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## Writing the Feminist Internet: a Chthonian Feminist Internet Theory for the twenty first century

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### ABSTRACT

This paper analytically responds to the collaborative performance work *Writing the Feminist Internet* as a motif of fourth wave feminism. It probes at the edge of Internet dark spaces that are often occupied by those who point to complacency in engagement with networking systems, by drawing auxiliary attention to the apparatus. Further examination sheds light on the valences and anarchy of technopolitics that transpired and reflects on the call for ‘hybrid of feminist activist efforts’ noted by Emma A. Jane. Positioning towards ‘a recalibrated approach to collectivism’ (2015, 285) Jane continues to give rise to a vast communal realm for the expression of alternative behaviours. In building upon the feminist ‘wave’ metaphor there is acknowledgement that the undercurrents of nautical lineages come to endure through ‘debt, or inheritance’ more often than a confluence of flows. The findings reveal that the potency of a chthonic feminist internet theory lies in its indeterminate stance. In conclusion, it is proposed that ambivalence and prominence in obscurity in such expansive ‘dark social spaces’ is where new meanings and enunciations can brew and be read as a source of critical and aesthetic ambiguity, amongst the highly revered principles of disarray, pandemonium and incompleteness.


### KEYWORDS

Materialist informatics; feminist theory; experiential pedagogy; philosophy of technology; artistic research; xenoglossia

### Introduction

To swell the readers imagination of what a feminist internet is, and what it could become, this article refers to feminist webserver communities as chthonic ‘dark social spaces’ (Heemsbergen et al. 2021, n.p.) to pose broader questions about the convergence of theory, art practice and feminist waves to ‘do whatever we know how to order it to perform’ (Lovelace cited in Menabrea 1842, n.d.).

The aim of this article is to advance a chthonic feminist critical internet theory, first and foremost kindled by the edicts of science fiction writer Ursula LeGuin who instructs, ‘Don’t look straight at the sun. Go into a dark bar for a bit and have a beer with Dionysius, every now and then’ (Le Guin 1976, xvii). The chthonian is a locus that refers to ‘that which is beneath the surface, the underworld and its state of darkness’ (Fontelieu 2020, n.p.). It can also be acknowledged as analogous to feminist computer subcultures, those whose activities frequently occur under the radar of sanctioned culture. A key tactic for proposing the term

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chthonic is to reorient enquiry towards the murkier side of feminist webserver peer production, in order to counterpose such tendencies of how the 'adjective "dark" may bring to mind illegal or immoral activity' (Gehl and McKelvey 2019, 223). Darkness is routinely deemed as the symbol of using power for personal gain or 'evil' nevertheless a chthonic deity, 'the carrier of the projection of human nature's instinctive drives and dark, rejected propensities . . . is also a fertile and divine source of abundance (Fontelieu 2020, n.p.).' In this way, the Internet is envisioned as a 'dark social space' (Heemsbergen et al. 2021, n.p.) as place, where culture and speculative realism, fiction and imagining invoke a potent understanding of the complexities of these ontologies in the conception of a chthonic feminist critical theory.

Over the past three decades, computer culture has generated numerous discourses, most conspicuously in the context of copyright licencing, opensource software, and deterministic automation. Expanding upon the 'dark social' to be chthonic can be considered both a critique of the usual instrumental perception of computation, and a metaphor to elucidate the abundant convergence of exchange as a stirring prolific space, oriented towards profusion. This vast idea of modern computation was first articulated almost two centuries ago by Ada Lovelace, whose depiction of computing capabilities contained transcendental and symbolic 'Notes' (cited in Menabrea [1842] n.d.). This proposition contends that below layers of obfuscation her revelations endure in the emergences of bio-technical-cultural transformations of the twenty-first century. One example is the interpretation of Lovelace's visions in line with computer programmer Ted Nelson who coined 'hypertext' and speaks of programming as a 'weaving of plans of events (and where they are to take place) – the choreography of happenings' (Nelson 1987 [1974], 40). This intertwining of people converging amidst temporalities and hemispheres enabled through a composition of computational networks and webserver software has become a common daily ritual for many of us.<sup>1</sup>

Informed by the epistemologies of fourth wave feminism (Clarke Mane 2012; Jane 2016), the article examines a motley crew of threads, perspectives and behaviours that manifested during the online performances of *Writing the Feminist Internet (WtFI) 2020*. To2012 depict the embodied, situated, inexorable, cherished, and radical ways in which the performance enabled participants to conduct provocative frolics on the front lines of text. *Writing the Feminist Internet (WtFI) 2020* is based on extensive fieldwork within computer subcultures, consisting of ethnographic participation and observation, informed by feminist genealogies that are spectral and manifold, illuminating the plurality agendas that constitute computer mediated interaction.

Amongst this description where obscure symbolic elements, wayward strategies, indeterminate offerings transmit elsewhere, the cauldron of the Internet is an anchor point for the chthonic feminist theory, holding a vast array of materials and brews of transgenerational and transdisciplinary feminist processes. Harboring what, how and when we contest common understandings of unusual Internet practices, they become:

highly wrought and so covered over with accretions of alien matter . . . hubble-bubble, swarm and chaos. We are peering over the edge of a cauldron in which fragments of all shapes and savours seem to simmer; now and again some vast form heaves itself up and seems about to haul itself out of chaos (Woolf. 1926, n.p.).

Notwithstanding the obvious connection of cauldrons and spellcasting to sorceresses, the current adverse associations and stigma, could be said to be residual effect of 'the medieval war on witches' (Dulchinos 2011, 76), alluding to the continual battle for women online to be considered in unbiased ways, in local and global contexts.

The source of contemporary computation rests firmly in the lap of Ada Lovelace, a site of chthonian expurgation (Stein 1984). Lovelace affirmed in 1842: 'The Analytical Engine has no pretensions whatever to originate anything. It can do whatever we know how to order it to perform' (Lovelace cited in Menabrea 1842, n.d.). Comparable to the obscurity of Lovelace, the Queen of Computing (Harrison 1900, 112), is Persephone, Queen of the stygian Netherworld, the chthonic deity of spring, flowers, death, life, vegetation and destruction. Described as a 'wilful creature' (Dillon 2001, 104) works of art frequently depict Persephone holding a box (or vessel) of which is said to diminish her prominence (Harrison 1900, 103) see [Figure 1](#). The contents of Persephone's mysterious container filled with 'Stygian sleep' percolates obliteration. Among other conceivable readings where for example, 'no such gesture of thanks has come from the Australian authorities to those numerous souls' (Wright 2017, n.p.), such oblivion offers yet another eerie reminder of the women 'computers' operating in the shadows of anonymity.



**Figure 1.** Chthonic stygian deity Isis-Persephone holding a sistrum in the left and the right hand clasping a box. 'Archaeological Museum in Herakleion. Statue of Isis-Persephone holding a sistrum. Temple of the Egyptian gods, Gortyn. Roman period (180-190 A.C.)'. Image: Wolfgang Sauber (4 April 2009), Creative Commons Attribution-Share

A chthonic feminist critical Internet theory can provide some accoutrements for the reader to appreciate the nuances present in these complex relationships and genealogies. In line with expanded communication milieus and cultures of materialist informatics, infrastructure can be understood to be made up of cyber physical systems. This performance work of WtFI (2020) highlights its neomaterialist spirit that ‘a political project that calls upon us to combat the modern colonial tendency to presume that one framework can be marshalled to account for all the others (Van Der Tuin and Nocek 2015, 820)’. Users – known collectively here as participants – divulge the potency of chthonic feminist internet theory, one that rests in the undefined informants and intermediaries witnessed through and within the practice of xenoglossia. A mystical ritual where the speech arrives through a body from an undetermined informant (Patai 1983). In conclusion it is proposed that the autonomous ambivalent expanse of chthonic feminist spaces are where new meanings can ferment in vessels that brew on the principles of engaged autonomy, disorder, pandemonium and incompleteness.

### Reimagining internet sovereignty as Feminist Laissez-Faire

WtFI (2020) was a tryptic of two-hour experimental writing sessions that invited the public to engage in editing and expanding upon a draft set of ‘10 working points’ (Mauro-Flude 2018, n.p.). In collaboration with three festivals and symposiums each iteration of subsequent sessions intended to enfold all the ‘feminist waves \*waves\* \0/ /0/’ (Mauro-Flude 2018, n.p.). The working points were then provided as a springboard for participants to erase, contest, remap, reconfigure in the performative writing act of ontological positioning in relation to one another. Collaborators irreverently augmented the numeric stability of the 10 principles. For instance, in Figure 2 we can see additions of ‘-1’ and ‘0 zero’. The principles were adapted from a pamphlet ‘10 working points for artists in the new divisions of labour’ by Schneider (2010), in turn, yet another derivative – a zealous translation of Petty’s (1899) manuscript on the consignment of labour.

Notably, one of main proponents of this *laissez-faire* theory of economy was Charles Babbage, the engineer who, assisted by Ada Lovelace, conceived an early version of a mechanical computer known as the Difference and Analytical Engine. An indication of Babbage obliviousness to the enormous density of this machine, Lovelace’s note’s observe, ‘just as the Jacquard-loom weaves flowers and leaves. Here, it seems to us, resides much more of originality than the Difference Engine can be fairly entitled to claim’ (cited in Menabrea 1842, n.d.). Erasure in the realm of writing and technopolitics is not apolitical, nor ahistorical. Elaborating upon the spurious nature of property, ownership and proprietary software, feminist historian Hanna Musial bears witness to:

The forgotten female laborers, whose removal from that history is paralleled by the erasure of the work of ethnic or indigenous . . . coders . . . technology itself becomes a medium of critical theory . . . not only as a tool of “social dreaming” . . . but also as a vehicle for a radical critical . . . practice . . . often as a remedy to legal and political disempowerment (Musial 2018, 166–7).

Concentrating on gendered racial and socio-cultural inequalities, Bailey and Trudy ‘reflect how misogynoir functions in social and institutional settings’ (2018, 766). They discuss racial injustice through lack of citational practice (and hence eradication), particularly in social media platforms such as Twitter by popular culture figures. In this spirit, a chthonic

feminist internet theory is posed as a means of taking back, salvaging and recovering previously appropriated antidotes, anecdotes and other undetermined offerings by women that have been erroneously diminished.

Contributors of WtFI (2020) were invited to initially meet on Jitsu (an open-source video conferencing platform) which served as antechamber before 'opting in' to the performance. There was acknowledgement of those present via a speech with accompanying cue cards, 'to the guests, hosts and ghosts – ancestors past, present and emerging. The space the feminist server sits on, and the spaces we are all occupying which are in themselves colonised, written, programmed and ruled by dominant other' (Mauro-Flude 2018, n.p.). Subsequently the hosts ushered the participants from the antechamber through to main stage, by the instruction to copy the Uniform Resource Locator (URL) that had been placed the chat element of the Jitsi, in their own browser address bar.<sup>2</sup> To arrive at the location of the main event a purposely configured Ether pad, an open-source text editor for real time multiple authoring (see Figure 2).

Here a technical 'How To' preamble, and a code of conduct was delivered by the host, typewriting the information in real time for the participants to read. The transition from communicating via audio/visual streaming, to reading and writing in a collaborative network space, enabled participants to make a perceptual shift, to tacitly engage with writing and reading even as they read.

Furthermore, the 'How To' presentation highlighted the ways that individuals could represent themselves within the collective online writing environment. The advice suggested participants enter an author name, and to designate a colour of which both could be shifted and modified, at any time during the 2-hour event. The name/colour identification allocations appeared in two places – in a horizontal list below the URL address bar in the easy-to-use collaborative word editing environment (see Figure 2), and to the right in a vertical pop out list (see Figures 3-5). Participants who opted out of name allocation appeared as 'unnamed' (see Figures 2-3). A glimpse of how different participant authors choose how to identify themselves: first name, unnamed, art duo brand, declaration of gender pronoun markers and so on, can be seen at the top of Figure 2, or the view the right of the image in Figures 3-5.

To facilitate the exploration of a cacophony of voices and decentring authorship through cross-over writing methods alongside the development of overlapping individual pieces (revealed by Figures 2-5 and related screen capture videos).<sup>3</sup> Further clarification was made 'when more users start to edit in the document there may be many colours according to who is writing into the text' Mauro-Flude (2020, n.p.), a process that enables the individual subject to be seen as part of the broader collective. Comments such as: 'I just adjusted by colour to differentiate myself ... weird ... Unnecessary?', 'its so quiet but also frenetic', 'I got kicked off mid-sentence and can't find where I was writing lol', substantiate how contributors were reflexive of their experience, as they simultaneously engaged with the ephemeral practise of reading and writing in communion (see Figure 3, '-1' lime green, dark green, orange and purple); substantiating how beliefs are embedded in acts of writing and how language is implicated in behaviour.<sup>4</sup>

On some occasions, participants deliberately sought to concentrate on the visuality of typography, forming new compositional properties of words or liberating words from the anecdotal limitations of syntax, in a wayward manner arranging the space beyond lexical



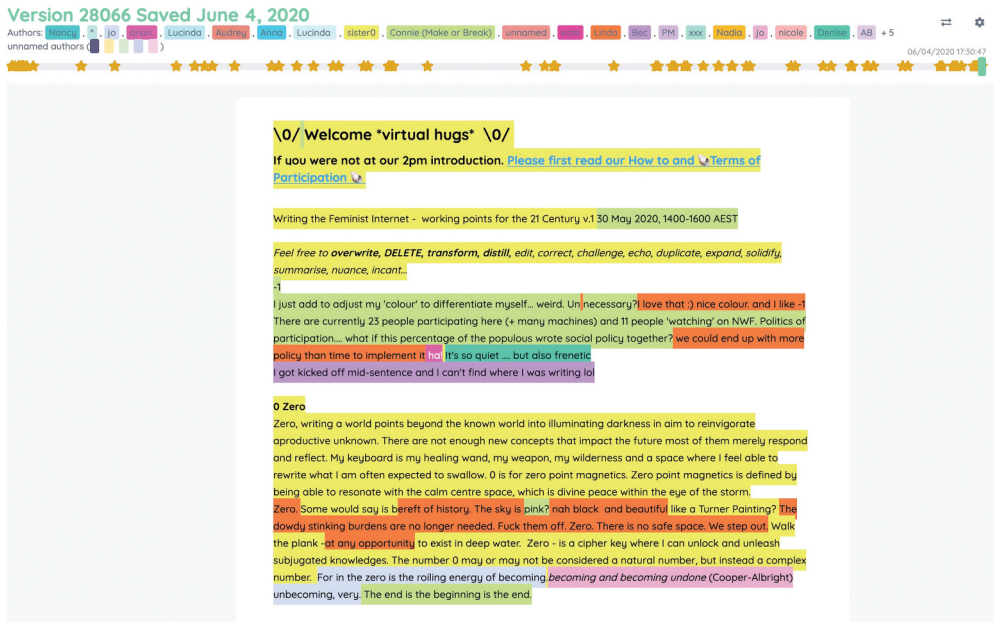
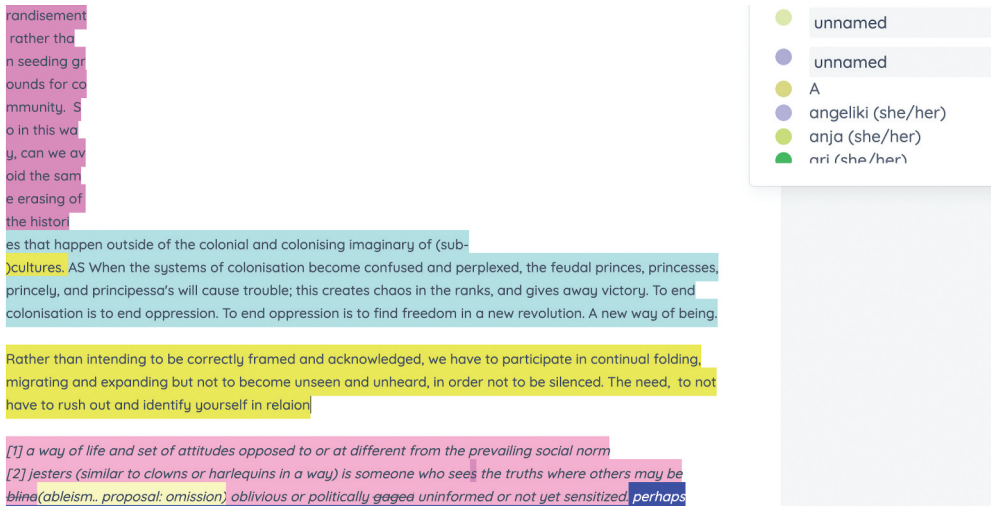


Figure 2. Screenshot Session 2 Writing the Feminist Internet – working points for the 21 Century v.1 30 May 2020, 1400–1600 AEST Image: Nancy Mauro-Flude.

norms (see Figure 3). The default text background colour was chosen by the most recent participants configuration. Observing this participants who had self-allocated a colour then began to change their initial colour palate, causing the majority of individual statements to transmogrify into a collective transcription. Dislocated from its source, the text became awash with a chaotic bricolage of tints as a result of the performative encounter of writing – acts of editing, elaborating, correcting, challenging, echoing, repeating, expanding, clarifying, summarising, distilling, nuancing – all of which produced different hues that were anarchically braided around letters or lines of text (see Figure 4).

Additionally, contributors who by default (or by choice) selected the same author colour as another could resemble a form of Xenoglossia, which is analogous to the more commonly known form of ventriloquy, for example, an intertextual weaving of thinking in relation to the infrastructures in and of colonisation (see Figure 3). These examples contain a panoply of characteristics of dark social spaces (Gehl 2018; Heemsbergen et al. 2021) by way of identity theft (ventriloquy), and also the misappropriation of working points as a kind of phishing act (imitation of institutions). Wilful acts of improvisation altering the working points, scrambling verity, authorship became molten, kaleidoscopic, deranged, abundant and chthonian, these are the attributes of a stygian feminist.

The performance events attracted an array of participants – writers of fiction and non-fiction, artists, poets, critics, curators, and transdisciplinary researchers who predominantly identified as womxn – from varied racial-socio-cultural backgrounds and different skill sets.<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 3.** Detail: Screenshot Session 1 WtFI where colour play highlights represent the mélange of individual and collective participation. v.1 30 May 2020, 1400–1600 AEST. Image: Nancy Mauro-Flude.

Individual details relating to the event were entwined with notions of feminist solidarity. Some partakers embraced a ‘peripatetic stance’ (Mauro-Flude 2020, 91) and others noted the profoundness of play within the limits a given system:

... [child name redacted] started typing into the etherpad hahaha and i only added like 2 sentences as i just couldnt quite figure out what i wanted to say (also the original manifesto read rly well to me), but listened to the relaxing typing noises! (WtFI participant).<sup>6</sup>

... it's a beautiful thing to create dynamic/organic flow within fairly rigid technological constraint (document formatting tech etc.). Lots of familiar faces (names) in there! (WtFI participant).<sup>7</sup>

From this comment it was notable to some of the cohort, that the performance gathered, among other participants, different generations of cyberfeminists. The inception of the movement is described by Dement:

coagulated and sparked in the reject-outsider mutiny, trauma-jouissance and fast hard beat of queer punk. It found visible existence and a manifesto, through VNS Matrix in the (typical) Adelaide heat wave of 1991 ... Cyberfeminism, as blurred edge range, entangles carnality with code; machines, blood and bad language; poetry and disdain; executables, theft and creative fabrication. It incites and follows lines of flight powered by contradiction, relatedness, transgression, and misbehaviour. It simultaneously embraces logic and unreason, giving the finger to binaries as it ravishes them Ibid.).

Abandoning *a priori* assumptions of neutrality raging against the complete neglect of specificity, sentiments like these move beyond the putative constraints of discursive, structural norms, corroded by stakeholder commerce.



The provocative unruly punk tactics of cyberfeminism serve as a productive entry point into the analyses of contested terrains and provenance of computers and promiscuous computing such as chthonian social spaces. The act of writing as an entombed annotation, contrasted with the act of performing bound to an ephemeral shape is described by poet laureate and punk rocker Patti Smith:

I love writing because there are acoustic typewriters and electric ones. It's a physical act but the word is still trapped on the page ... performing ... keeps the act of creation alive. I love the process of creation, although the end product is in itself a necessary evil. Still, I'm glad it's there, otherwise I wouldn't have ... records, ... Burroughs or Rimbaud books to enjoy (1995, 282).

It is striking how Smith's mid-nineties reference to published artefacts of the poets from the beat and libertine generations (notably predominantly male) as the end product as 'a necessary evil' (Smith, Cited in Shapiro 1995, 282) is portrayed in the same light or stigma frequently afforded to the dark web (Gehl 2018).

Perhaps more significant and salient is the ability to capture the paratactic dance of writing in the transfiguration of words.<sup>8</sup> That is enabled by synchronous multiple authoring tools in a networked environment, that opens a cornucopia of potentials for unforeseen sites, repositories and tools for further consideration. The *EtherPad* software archived *WtFI* (2020) performance in real time, recording tacit exchanges of the keystrokes in a choreography of writerly transmutation.

Indicating the tension between being an individual as a part of a collaboration, the following participant account not only addresses the ability to capture 'the process as it unfurled', but aids as a testament to the ways in which a chthonic feminist context enables collaborators to gain a visceral grasp on the actions of their collaborators, who are present within the network, yet physically remote:

peeped at the femnet link ... how cool you screencapped the process as it unfurled, perfect and yes, it's interesting the editing that we can do ... we identity\_runnerz ... one reserves the right to be the word-boss ... im sometimes conflicted about the rightness of that.but sheesh, u wanna be happy with the ballet in the poems/manifestos in the end.and that means some harsh cutting and sensitive line spacing

and i felt your rearranging today! think that's enough housework for the day! (*WtFI* participant [my italics]).<sup>9</sup>

Drawing upon imbroglios and intermediaries, conferring to the subterranean 'cut-and-paste' nonlinear plots of Virginia Woolf, postmodern literary critic N. Katherine Hayles (2005) considers the inter/intrasubjective inscriptions from the typewriter to the computer, appealing for a counter narrative approach to remedy to techno-determinism:

amid the uncertainties, potentialities and dangers created by the Regime of Computation, simulations, computational and narrative- can serve as potent resources with which to explore and understand the entanglement of language with code ... the potential to inspire another kind of narrative in which humans are not seen as subjects manipulating objects in the world (2005, 242).

In a bid to decenter the human from the locus of action reveals an acute need to conceive computing practices as dynamic forms and processes, and also to acknowledge the elements that form the assemblage of networks and systems that perform around and act through us.

In this way a chthonic feminist theory envisions the Internet as a 'cauldron' of happenings, a host for inexplicable aseptic brews (see [Figures 2–3](#)). Because aseptic writing is often illegible, vivid and/or open ended, it has no fixed meaning (evidenced in concrete poetry), and where the reader as writer, as conjuror, is faced to think not of communication but rather performances with materialities and related knowledge production in collaboration with the paraphernalia of writerly technologies.

Chthonian feminist processes like these can not only delegitimize authorial authority but compost knowledge production. An exemplar of this is artistic research with datasets trained from conversational machine learning modelling agents by Linda Dement. Contributing in *WtFi* (2020) she generated a text that responded to the prompts 'A Feminist Internet ...'.<sup>10</sup> In [Figure 3](#) we see how other participants (denoted by colour and syntax) began to riff upon the output from 'The Feminist Internet is ...' above and below. Transfigure pluralities of 'Feminists internets are ...'; 'Feminists internets' which 'refuses, excels, connects, disseminates, is a bitch mutant, refuses, rejects, WILL EAT YOU' and so on. The bedlam in the browser was in line with the errant, formidable and fecund characteristics of chthonic Stygian deities (Dillon 2001).

The complicit nature of discursive systems established by orthodox concords, writing is a phenomenon often obscured by the conventions of capital be it cultural or financial or otherwise (Bourdieu 1977). Suspending this notion in *WtFi* (2020) the text became a medium, a conjuring tool for the transmission and transfiguration of thought, rather than the fulcrum of thoughts necessary condition. The term 'Feminist Internet' thus emerges as ornery, capricious, unfixed, and unfinished, always underway, and open to interpretation. It alludes to a trajectory that is forking and diversified, a collective quixotic oddity, where many arms work as one, purposely writing in synchronicity and then in the occasional unpredictable asynchronous deviation (see [Figure 3](#)).

Typically, the definition of 'Feminist Internet' is motivated by the confluence of activism and artistic research in a bid to offer digital literacy and to spread awareness of alternative computation methods. One initial version of the 'Feminist Internet' manifested on 18 December 2017, during a residency 'Doing Feminism/Sharing the World' hosted by the *Favour Economy* (2017) and facilitated by this author. In a bid to acquaint a broader artistic community with feminist traditions of technical knowledge production, the starting point for the workshop was to discuss the 'The Feminist Principles of the Internet (2014)', an evolving document that was developed by the Association for Progressive Communications a global Non-Government Organization (NGO) largely active in South East Asia, Africa and South America. Proceeding this a draught 'Feminist Internet Lore Manifesto: 10 working points for the twenty-first century' (Mauro-Flude 2018, n.p.) was published on -empire-.<sup>11</sup> Likewise, a Feminist Internet Manifesto was distributed 19 March 2018 by Feminist Internet, an arts activist collective who conduct public outreach and advocacy to foreground gender inequalities and programmed bias in digital environments mainly operating in the United Kingdom.

Stygian feminists restoring transgressive conceptualism to subvert the conventions surrounding feminist internet or feminist server collectives. Likewise, artist and theorist Rosa Menkman (2014, n.p.) asks 'But what happens when instead of choosing "best practices," as a point of reference, we chose an unreasonable benchmark? What can we expect from these deranged logics at work?'. Entwining the threads to rewrite computational sovereignty out of its current totalitarian emergence where 'the more incentives for figuring out how to hack it will proliferate' (Ahmed 2016, 156). Beyond the adoption of a solution, *WtFI* (2020) was a ruse to consecrate Feminist Internet futures, a great marsh saturated at the stygian crossroads of theoretical interrogation, art practice and feminist webserver technology (see Figure 4).

### The undercurrents of fourth wave feminism

The subjects of feminist politics informed by the confluence of feminist grassroots activists, feminist theorists, feminist artists have actuated in various ways and means throughout generational waves (Van Der Tuin 2015). Given the social and institutional obstacles that stymie feminist ambitions from: the suffragette movement schlepping on the shackles and cables of unforgiving infrastructures; second wave consciousness raising of the broader public to the inconspicuousness of class war, domestic labour, and gender inequality; to the self-determination and autonomy of third wave feminists who have a 'tolerance for contradiction (Clark Mane 2012, 86)'. Through an active resistance of conventions, searching not only for a new milieu but also new forms and processes that steer away from racial and gender asymmetry, and other (techno) essentialist mandates towards other kinds of experiences, outside the yoke of imperialist regimes.

The relationship between the pacts surrounding equivalence and well-defined intentions in feminist internet communities, and the contemporary occulture of chthonic commons latent in many fourth wave feminists embrace of spirited and unruly structures of chaotic entanglements of artistic genre, language, codes, and signals, often staged in Internet subculture through 'the tensions between dark and connected, opting in and opting out, and exposure and retreat' (Heemsbergen et al. 2021, n.p.). Opting in, the participants of *WtFI* (2020) placed themselves with in amidst to computational systems, developing discursive and/or aesthetic positions which at time exceeded these procedures. Freed from the strictures of conventional academic style and with support of contemporaries, revealing the ways in which processes with text can be used together to illuminate and describe unseen realms.

Channelling one another through textual conduits, the ripples accumulated at times were at odds with of some expectations of preconceived feminist imaginaries. A distinct individual 'Growly Gerkin/ccl' in black and white text, commandeering an authorial role, inserting themselves firming in the centre of the act, asking questions '>which feminism is this text referring to?'; >who is the *we* that this text refers to?' (Figure 5). By exhibiting a need for unwavering meaning and the compulsion to be correct, it can be suggested from this example how procedures of acceptability are persistently reasserted by some and rewritten and rendered as mutable by others. These 'received wisdoms' (Ahmed. 2016) are inherited from conformist agendas that can be understood as intolerant of undoing established assumptions in public.

Pondering ‘affective temporality’ Prudence Chamberlain examines how the fundamental shifts from principles of equality to the beliefs and actions of autonomy have dismayed some (2016, 462). Yet, stygian chthonic deities, capable of anything, except perhaps, are summoned to the clarion call of Jane (2016) to ‘forge hybrid activist strategies which involve temporary allegiances between various theories, tactics and feminist generations’ (2016, 292). Expanding the aperture and valences of technopolitics through a candid realm of antediluvian parables, possibilities and experiences figures make WtFI (2020) both resonant and contestable for its current moment – asking its own questions, re-examining its own past and envisaging other futures.

Shining a light on how a processual understanding of feminist computing methodologies is able to be more bountiful and wide-ranging, Rök Jóns (2013) enquires ‘is the 4th wave of feminism digital?’. Jóns further surmises that if it faithfully is to be so it ‘would have to be in part discursive and would require a restructuring of legal, institutional, educational, economic, social, religious, geographical, corporeal and cultural barriers . . .’ (2013, n.p.). WtFi (2020) was activated by low bandwidth, user friendly software from ‘The augmented homes of shared laboratories, of communal media and technical facilities’ (Laboria Cuboniks 2015, n.p.). Founding member of the collaborative group Laboria Cuboniks (2015) and feminist writer Helen Hester (2018) contribute to the fourth wave through a manifesto entitled Xenofeminism. Thus, Xenofeminist’s describe themselves as ‘. . . a labour of bricolage, synthesizing cyberfeminism, posthumanism, accelerationism, neorationalism, materialist feminism and so on, in an attempt to forge a project suited to contemporary political conditions . . . a project for which the future remains open as a site



Figure 4. Screenshot Session 2 WtFI v.1 30 May 2020, 1400–1600 AEST Image: Nancy Mauro-Flude.

of radical recomposition (2018, 1)'. Untangling the constructions of supremacy, gender, race, class, opinions' that logically flatten the veracities of aesthetic properties where 'fog-shrouded literary minefields ... full of barbed wire and stumps of dead' (Le Guin 1989, 104). Intense debates propel the motivation for engaging in discourse that is consistently rendered to be equivocal. The energies of these feminist waves must 'move forward with the kind of generosity and commitment to ambiguity ... remembering the utopian thought and solidarity politics that allowed feminists of the past to think beyond gender, to a world of possibility' (Nicholas 2021, 18). Navigating over (and across) notional feminist waves and 'e-bile' (Jane 2016, 289), audaciously the cyberfeminist (as defined by VNS Matrix 1991; Dement 2017) floats over these commonplace issues, to retrieve what Lovelace (cited in Menabrea 1842) envisioned for her engine – the infinite ability to weave new configurations – to remain adrift, so as not to become ensnared in the undercurrents.

### Internet of covens and xenoglossia

Affirming the burden of seeking out other procedures for communication as outlined by Irigaray (1980):

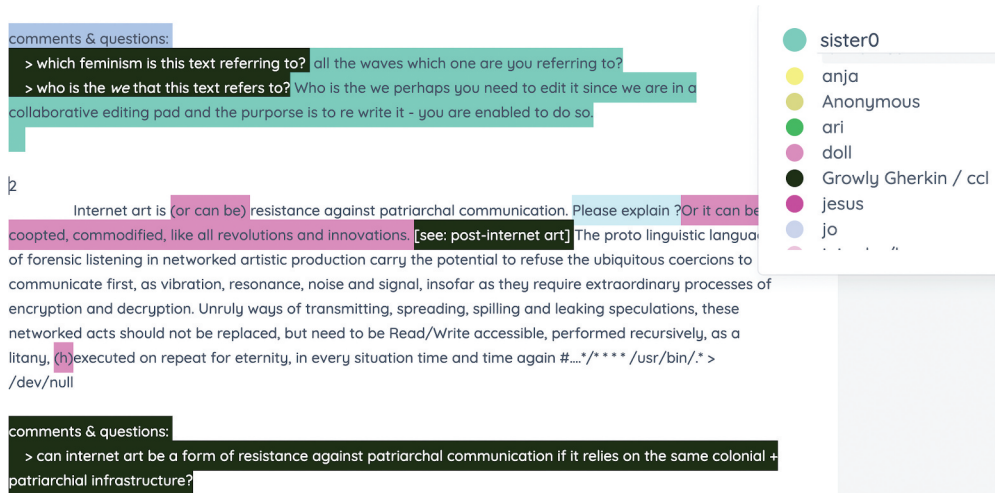
If we continue to speak this sameness, if we speak to each other as men have spoken for centuries, as they have taught us to speak, we will fail each other. Again ... words will pass through our bodies, above our heads, disappear, make us disappear (1980, 69).

To evade banishment and erasure our words must now emerge from the unfamiliar. To unspeak talking for other kinds of exchange may be observed in asemic brews of Xenoglossia, to evade banishment and erasure our words must now emerge from the unfamiliar. Underscoring a chthonic feminist Internet is a twenty first-century form of xenoglossia, dark social spaces that render writing incapable to be claimed with authority because the texts emerge from everywhere other than an original source. These other possible modes of being, evidenced by the assorted desires of WtFi (2020) participants façades through the use of pseudonyms, 'identity\_runnerz' altering name handles, chameleon switching hues, annihilating and abandon self completely (see figures 2-3-4). To modify the familiarity of qualities of writing, being for the most part known for many, collaborative transmutation transports contributors into a wild terrain of online space converge at the centre of a great stygian marsh where dimensions and constraints may vacillate.

The image *Witches Going to their Sabbath* (1878) depicts a coven engaged in a consensual hallucination (see Figure 6) and was shared by a participant proceeding WtFi (2020). It was accompanied by the following note:

Thank you dear, I loved this. Want more, more more! adding a little something that popped up while writing ... <sup>12</sup>

These findings entail, how, even if evanescently or fleetingly stygian Internet covens can summon up a semblance of oblivion and xenoglossia. Each actant arrives to the stygian stream with their own flora to contribute, however trivial or substantial, imparting an apophanie, an omen, for further deciphering. Ascertaining the Internet as a vessel of infinite veracity, a cauldron that holds inexplicable asemic brews.



**Figure 5.** Witches Going to their Sabbath (1878) by Luis Ricardo Falero. Image public domain <https://www.wikiart.org/en/luis-ricardo-falero/the-witches-sabbath>. Accessed 20 March 2021.

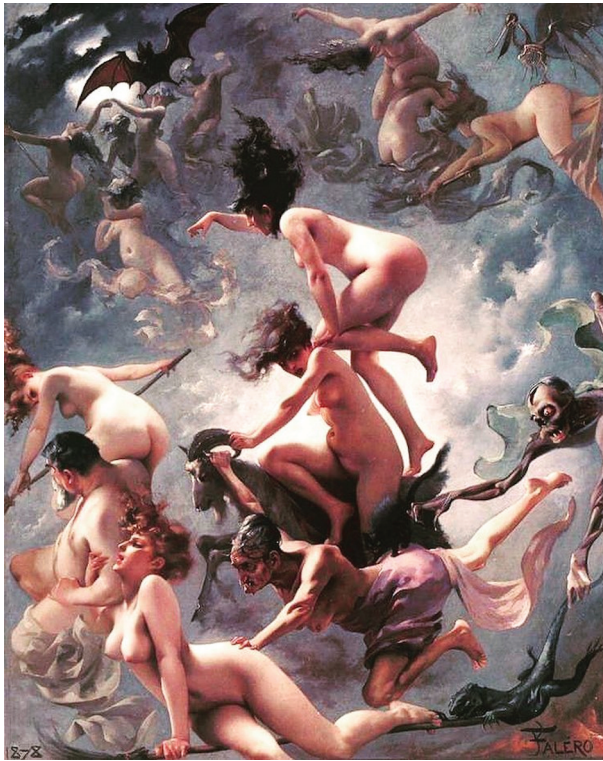
## Conclusion

A stygian critical feminist internet theory is an epistemology that ruminates on how knowledge is produced, circulates and is transformed. A dance of obfuscated symbolic elements, in the weaves and weft envisages acts of computing as a form of conjuring that don't reproduce ontological separations between the knowledge that is generated. A proliferation of influences, this theory is multidirectional and full of cracks, bringing about different kinds of remedies, where there is never one correct interpretation nor modus. Relative and situated, knowledge, method and elucidations are rendered according to the appropriateness of a given context and situation which have effects that are palpable but equivocal.

The scavenging and fermenting process-based performance art examined in WtFI (2020) a computational word-based dance that hovers at the crossroads of performance, concrete poetry and conceptual art. Durational sit-ins of textual foraging are rituals of incanting, assembling, seeking and carving out online space away from procedures that inflict erasure. The shapeshifting tactics of elusiveness and ambiguousness depicted are temporal interactions by machinic percipients and assemblages of living entities and matter, following Barad (2012, 2007) (among others). A coven of artists communicating processes by spontaneously combining 'texts' reports perceived from the other side of the performance space are corroborated through acts of alterity.

In the absence of profound infrastructural change, attentive improvised procedures, miscellaneous perspectives together with perplexity and elation, are able to traverse beyond systemic problems associated with the dark spaces of feminism. Terpsichorean innovations surface from the confluence of theories and art practices conducted by trans-generational feminist writers. Guided by the wayward and indeterminant ravines of stygian Internets.





**Figure 6.** Witches Going to their Sabbath (1878) by Luis Ricardo Falero. Image public domain <https://www.wikiart.org/en/luis-ricardo-falero/the-witches-sabbath>. Accessed 20 March 2021.

The numinous sense of what is not there, of the ineffable permeating the effable in this flourishing space of possibility language is a provisional and acquiescent system that emphasizes process over comprehension, and which may be experienced without recourse to the usual semiotic correlation between words and the world.

## Notes

1. It should be noted that the WtFI (2020) was hosted on an autonomous feminist server run server (not third party software). Although an alternative space, it was not the 'dark web' where the site was only accessible if 'routed through special routing software packages' (Gehl 2018, 5). The Internet Provider IP was publicly accessible through standard Internet Browser, defined as the 'clear web' by Gehl which includes 'websites built with standard web technologies (HTML, CSS, server-side scripting languages, hosting software' (Gehl 2018, 5). 'A feminist server aims to provide a safe space for experimentation with internet protocols community who are considered "prosumers," instead of "clients" who have limited webserver access and permissions antithetical to archetypes of supremacy' (Mauro-Flude 2020, 84-85).
2. One example of a URL provide is here <https://miss-hack.org/ether/p/r.0fb164af9342e9ff93429f425974ab8e>. Accessed 10 March 2021.
3. Writing the Feminist Internet – working points for the 21 Century 2020 Collaborate Performance Event:  
'Next Wave Festival' Version 1, 30 May 2020, 1400-1600 AEST, <https://miss-hack.org/ether/>

- [p/r.0fb164af9342e9ff93429f425974ab8e](https://p/r.0fb164af9342e9ff93429f425974ab8e). Accessed 21 October 2020; 'Hackers and Designers Amsterdam Summer School Academy' Version 2. 25 July 2020, 18:00-20:00 AEST. <https://www.miss-hack.org/ether/p/r.83e1e7dbab9c9d44ee00f9e94c0831f7>. Accessed 21 October 2020; 'Digital Intimacies 6 Connection in Crisis Symposium' Version 3, 27 November 2020, 1600-1800 AEST. <http://www.vvvvvvvvvvvv.net/share/p/r.d00ab7adf70327e2a2681db4df3600b4>. Accessed 21 December 2020.
4. In line with Jane (2016), I also will not be writing 'sic' after 'grammatical, spelling and syntax errors in cited electronic communications and online material in recognition of the informality and colloquialism commonly found in such contexts' (2016, 293).
  5. 'By participating in the spelling of "womxn" feminists acknowledge the diverse identities of women that are not defined in relation to men' (Oxfam, 2016, n.p.)
  6. Email correspondence, 6 June 2020, AEST 23:39:01.
  7. Email correspondence, 2 June 2020, AEST 10:35:10.
  8. A counter argument could be made for the polyvalency of language written in traditional print, but it is beyond the bounds of this essay. The 'dance of writing' in a networked space is further elaborated upon by Nancy Mauro-Flude and Jo Pollitt in 'I am \_your\_ Pyrate Dancer', *Indeterminacy After AI Leonardo Journal*, MIT Press. 2022 (in press).
  9. 9 Email correspondence, 27 November 2020 AEST 18:05.
  10. See Linda Dement <http://lindadement.com/art-peasants.htm>. Accessed 10 March 2021. GPT-2 AI developed by Open AI. <https://openai.com/blog/better-language-models/> Accessed 10 March 2021.
  11. A community who participates in monthly thematic discussions via an email list active since 2002 (founded by Melinda Rackham an Australian cyberfeminist artist, curator, and writer) with the objective to trace 'the emergence of new media theory, practice, and networked culture. <https://empyre.library.cornell.edu/>. Accessed 10 March 2021.
  12. Email correspondence, 25 July 2020 AEST 20:02.

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