

COMMISSION SCREEN-TO- SOUNDSCAPES

Constant continues its series of artistic commissions this time in the context of “A cane, sticky notes, another body”. The commission format was created to make resources available for artists and researchers to develop their own body of work intersecting with the yearly theme.

For this commission, Constant invited Ahnjili ZhuParris. Ahnjili is a machine learning engineer, Ph.D. candidate, artist, and science communicator. Ahnjili’s artistic research and science communication efforts are dedicated to raising awareness about A.I. and algorithmic violence, which encompasses the violence that may arise from or be justified by automated decision-making systems. Ahnjili was joined by Alyssa Gersony, artist & vision rehabilitation therapist, Colette Aliman, sound designer and Dan Xu, user experience designer. They together set up the project called Screen-To-Soundscape and were joined by the co-creators Chris Alexandre, Bruno Defalque, Joris Verhulst, Raphael Bascour, Vincent Leone who gave advice and expertise on the user experience.

Screen-to-Soundscape adopts a creative and experimental approach to reimagining screen reader voices. The project aims to develop a speculative design prototype that

EXPLANATION OF THE TITLE

3DIMENTIONAL TITLE

A cane, sticky notes, another body addresses the different dimensions through which we have been thinking and making access across 2024 at Constant.

A cane speaks of physical objects. A cane can be used to support one leg while walking.

Sticky notes refers to small strategies. Sticky notes can be used to remind specific things to someone suffering from memory loss.

Another body tells the importance of considering our body as one in a network of many others, and how our needs for support and access differ and are always transitory.

Constant is a Brussels based organisation, which develops its artistic research around technologies, combining feminisms, activisms, free-culture philosophy, and other forms of care for and critical engagement with the world. The year 2024 was dedicated to **accessibility**, understood in its multiple dimensions and senses, and it formed the second thematic year of Constant’s 5-year trajectory called SPLINT, in which we explore the question: what could/should SPeculative, Libre and INtersectional Technologies be.

3 friends hooking themselves on a long chain and making some crochet blobs



As ecological and political catastrophes unfold at a worrying speed and intensity, it is urgent to pose ourselves the question of what technologies we need for life to be sustained and for resisting the computational monoculture. Access needs remind us that a solely "anti-tech" response is not a viable solution, that while we refuse the 'always unlimited' regimes of the GAFAMs, we need to continuously learn how the same limits impact everybody differently, that meeting basic needs for everyone will take everyone's care. In this Zine, we have gathered pieces and bits, traces, snippets, writings, images and sounds of the past year's activities on and around multiple access questions, from building renovations to alt-text poetry. It is not a complete overview of last year's programme, but a polyphonic, polymorphic, sometimes messy, but always engaged storytelling of our experiences. Most of all it is an opening for its readers to take this work and extend it in new directions and towards the future. It is also an invitation, if you feel tempted by this material, to get in touch, to join forces through multiplicity and divergences.

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For the fourth session I wanted to connect coding with crochet. I was mostly curious to see what it would mean for coders to apply the same logic of coding to a different technique such as crochet and pattern making. It served as an introduction to computational thinking via a hands-on activity. We ended up introducing the slime mold so as to move away from the binary approach of pattern making and coding.

5. FOREVER WORK IN PROGRESS

The idea was to use some of our time to take a look at our relationship with work and time.

Starting from the feeling that being a coder produces symptoms correlating with productivist and solution-driven mindsets, the concept of *crip time* was introduced.

Crip time invites us to slow down, rethink what progress is, and honor the messy, non-linear nature of creation. We looked at what can resist the idea that productivity is the ultimate measure of value, reminding us that there is worth in the incomplete and the unresolved. This was part of a counter-narrative that questions the very culture of efficiency. The sessions brought forth questions on unionizing, organising and remembering different struggles through history.

good energies, different curiosities and questions. The session ended up being a collective discussion on some topics around surveillance, security and the digital *footprint*. There was also a tangent on Palestine and activism which brought us to think with the necessity to boycott wix, a widely used Zionist project.

Below you will find some links and resources that were shared in the moment:

— Zotero: open source tool to organize source materials: <https://github.com/zotero/zotero>

— Some links we looked at on surveillance:
— Public surveillance cameras: <http://www.insecam.org/>

— A collection of tools to help anarchists and other rebels **understand** the capabilities of their enemies,

undermine surveillance efforts, and ultimately **act**

without getting caught: [https://www.notrace.how/Wix graveyard: https://nekr0c0m0t0r0y.an0rch0s0rv0r.org%2F](https://www.notrace.how/Wix%20graveyard%3Ahttps%3A%2F%2Fnekr0c0m0t0r0y.an0rch0s0rv0r.org%2F)

— How to download a website and make it static: <https://www.httrack.com/>

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After the open work time, The group hinted at having a session to focus on Palestine and the technologies that are complicit in the genocide in Gaza. I was happy to invite Sakinus to lead the reading session. This was a great way to experiment with the varying possibilities of the sessions as many were eager to read complicated texts together around technological entanglements.

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    Today we took a very technical turn. Can we do more
    reflective stuff? Can we also read stuff, not only
    be hands on... Maybe read about the human experience
    of the internet?

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    I didn't understand everything but, it was nice to
    be here and so great that I finally got to use the
    terminal

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2. OPEN WORKING TIME

For the second session I made the decision to organise an open moment. The intention was to create a small pocket of time where people with different interests could come and share what they are busy with or simply join out of curiosity of what others might bring. The people in the mailing list seemed to be super interested in the vagueness of the sessions, and although the title of the sessions gave the impression that we were focussing on *coding related projects*, it didn't seem to shy people away from joining and doing everything but coding which I found very nice and refreshing.

The session could have taken many directions, especially since engagement and inspiration from the participants shouldn't be a given. But some brought a project to work on during the time and shared about it, others came with

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DREMPPEL DREMPPEL

From a warp¹ about Constant internal worksession: <https://constantvzw.org/werfts/drempel.en.html>

In March 2024, Constant organised an internal worksession called Drempe! Drempe! Drempe!. "Internal" because this session gathered mainly Constant team, team members of its two main partners for the year 2024, Kaaitheater and Museum Dr. Guislain, and a few 'external' contributors:

session was an opportunity for us, as institutional workers, to examine and learn from different crossings, overlaps and gaps in our understanding of and effort towards accessibility.

accessibility.

INTRODUCTION: THE TEAPOTS

To start things off we made a small introductory exercise. We asked each participant to draw the institution they're involved with in the shape of a teapot. This small exercise was to try to move away from the traditional introduction moments during which every person would present themselves with their name, role, etc and instead focus on their perspective on 'their' institution. It was also an

1. warps on our website are articles documenting Constant's main activities.



a table full of snacks, Cato brought some homemade sesame cookies as well, it was just two but we split them amongst the whole group

Maarthe brought a device that they wanted to work on during the open time, the device has this led lights and when lit up as it is on the image, it displays a fun little rainbow.



1. STARTING WITH HTML

After some tinkering in my mind, I was finally set on having a first session where we looked at practical coding skills when we did the html exercise where we looked at how to write code, from finding an IDE to writing the first html tags. What I enjoyed is hearing how the people who joined felt welcome and excited to continue. There were suggestions that helped stir the course of the coming sessions such as:

coding: most things came down to being able to write instructions that the machine understands and ask the right questions to solve the equation at hand.

The other thing I wanted to bring forward is my wish to create a space that was a bit different than the typical hacking and coding spaces, which tend to be male dominated and very much focussed on progress (too unclear what you mean by progress), learning technical skills etc. Inspired by the people that joined the sessions, I have been trying to understand what coding mean for people that [who] say:

<anotherbody>

Yes I am a programmer but actually, I would really like to not be in front of the computer.

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It took a while to start, mainly because I hoped to draw in people with various backgrounds: curious people, programmers, people with no computer-related knowledge, people wanting to code with other people, knitters, theorists, artists activists, etc.

So, I wanted a soft start that wouldn't scare people off while not being too boring for those who had prior affinities with and knowledge of techno feminist practices and coding.

attempt to take the attention away from the individual only and get to know them in relation to a specific context.

The week was organised around three main focus points:

- 1** Physical spaces: how to traverse them, how to make signage for them and other forms of institutional navigation.
- 2** Language: exploring the possibilities and challenges of multi-languages practices, a look at AI as access tools connected to language.
- 3** Digital spaces: exploring how the three institutions' websites operate within certain guidelines and practices on accessibility.

STARTING OFF WITH A DEFINITION

The term "accessibility" can feel overwhelming due to the myriad of things that it potentially conveys. Though it feels necessary not to shy away from it because it keeps reminding us of a work that is never finite, always in the process.

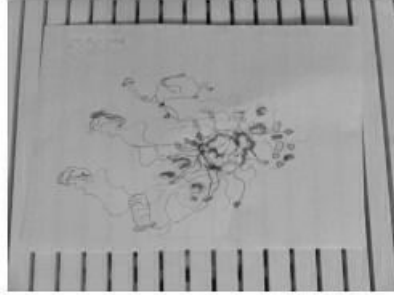
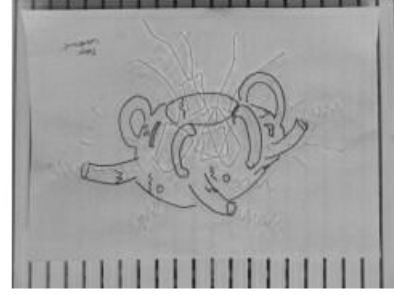
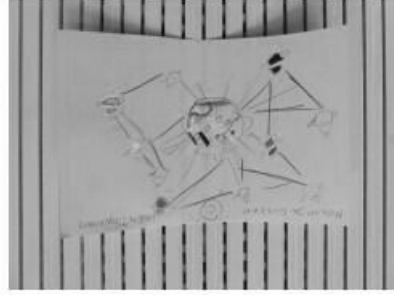
Throughout the rest of the days we delved into some texts to understand accessibility via different lenses. We understood that a unique definition for accessibility isn't helpful. It is an ever shifting and deeply intersectional and contextual concept. One of the starting texts we read gave us some historical context of the word 'accessibility':

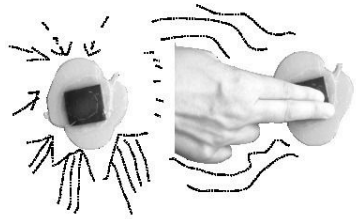
IT'S TECHNICAL AND I DON'T UNDERSTAND MUCH OF IT ANYWAY

-- Written by Imane B.K.

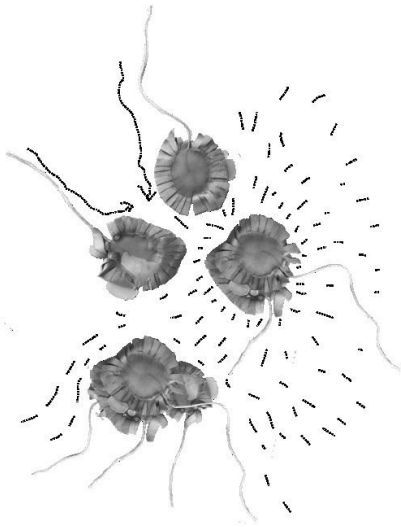
In the process of explaining and writing about the series of meetings called *confusing coding situations* which I organised and sometimes co-organised, I get lost in the difficult terms, trying to explain what and how and with whom it happens.

In the end, I am continuing to keep the long and confusing title even though it might not be helping. Some say that coding is hard, yet coding is something we do all of the time. Coding is defined as a set of instructions we write to a computer so it executes a certain task. This is a technique that is present in many other practices so, I have always been intrigued as to why computer coders and programmers are always seen as *very unique people*. It felt as if their job requires some specific skill or knowledge that is very difficult to acquire. While I do not want to delve deeper into why I find it weird how coding has become a highly appreciated thing in the mainstream, I do want to point at a specific thing I noticed in my own parours in the coding realm that inspired me to take a critical look at



PRESSURE

A translucent body needs to be pressed to be activated. The harder you push, the more contact is made.

CREATURES

Two creatures with conductive flagella have to touch to connect. They can only touch a little bit and they can activate or de-activate.

Thanks Alex, Marie, Raaf, Zsolt and all the wonderful participants/partakers of this workshop

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According to the Oxford English Dictionary, use of “accessible” as an adjective dates as far back as the fourteenth century, when it denoted being “capable of being entered or approached” and “readily reached.” It was only in 1961 that “accessible” began to be used to denote the ability to be “readily understood.” As a noun, “access” derives from the fourteenth-century Old French “accès” (denoting both the “coming on” or “attack” of an illness or emotion) and from the Latin “accessus” (“a coming to, an approach”). Describing “the power, opportunity, permission, or right to come near or into contact with someone or something,” [...].

“Access” can rectify exclusion; however, such efforts remain incomplete without a critical assessment of how those exclusions first came to be and how they continue to function. [...] For radical disability activists, the tension in “accessibility” also arises from use of the term to denote inclusion in an unjust system—or, as activist organizer AJ Withers (2015) terms it, “accessing privilege.” In this view, a truly radical approach to accessibility requires considering the tensions between “accessibility” as a solution or checklist versus “accessibility” as an ongoing negotiation. For radical disability activists, the potential of “accessibility” is precisely to mark “access” as an ongoing and shifting process rather than as a mode of solving individualized problems.[...]

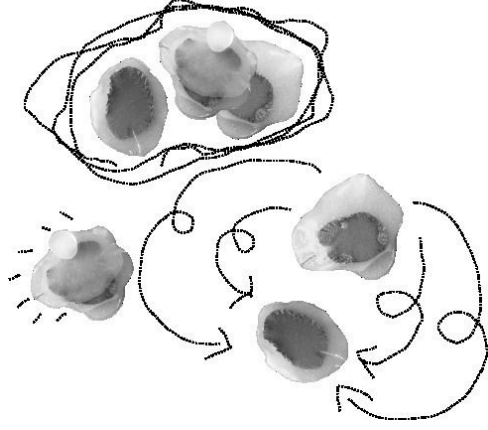
While “accessibility” is regularly presented as a way of extending social inclusion to those who have historically been marginalized by ableism or other forms of oppression, this conception of “access” regularly (though rarely explicitly) comes into conflict with “security culture,” “safe space,” or forms of intellectual engagement such as dense

theoretical writing or complicated word usage not deemed to be "readily accessible." Like "accessibility," these forms of exclusion are also commonly presented as a self-evident good, in which access is deliberately restricted for some in order to create a different kind of access, or community, for others. Importantly, the access barriers created by "security culture," "safe spaces," or through particular kinds of intellectual engagement like "inaccessible" writing, are usually taken to be necessary. Indeed, these practices are often necessary in order to create boundaries so as to thwart different kinds of attacks by the state and other enemies. The result is that the assumed good of creating access is pitted against the assumed good of maintaining security, creating community, or deepening our understanding of ourselves and our world. Here, far from being a self-evident good, "access" functions as a kind of attack upon boundaries that have been constructed for a particular purpose.[...]

The question remains: how might we address the divide in radical practices between celebrating access and acknowledging the need for particular exclusionary spaces within radical milieus to defend ourselves from attack? If, despite its violence, exclusion is a category we want to embrace in certain moments (for example, in calls for sovereignty or in contests over occupation), then it may be through "access" as a boundary practice denoting both "contact" and "attack" that we might find the means of navigating this fraught terrain.

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Excerpt from "Accessible" written by Kelly Fritsch from the book "Keywords for Radicals: The Contested Vocabulary of Late-Capitalist Struggle".

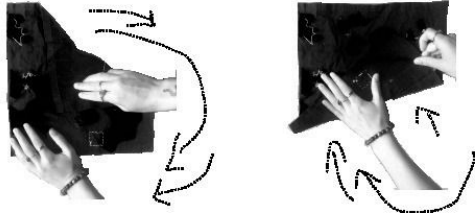


Two translucent blobs need to touch each other to activate something. Depending on how they touch, they will work or not.

BLOBULAR



A bright blue map is being folded in two different ways. Each time it is folded in a different way, a different kind of button action can be imagined. There is conductive thread worked into it.

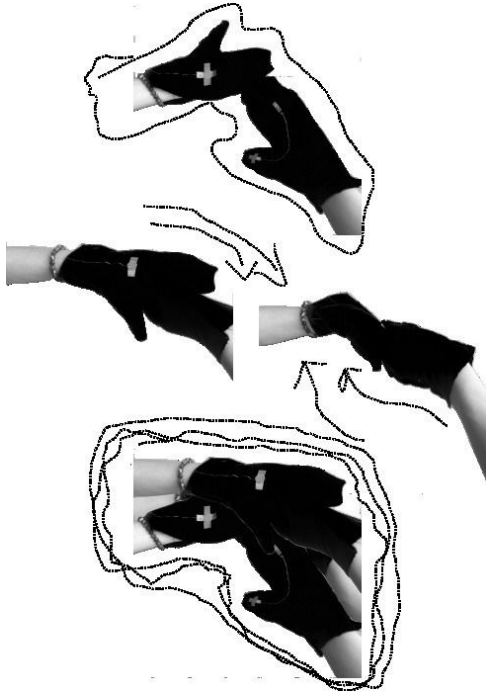


MANIPULATING THE MAP

(CONNECTING) BUTTONS

SNAPPING

A rigid folded button made with woven colourful plastics. When opened and then pulled swiftly with both hands, the active zones touch and go to their folded position. The conductive fabric layers inside touch.

DOUBLE GLOVE

Two light blue gloves with conductive threads and electronics connected to them shake hands. They are lefthanded.

PHYSICAL SPACES

For the day on physical spaces, we started by telling each other about our offices and buildings. We shared what we thought needed thinking and intervention and how we were planning to go about it. We looked together at maps, videos and images.

There, the differences between our institutional realities became quite visible. For instance, Constant, whose office and studio space are not 'public', is not held by the same standards than the ones of Kaaithheater and Museum Dr.Guislain. They feel a sense of responsibility and care towards the public; the priority is to ensure the safety of the people in the space. This safety comes with many standards and regulations from various funding institutions that do not allow for much speculation/experimentation when thinking along the multi-layeredness of accessibility questions. Since Constant does not accommodate a big audience like Kaaithheater and Museum Dr. Guislain, it also allows us to take integral part to the thinking on access in our own spaces instead of having to hand over the whole process to external experts; without much space for collective thinking and making. Though, the differences in the scale of the buildings and resources of Kaaithheater and Museum Dr.Guislain showed significantly more possibilities for ambitious renovations and redoing regarding access than our DIY approaches/attempts. This does not mean that Constant will not aim for accessibility as do bigger institutions or that we will not look at standards and regulations in the process. In fact, we can allow ourselves

to take these standards as a starting point and go beyond their rigidity to accommodate people's needs on a finer and more nuanced level. This type of work requires time, transparency, collaboration and solidarity with communities.

SIGNS EXERCISE

"Sometimes we find people wandering in the hallways of the museum while they are searching to access the hospital."

The question of orientation and signage came up several times in our discussions; it appeared that unclear,

confusing or just non-existent signs are a common issue in (public) buildings. Since we were thinking of access in

relation to physical space, we proposed to work with signs as tools for facilitating access. We divided into three

groups, each taking one area for experimenting with the possibilities of signage. One team was in the kitchen, one in the entrance and the third one in the garden. To introduce

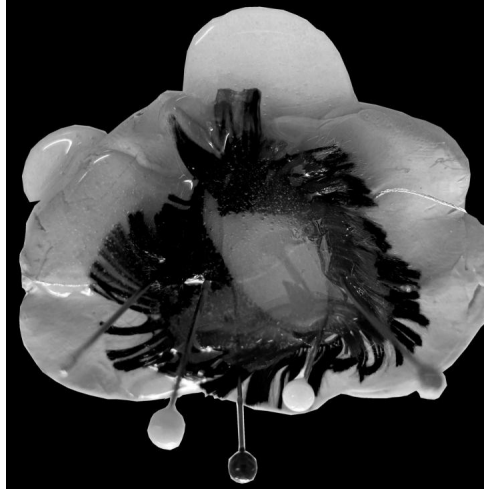
the exercise, we all followed a ritual by the collective MELT. We offered this ritual for the way that it makes us be

thoughtful and attentive to the space we occupy.

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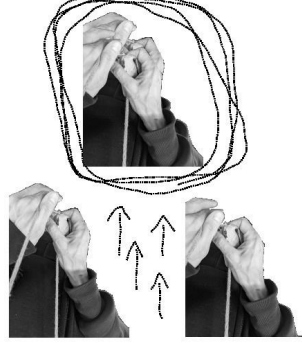
"Ritual for bad listening: Take a piece of paper or your smartphone and for 5 minutes, write down every sound that you hear and/or sense (the humming of the heater, the chirping of a bird, the temperature in the room, the brightness of the light). Repeat this ritual in different settings if possible. When and where are you comfortable with listening/sensing? Do you listen/sense deeper with time? Are any of the

A clay shape is holding a fluffy blue textile thread. The thread is being held with pins, translucent silicone has been poured all over.



CASTING SILICONE

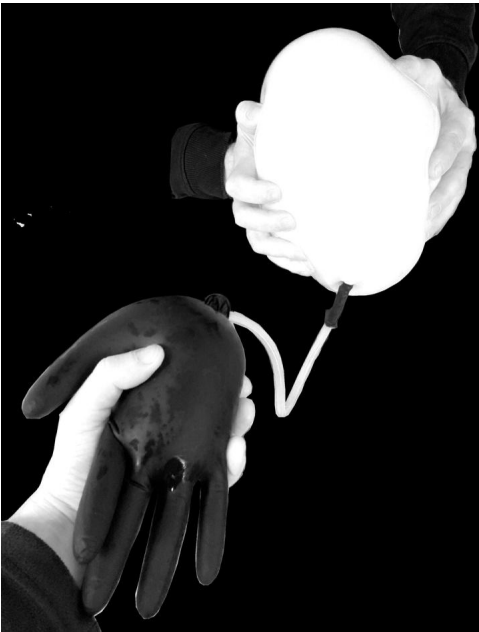
Prototype of a hoodie cord, in order to be able to discreetly activate or deactivate a device. The hoodie is black, and a hand is pulling the light grey conductive cord. Small electronics are held by the same hand.



HOODIE

PLANETARY BUTTONS

A planet like shape is being held by a hand. Two other celestial bodies are suspended from it, they are being held by a conductive thread. They are colliding.

SQUEEZING

A black rubber glove is connected with an inflated red balloon. When the balloon is squeezed, the glove inflates and vice versa

things you hear/sense an access barrier for you or for someone you know? You can use this ritual as a way of checking in with a new space. This ritual is based on a text by Jonathan Smilges."

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Excerpt from CONF(FUSE)ING AND RE(FUSING) BARRIERS
by Ren Britton & Isabel Paehr

EXAMPLES OF THE SIGNAGE EXERCISE:

Sarah entered the kitchen, looked around and very pragmatically said "Well, this cannot be a public space".

The team in the kitchen focused on the many ways that the space could be hazardous; that angle was possibly prompted by the nature of the equipment generally present in kitchens. The signs were used to warn (slightly humorously) about the dangers present in the room. The making of signs for the kitchen highlighted how much the studio's kitchen made with a DIY ethos could constitute a barrier for many: a space relatively large becomes narrow because of the accumulation of appliances and scavenged items, a tap with sometimes scorching running water because of an old water boiler, a missing cooking hood which causes the room to sometimes fill with dense smoke etc.

The team in the entrance proposed a prototype for another type of signage. They attached a yellow neon string from the entrance door throughout the hallway (around 10m long) to guide people. As we were all walking after one another holding the string in one hand, someone suggested

“what about a large fluffy string to make it nicer?”
In this way, visitors are guided by holding the string and following it through the space; this was another type of signage that would not rely on visual clues. Though, a visual sign was still created to explain the presence and purpose of the string. The possibility of changing this visual sign into an audio one was also mentioned.

The group in the garden made use of the signs as a way of conceptualising the function(s) or the potentialities of the space. Here, the sign does not give operational information but instead invites the persons looking at it to compose with it.

For the making of the signs, we used this tool: <https://observatory.db.erau.edu/generators/signs/>

LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

ALT-TEXT EXERCISE

A series of exercises coming directly from <https://alt-text-as-poetry.net/>, a project developed by artists Bojana Cokiyat and Shannon Finnegan.

We read each others' communication materials and considered whether we understood what was communicated. We had a try at translating a text into simple language. Constant, who is used to being playful and experimental with languages, felt it was important to try to find a balance between its usual experimental modes and the necessity of simple language.

(CONNECTING) BUTTONS

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What kind of button would your brain, neurodiverse or otherwise, like to exist? What gesture does your hand/other body part want to do to activate something (technologically)? What material do you find pleasant? What shape should such a button have? At what scale?

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In March and June of 2024, we speculated and created prototypes of on and off buttons, within the framework of A Cane, sticky notes and another body. The workshop had a very wide spectrum of ways of creating, from soldering to sewing. We experimented with silicone casting, types of interactions, inflatables, textile and electronics. The material choices, with how they feel, were most apparent in the research. We left open the potential narratives around the button. Not only what they would look like but also what they could activate or deactivate was part of the speculation. In this zine you will find an arbitrary selection of the creations. In those still images we have tried to include the aspect of movement, of body gestures.

and software. It is also about the people who use it and the relationships they create. These relationships include the processes, emotions, and communities involved. The users are an important part of Rosa's infrastructure. They perform actions that affect the technology and the people around them. Sharing Rosa involves passing it on to others. These relationships are important for understanding how Rosa works and how it can be improved.

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Example of exercise: The text describing the project ATNOFS on the feminist server 'rosa' was selected by one of the participants.

'original' text: rosa (they, them) is a feminist server that travels between different locations, providing a mobile infrastructure for learning, documentation, and experiments for the meetings that happened during the A Traversal Network of Feminist Servers project. rosa is not only its constituting hardware or software, but also the multitude of relations which are created around the making, maintaining and passing on of this infrastructure: the processes that are performed, the affective charge of their actioning, the communities around them.

the text rewritten by some of the participants: rosa (they, them) is a feminist travelling server. Rosa provided a digital space for learning, documentation and experiment for the meetings of the project called A traversal network of feminist servers. rosa is not only a technological device it is also a community with practices of making, maintaining and sharing.

DIGITAL SPACES

AI AND TECHNOABLEISM

One question that informed the preparation of the worksession, but was not clear when and how to bring it to the table, was the one regarding the many A.I.-fueled projects directly engaging with accessibility needs. The issue points to an intersection of different political vectors:

companies with extremely exploitative and extractive agendas like Microsoft, OpenAI or Zoom are at the same time able to offer advanced software "solutions" for access needs. This includes for example automated closed captions during a videocall, image recognition of documents, automatically generating alt-text from an image and situational pictures that can help people with visual impairment as well as people who don't speak the bureaucratic language of the country they live in.

We found ourselves oscillating between the advantages and usefulness of these technological solutions 'offered' by profit-driven companies and our own urgencies to cultivate other modes of relating to technological processes and devices. With the rise of data collection and the increasing demands and regulations for web accessibility, we remain wary of how these two combined are used to mine and extract data that feeds back these companies' initial goal: the capitalisation of the users.

During the session, AI use came up in relation to time-intensive tasks such as the production of alt-text. The necessity for alt-text tends to catalyse institutional workers' anxiety regarding a consequential piling up of tasks in their already tight workflow.

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This could be a good use of chatgpt

Rosa is a project that travels to different places. It offers a space for meetings, learning, and trying new things. The project is part of the A Traversal Network of Feminist Servers. The space has chocolates, candles, and a soft toy for celebrations. Rosa is more than just its hardware

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The previous text rewritten by <https://capito.eu>

As we were discussing and uncomfortably testing out some chatgpt features, we wanted to figure out whether these models, which promote their efficiency, do really help when it comes to specific language-based tasks? During the session, we tested Capito's tool. Capito drew our attention, because it is a group that started working on accessible/simple language in 1999. They seem to have embraced the AI craze and created a tool to automate some of the labour they used to do. The results were, in some part, unsurprising and in another, unexpectedly weird.

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Powerpoint actually has an AI feature that writes the alt text for you

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We were approached by a company to automatise these procedures and become more efficient

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