmation are defenses of a worlding that happens explicitly against and despite dissident, excluded and/or minoritarian modes of existence. That is why bringing down the cloud needs to be a fundamental horizon of contemporary trans*feminist struggles.

What does Counter Cloud Action have to do with labour action? ✨

As we wrote above, Counter Cloud Action is about labour, care, anti-racism, queer life, anti-ableist and trans★feminist technopolitics. We will join all possible fights because we understand the multi-front implications of the cloud to be deeply interconnected and hence calling for interlocking struggles.

Why is October 12th another Counter Cloud Action day? ✨

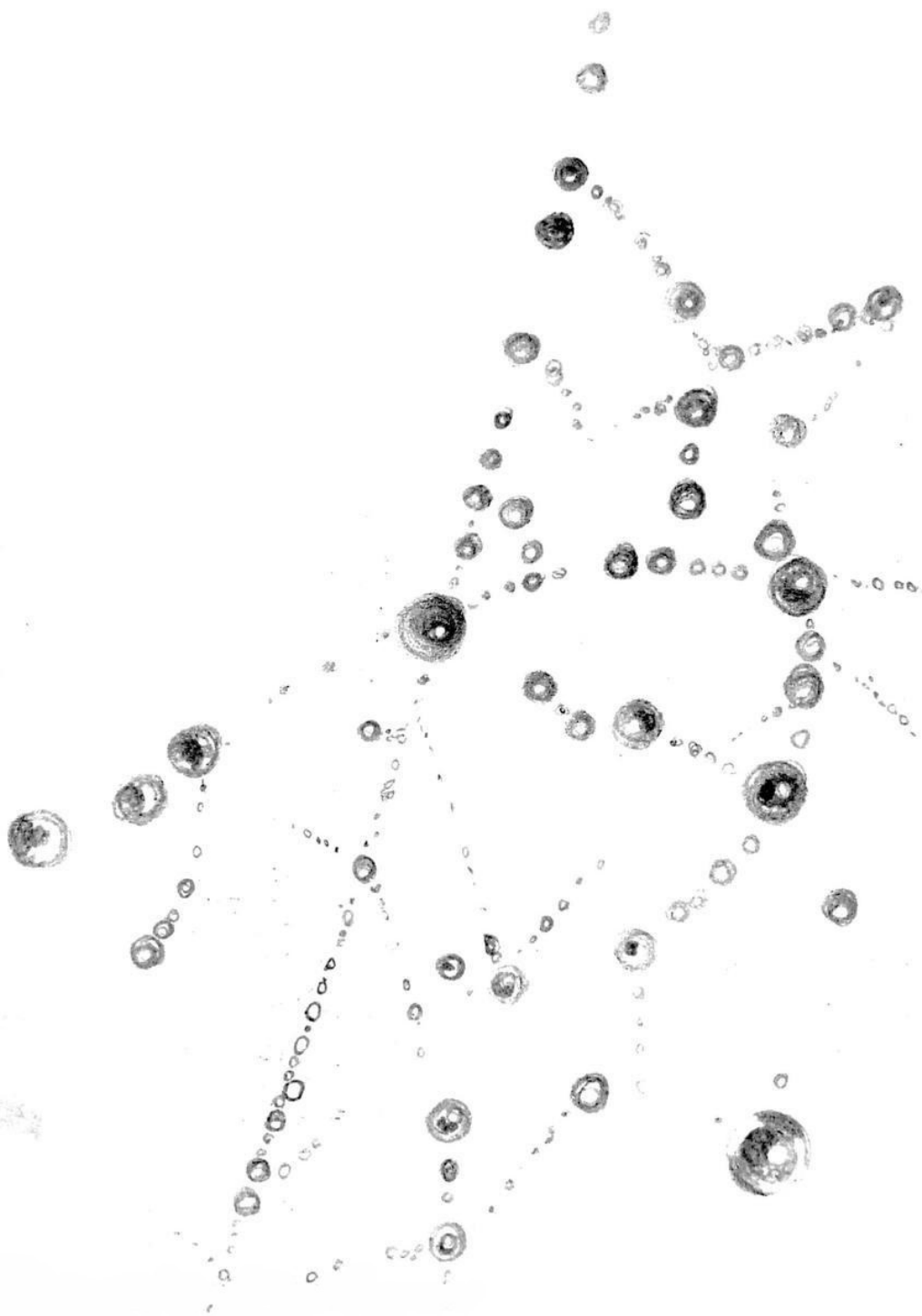
On the 12th of October, communities and individuals involved in Counter Cloud Action therefore (re)join ongoing struggles against

genocidal, ecocidal and epistemicidal forms of oppression, extraction, erasure and depletion.

The 12th October marks the trans-oceanic invasion of Abya Yala (aka the Americas) and is nowadays actively celebrated by many as "Columbus Day" or "day of Hispanity" (sic). Activists have reclaimed the day to remember the atrocities of colonialism and to celebrate Indigenous and anti-colonial resistance instead: "nada que celebrar" (nothing to celebrate)!

Historical colonial capitalism was built with stolen resources and labour; it also imposed logics and ways of thinking. Today's capitalist Cloud Regime relies deeply on the continuation of global chains of extraction, exploitation and dispossession.

For more, see this [collective statement](#).



Getting involved

Where can I find examples of Trans Feminist Counter Cloud Action? ✨*

March 8 ✨

2023

Call to strike with many entry points + static version

Activities:

- ... in a trans*feminist world, call for zine (Stuttgart)
- FLINTA* No-Cloud-CryptoParty at Heart of Code (Berlin)
- Researching in Two Acts (Basel)
- Meet-up for collective cloud drawing and discussion (Dundee)
- Pickets in the Cloud (Barcelona)
- Vitrine, collective reading and picket signs (Brussels)
- counter-cloud stories (London)
- Dancing in the ruins of Big Tech (Rotterdam)
- A Videostore After the End of the World (Copenhagen)
- Ludd walk (Leicester)
- Re-writing the kernel - server stories from a trans-feminist future (Nantes)
- open closet day around the home-server (Paris)
- Live Radio Transmission with local feminist group "8 march collectief" + Digital Depletion strike call (Antwerpen)
- Servus Counter Cloud Clinic (Linz)
- Demo + rally on main square + Feminist*innen lesen Feminist*innen + Radio Program (Linz)

+ also many more covert, intimate, private, hidden actions and/or activities without webpages in a.o. Aarhus, Tbilisi, Ghent, Liverpool, Amsterdam, Graz ...

Image log: <https://vvvvvvara.org/logs/digitaldepletionstrike/>

May 1 ✨

2023

[Not a strike, but still a day/month of struggles]

- [Be wary of chemical mercy](#) with Marta Echaves and Jara Rocha (09.05.2023, Barcelona)
- [School of elephants in the room](#), May Day edition (04.05.2023, Barcelona)

October 12

2023

(coming up)

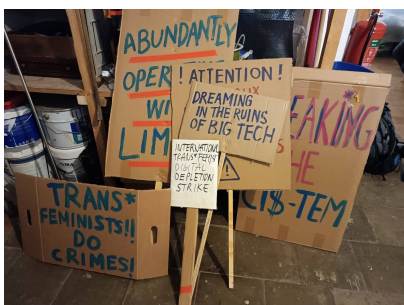
Where can I download stickers, posters, e-mail responders or webpage covers? ✨

- [Many slogans](#), gif animations etc. gathered by TITiPI
- [Stickers](#) for the International Trans★Feminist Digital Depletion Strike, March 8th 2023 and beyond, David Benque
- [Digital Depletion posters](#) by Batool Desouky and Cristina Cochior for NEoN. [Download here](#)
- [Poster generator](#) designed and updated in the context of the web to print workshop L'idéal anarchique
- [E-mail autoresponder](#) by Shusha Niederberger and Magdalena Tyżlik-Carver

- In a transfeminist world ... [zines](#)
- A 3d printable [T*F camera cover](#) by George Simms

How can I contact others for more Trans* Feminist Counter Cloud Action? ✨

Sign up for the [mailinglist](#) (low traffic) and send us a message.



COUNTER

January

February

TRANS*FEMINIST

March

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Digital Depletion Strike

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May

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Make Amazon Pay!

July

August

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¡NADA QUE CELEBRAR!

October

November

December

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¡NADA QUE CELEBRAR!

ACTION DAYS