

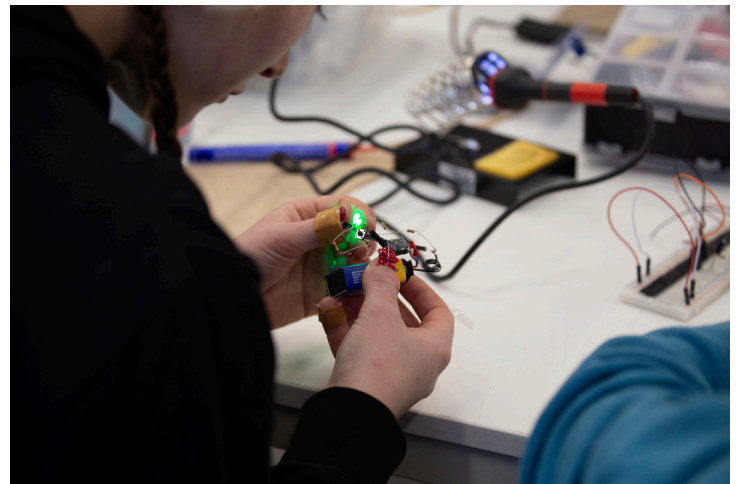
What was the starting point of your research project?

A couple of years back I discovered how relatively simple—from the technical side—it is to set up an independent server at home. I have also been interested a lot in the activities and protocols of feminist and queer hackerspaces. I identify with the commitment of these groups to educate themselves about technology on their own terms. They explore and build alternative infrastructures and tools that allow them to articulate their stories and serve their collective needs. During the fellowship I wanted to research further and bring the topic of self-hosting and feminist DIY/DIT toolboxes to the academy and to explore it collectively with the students.

What has been your approach for the fellowship research project and how does it relate to the role of research in your practice?

Throughout this fellowship one of my biggest goals was to encourage students to not be intimidated by code and to challenge their role as digital users—shifting it toward one of being active and curious contributors. I have therefore organized and led seven learning-together sessions with the students, during which I shared my self-taught skills and research on the topic. I set up a basic local server at the academy that was active and visible to the participants during these moments. We logged in and navigated this locally hosted digital space and tried to understand better what it is and what it means to run it semi-autonomously. Eventually I realized that my most essential research process and results happened precisely during these hands-on collective gatherings: it was during my contact with the participants and their questions, confusion, feedback, and excitement, etc. Out of this research process crystallized a personal hybrid installation work and a new format for the workshop.

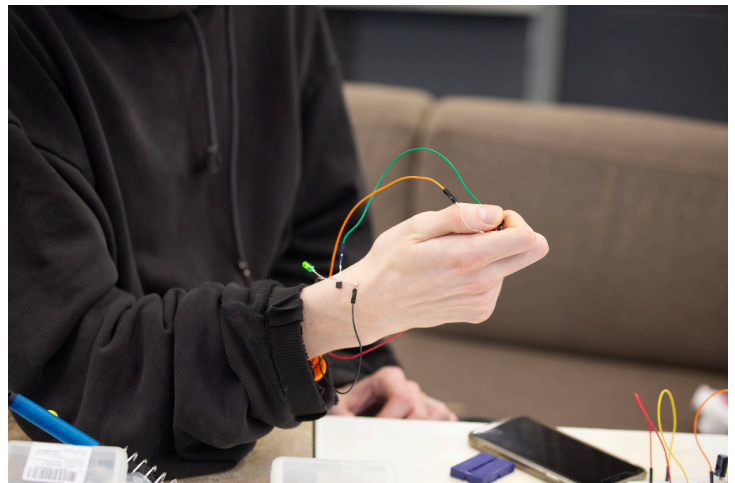
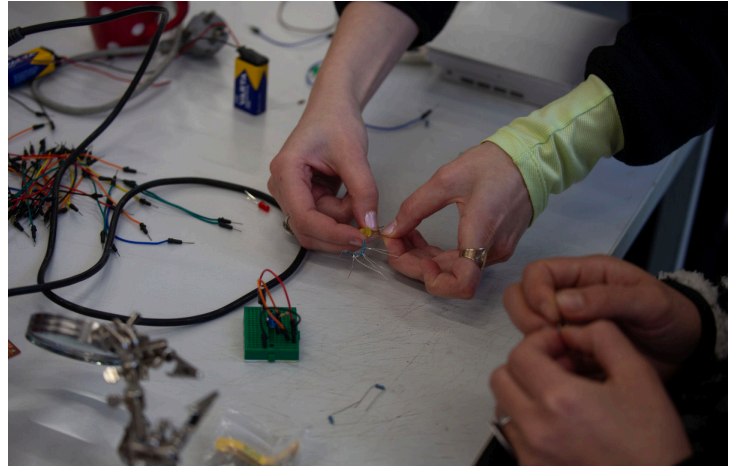
For the past few years, do-it-yourself (DIY) and do-it-together (DIT) digital networks and feminist, queer, art servers have become an important area of research for me,¹ as I believe in a decentralized, diverse, and open-source digital space.² I have been interested a lot in the ideas and protocols of feminist and queer hackerspaces and initiatives—such as Systemserver, Anarcha server, and Transversal Network of Feminist Servers—that maintain their own servers and also document these processes as a way to share knowledge. A lot of the members of these collectives are artists using their artistic practices to creatively and critically rethink technology and to address the problems surrounding it: gender and racial bias, privacy, agency, etc. Feminist servers matter because they offer care: an alternative and safer space for minority groups online.³ A lot of my artistic work has been focused on experimenting with the semi-autonomy and queering that self-hosting allows. The fellowship allowed me to further deepen my practice through hands-on collective gatherings with students at the academy.⁴



- 1 By "server" I mean a computer that can be connected to the Internet, run a website, and provide file storage.
- 2 For an index of DIY and DIT resources see: <https://pad.riseup.net/p/DIY-link-index-keep>.
- 3 See further, Feminist Server Summit's "A Feminist Server Manifesto 0.01," https://areyoubeingserved.constantvzw.org/Summit_afterlife.xhtml
- 4 Self-hosting is the practice of running and maintaining a website or service using a private web server, instead of using a service outside of one's own control. Self-hosting allows users to have more control over their data, privacy, and computing infrastructure.

Considering there has been a very clear choice to engage with website-projects programmed and designed 20 to 30 years ago, it would be interesting to hear your thoughts on how something that may be considered an outdated aesthetics by some might get positioned within political dissent movements and feminist activism from a contemporary perspective?

I think working with digital technologies—in this case web-based—from a slow, ambient, minimalist, “handmade” position can, in fact, often be mistaken as outdated or nostalgic. Plain HTML, for example, as the foundation of a website architecture, without CSS (styling) or JavaScript (interaction) files applied, will most of the time have a certain early net appearance. At the same time, plain HTML websites are known to survive and archive best throughout the continuous rapid development of web-frameworks. To me it is more about the choice—or the freedom—to do, to learn, and to build my own at my own pace regardless of what’s considered “the latest.” It allows critical thinking and making outside the grid-based, centralized, and commodified state of the web. This approach already dominates our digital space without our-digital users’-consent. Therefore creating a nuanced space and embracing its materiality, the code, is more interesting and powerful to me.

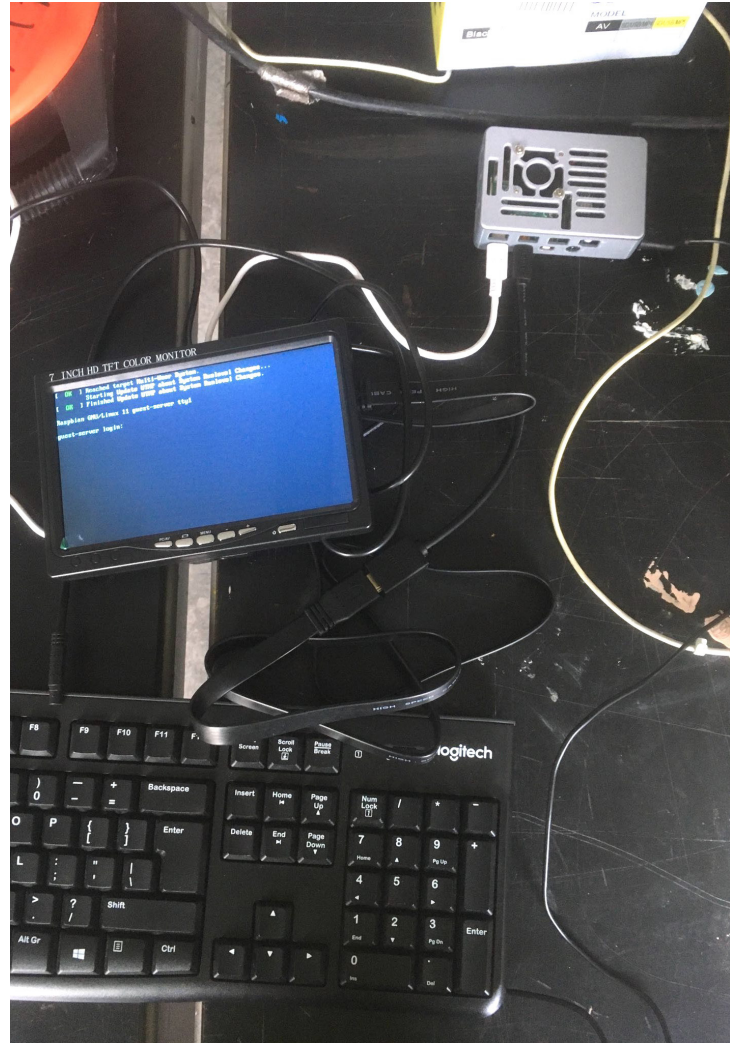


Prototyping a free-form circuits during workshop “Crafts & Artificial Intelligence,” photo: Patrícia Domingues.

I organized the first learning sessions collectively with another fellowship participant, Patrícia Domingues. We brought together the students from the VAV-moving image and Jewellery – Linking Bodies departments for a three-day event titled “Crafts & Artificial Intelligence,” that included workshops, lectures, and discussions. My main contribution to the event was two workshops on command-line and free-form circuit-making. There were many highlights from this coming-together moment, but the most important ones for me were the conversations we had with the students as well as the ones between me and Domingues. She pointed out that what she found interesting about my artistic approach with technology was that she noticed a lot of craft making. This was an eye opening moment for me, because I realized that it was, in fact, true, and it was the direction that I wanted to focus on and further develop.

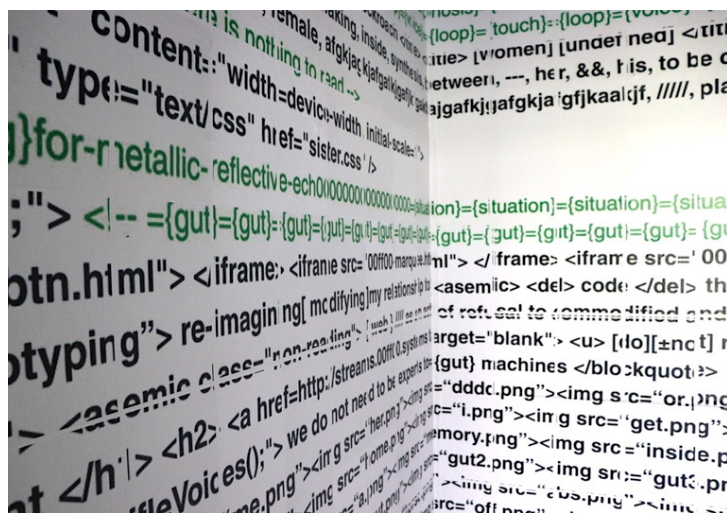
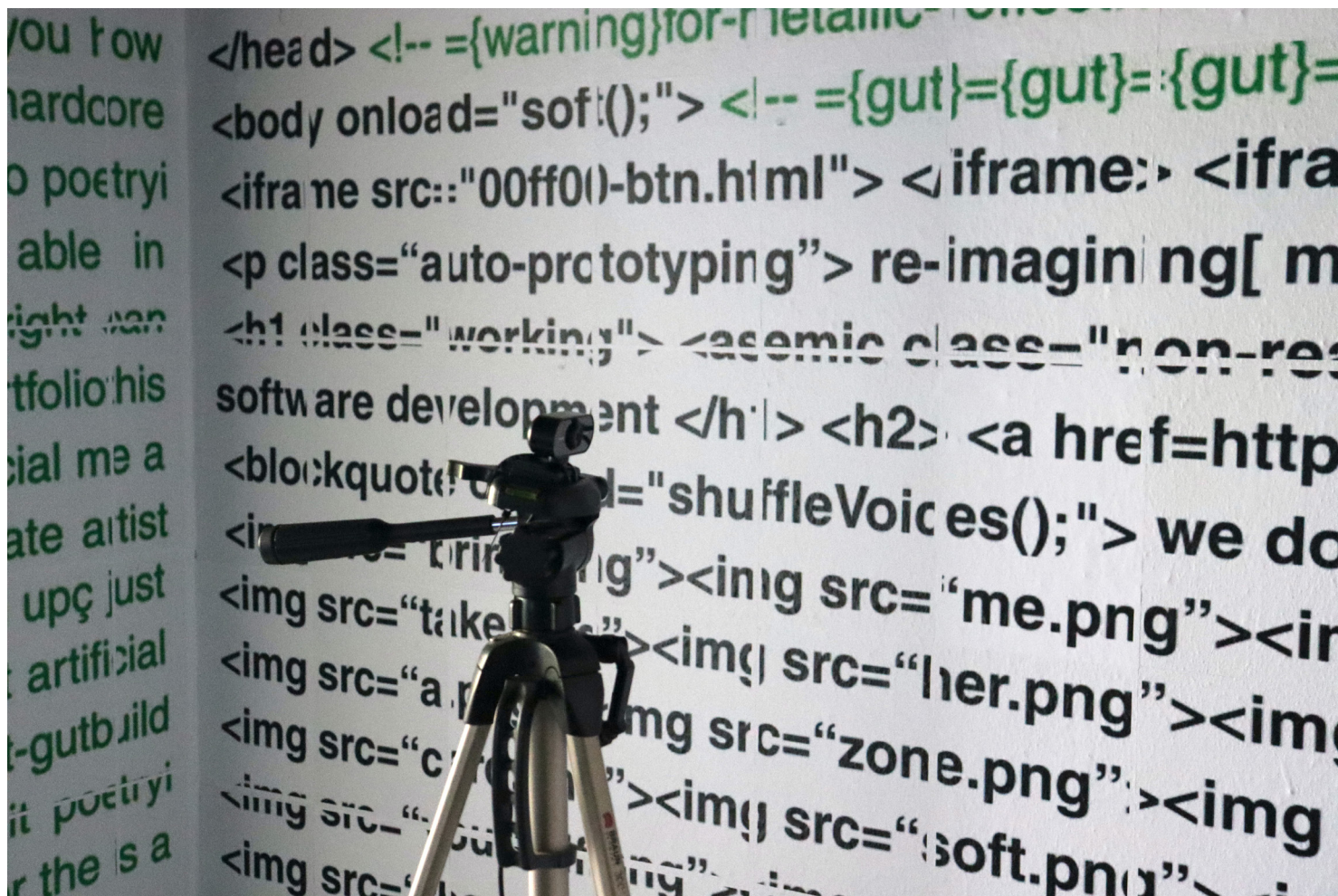


During learning-together sessions with VAV-moving image department, coding and setting up a local server using a Raspberry Pi, photos: Sandra Golubjevaite.



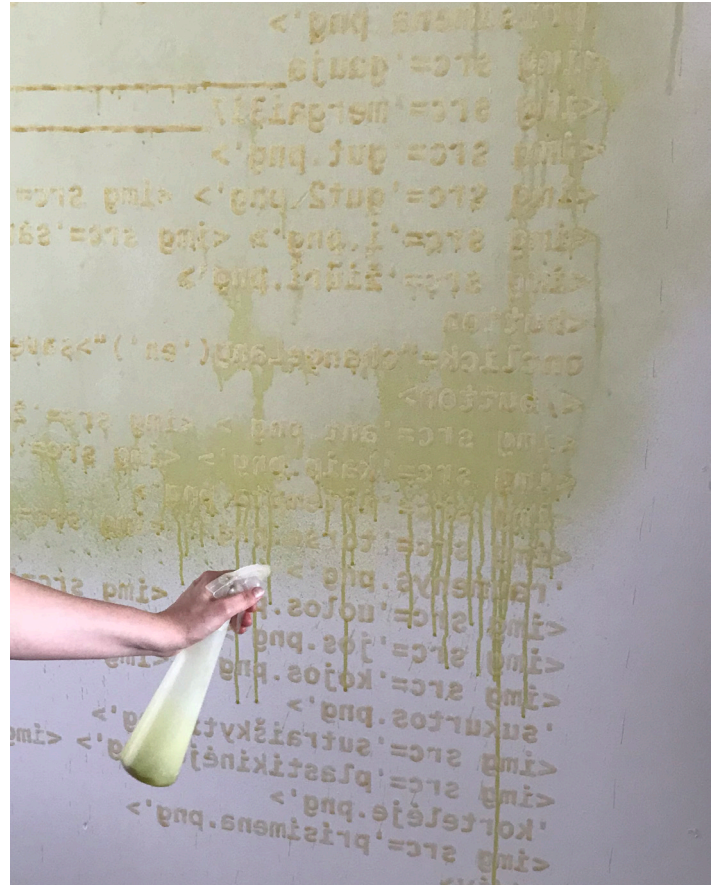
As I continued organizing learning-sessions, later on I wanted to share a method of interacting with digital machines (computers, servers) directly through code as well as hand-crafting with code. Through the conversations with the students during the fellowship, it made it even more clear to me how code is usually perceived as a complicated, inaccessible, foreign language.

I further began to wonder if during a time of rapidly evolving web development systems and when artificial intelligence (AI) can generate software code in seconds, is the manual process of writing code from scratch, like HTML, becoming a craft? Following this question I began working on a series of hybrid online-offline installations. I am interested in how the perceptions of inaccessibility of code could be overcome by making the invisible digital processes more visible to the public and how a dialogue about this could be created within an art exhibition context. I started to work with code outside of its natural habitat, for example, the browser, where all running processes often stay invisible to digital users. I wondered what it could mean to interface with code directly, outside digital graphical user interfaces, through silent and tactile readings of signs, textures, materials.



Sandra Golubjevaite, *writing <a> w*, 2023, installation as part of group exhibition *You Are Here* at a self-organized space in Rembrandtplein, Amsterdam, photo: Sandra Golubjevaite

The first installation was prototyped over a short period of three weeks to serve as a proof of concept. It was presented over a course of two consecutive weekends in an open studio format during a group exhibition *You Are Here* (2023) at a self-organized location in Amsterdam. It was my first attempt to challenge the conventional order of writing code in my practice and to embrace it more as a free-form language.



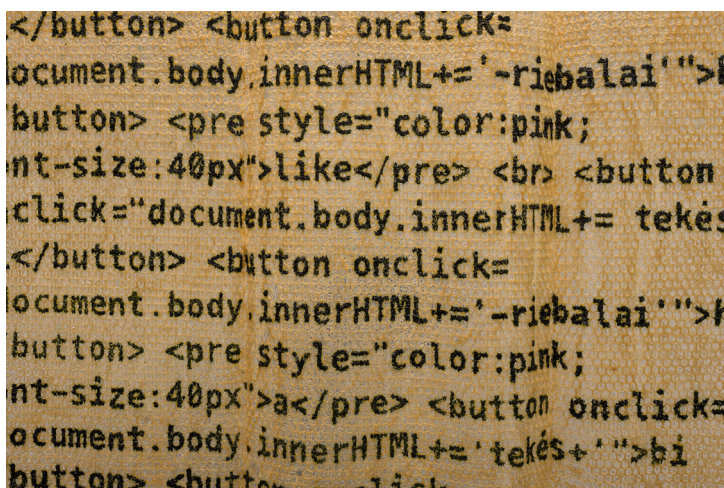
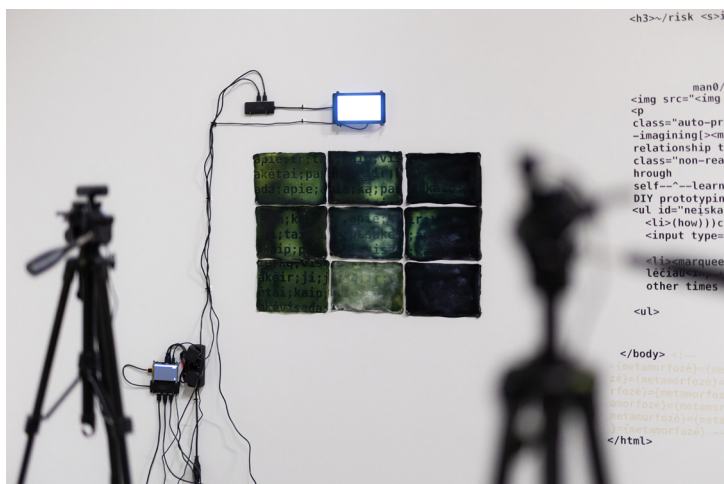
Studio documentation, photo: Sandra Golubjevaite



Language and code share a common ground in their implied expectations to adhere to traditional templates. What happens when one dares to deconstruct these rigid systems and interrupt them as digital users, and instead shape them more intuitively for example?



The second installation was prototyped after the fellowship ended, but I wanted to share the documentation as it was the result of the aftermath. The work was created for a group exhibition *In Exchange to Ages* (2023) at National Art Gallery, Vilnius, as part of the selection for the JCDecaux Award 2023. Through a laborious process I produced three large latex pieces containing parts of a non-linear narrative: a mixture of stories about womanhood, girlhood, software, failure, queerness, fragility, and metamorphosis which merged together with HTML tags. I made a choice to paint each letter in each piece by hand, and through this stretched my time with each container of code. To me the process felt very soft and caring, almost like casting a healing spell. The pieces that resulted looked almost “hand-knitted.”⁵



Sandra Golubjevaite, *{ww} [-a] [-non]*, 2023, JCDecaux Award 2023 group exhibition *In Exchange to Ages*, National Art Gallery, Vilnius, photo: Mika Savičiūtė, courtesy CAC, Vilnius

5 Read further my process logs via the following links:
LOG from sessions one to six, <https://pad.riseup.net/p/learningtogethertoLAN-keep>; LOG from server
install, <https://pad.riseup.net/p/guest-server-log-keep>.