

A Transversal Network of Feminist Servers

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A Traversal Network of Feminist Servers (ATNOFS) is a collaborative project formed around intersectional, feminist, ecological servers. Understanding servers as computers that host space and services for communities around them, this project exists inside, and in between, roaming servers and different networks. Its decentralized program was developed in six chapters hosted in five different locations (The Netherlands, Romania, Austria, Greece, Belgium) throughout 2022.

ATNOFS is initiated by Varia in collaboration with LURK, HYPHA, esc medien kunst labor, Feminist Hack Meetings, and Constant. With special contributions by Marloes de Valk and ooooo.

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The name of the collective project

T.C. “A Transversal Network of Feminist Servers” engages with many notions that trigger, among others, ideas of solidarity, emancipation but also inter-dependency or services. While developing this project, what needs needed addressing and what were the questions the different collectives wanted to engage with?

In general, the project wanted to connect different local urgencies from different realities in different regions: trying together existing and new tools that are less extractive and available for activists, circulating knowledge on self-hosted and self-organized feminist infrastructure, supporting the need of safer online spaces, creating a mutually supportive network.

In practice, these general issues were brought together inside Rosa (the name of the traveling server that hosted the computational aspects of the project). We have selected a few beginning questions that were collectively listed with regards to starting ATNOFS and are at the basis of configuring Rosa:

- What can a intersectional feminist server be?
- How is Rosa a feminist server?
- How does Rosa operate?
- What does operate mean?
- Does operate mean work?
- Does work mean labor?
- Is this labor paid?
- Is this work around Rosa elitist or niche?
- What makes us feel like we can trust each other?
- What is the difference between a feminist server and a server maintained with feminist principles?

principles?

T.C. It seems that Rosa, the roaming server that traveled during the project, has become much more than just the web/file sharing server you started with. How would you describe its role within the project, in the broadest sense?

AT-NOFS These questions inspired the installation of the server, which left the space for collective reading and writing, also on an administrative level.

Rosa was initially set up by Varia, the association that initiated the project and that installed some of the tools to be hosted on it, but it slowly transformed by passing through the different chapters, with changes on the software, a beautifully sewn fabric wrap, and of course content: documentation, pictures and a lot of Etherpads.

This local server covered (at least) three roles. First of all it helped to make practical the concept of what is a feminist server, testing with our own needs what would be needed to be used and functional from a feminist perspective. That meant also accepting the limits of a local server: unlike the 99.9% boasted uptime of commercial services, Rosa was online only as long as one of the groups took care for it being online in one of the chapters, but was offline during travel.

Then it also had the role of collecting all the traces of the project, which meant both the notes and pictures taken, but also to adapt and keep changing along the different chapters, receiving a sewn fabric case, hosting additions making use of sound and so on.

Finally, it has been the infrastructure for the publication work that wraps up the project. Thanks to the PDF-to-print software Octomode, also developed by Varia, all the editing, designing and layout work for the printed publication of ATNOFS took place on the Rosa server. Octomode is configured as a resonant tentacular publishing tool allowing new forms of labor division and various temporal forms of engagement. Some participants can focus on developing the content of a publication, while others may work on the CSS and figuring out the source and logic of the program. The whole production process hosted various inter-related happenings at the same time, which have finally being sent to print!

T.C. The project aimed at linking specific and situated practices through a European network of organizations whose

concerns and context (financial, infrastructural...) did not always overlap. How did you negotiate between your specific concerns and your desire to work together?

One thing that helped has been the fact that the main activity at the core of the project has been from the beginning to gather and make connections between the different organizations. To encounter other groups and collectives is something that proves important especially when coming from different contexts and at different stages of a project: some associations were in the early steps of their work as a network, while other in the group existed for many years.. For both it has been very important to meet: longer-lasting projects could share experiences and suggestions from many years of involvements, while younger projects brought energies coming from activism and fresh looks at the shared questions. The organization of the chapter was up to the group hosting it, so as a format it could tune to the urgencies and necessities of the different networks and interested groups surrounding. For some was the occasion to bring together new forming networks of activists and other interested. For others the space to extend existing networks or to develop further ideas that had already been cooking for a while.

It was also just good to face the different expectations of what do you do together on a weekend, how intensively you work, what time you meet in the morning and until how late you will hang out together. This simple everyday things of course relate to how in different places there are different availabilities of time, different assumptions on the relation between work and labor.

The claim for autonomy and its underlying infrastructure is a long-standing concern in the history of computing. How does this project differ from community server initiatives (XS4All, Servus...) or self-hosting projects (Yunohost, Freedombox...)?

This project and others developing the proposal of feminist servers and feminist networking start from recognizing how many of the practices in autonomous tech collectives such as the ones you mention are definitely in lines with feminist principles, whether they are outspoken as such or not.

For example, the importance of the context and situated aspect of an infrastructure project, the recognition of the care necessary, the load it means on the different lives of people working at the project,

the importance of considering this question with political solidarity, unlike a work place, or sharing knowledge that empower one's ability to be responsible of her life.

What is maybe the fundamental difference, is that this sort of questions that used to be internal in server collectives are brought to the foreground, and become the most important questions to work on together. That might mean then to take distance from the idea of "autonomy at all costs" that is often around many infrastructure projects (for example Yunohost you mention), that means every small group installing all the services they need.. Let's rather embrace interdependency, using the infrastructure of others in solidarity. The trust factor is an essential element in this type of server practice.

In his interview Tyler Reigeluth mentioned the continuity in our western industrial societies between the ancient master/slave metaphor and the language used in computing. Several sessions were dedicated to language, including one at Varia that focused on the Unix-like command line environment Rosa runs on. What were your findings and ideas to rethink this vocabulary in a way that would embody Trans*feminist values?

A sort of dialect/language/accent/mode of speaking and use of language emerged within Rosa. Commands were given new names, common spaces such as pads were made more friendly by intervening into their habitual techno-solutionist language. It became a different way to inhabit the space inside the server together, through naming and renaming. Through enabling the use of aliases in the bash command-line environment, commands can and were be changed. The way Rosa communicates with the people working in this server can also be modified. In general the read-write access of the configuration itself lies at the basis of the possibilities.

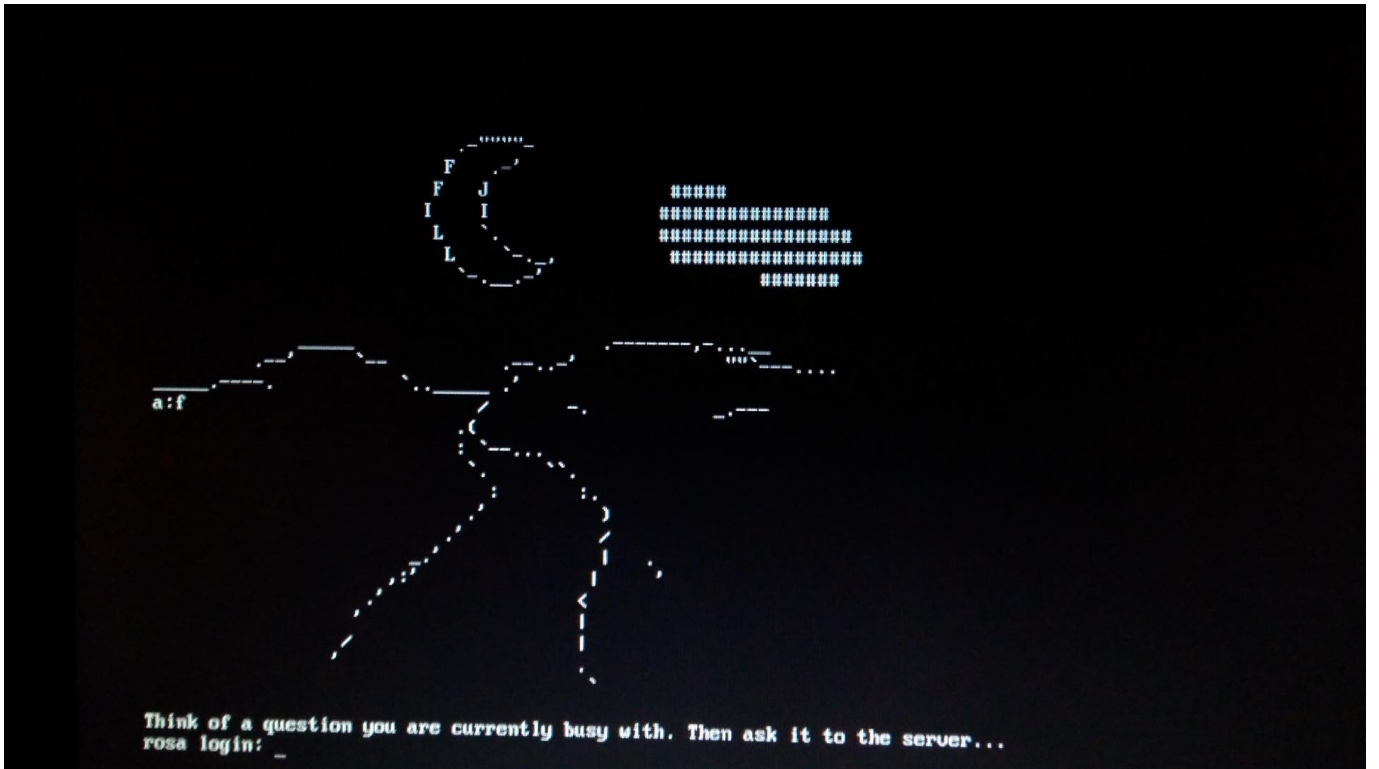
A few specific examples: a specific edit that happened in one of the sessions was changing the error page by including the directions on how to fix, in this case, an Nginx error. We also gave Rosa a voice, announcing their IP address when being plugged into the local network.

During the second Tangible Cloud work-session you presented an attempt at rewriting the 2013 "Feminist Server Manifesto". What were your intentions? Could you highlight the main differences between the two

texts, both in terms of content and approaches?

We shared two versions but we did not write them ourselves. The intention was to share the manifesto and the inspiring proposal that it consists of, not as something like a finished answer, rather a continuous question. So the first version from 2013 was also hosted on Etherpad, a read and write platform, that through the years had collected different additions and welcomed different perspectives. But the first one kept a sort of “officiality” that it definitely did not want to have. After the Graz session of AT-NOFS in *esc medien kunst labor*, some people who participated in this session went on to the AMRO 22 festival in Linz¹. Rosa became a point of conversation during the event, an unexpected added location in their journey. The conversation was about collective hosting practices, and Rosa was presented alongside other groups/organizations/practices with longer histories, in different countries. The ATNOFS affiliates, along with other AMRO participants, decided to tackle the manifesto and make a new version, in connection with the changes Rosa has brought along.

¹ See: <https://www.radical-openness.org/en>



The command-line prompt of Rosa.



Rosa, the roaming server.

