# female Freelancer

*\*(falling action) Don’t doubt the subject’s feminism\**

If I do not become a corporation I will never beat the assholes to the moon

If someone is to go to the moon let me sing you a love song

Let it be me

— Ariana Reines, *A Sand Book*, ‘The Long Love That In My Thought Doth Harbor’

In 2021 I was very much flirting with the idea of building my own software. When I shared my goal with Scott, he told me *Good luck*, then eventually asked: If writing semantic code is not your cup of tea, then why don’t you just stick to your writing practice instead?

My first answer to that question would be to point out the irony behind it. After my fadeout from his studio, I seriously started answering his question with an occasional pat on the shoulder whenever I reminded myself of my software plan.

The only way out is through, I thought.[[1]](#footnote-2) Compared to the lack of choices with BlockSmith software, my own software would allow more choice to the user—for that’s always the developer’s goal. Maybe in collaboration with someone else’s brain, I’d figure out what kind of software that would be.

Out of sheer excitement, I called Clara to see if she’d be interested in sharing this dream and becoming a powerful female duo. Slow, poetic, more creative, and, most of all: very capable.

This power woman image led me to believe that we could change the classic reasons as to why everybody wants to hire a female web developer right now, in tech corporations, companies, start-ups, educational institutions, etc. (Slow, poetic, more creative, capable, and, most of all: cheaper.)[[2]](#footnote-3)

With a software by our side, Clara and I would improve the image of female employability, expanding it into safer spaces where the female developer can be her true self.

For example: art academies. Due to the well-known ego politics and patriarchal power dynamics that must be urgently dealt with when encountered, most academies don’t have time to find out what exactly they want from the coding tutor they’re looking for. They just know that, if they still want to be relevant and contemporary, they urgently need one. Because of a general lack of discourse regarding web development, it’s hard for these academies to recognize various educational needs of the (art) practice. Their uncertainty puts them in a position of not being able to take any risks, and often leads them to play it safe, hiring the technically most skilled candidate who can fill a gap, solve a problem, quick, fail-proof.

For example: in tech corporations and start-ups, where the teams consist of mostly men, a female web developer enters the team as an added ‘light-energy’. Where the team’s goal is focused on the technical progress, a female web developer injects the milestones with her decorative, design touch. Most of the time, she does so in the tasks related to the project’s documentation, presentation, and revision—the process, not the finalization. This is the world we live in.

But, with software by our side, we (Clara and I) could put an end to this kind of thinking. This, however, sounded too dreamy.

This power woman image threw me into the depths of identity politics more than the basics of software development—which, truth be told, is what got me excited about the plan in the first place. The burden of our software, no matter how technologically crafted, would be its representation cornering us in the thread that continues equal positioning of women in the history of technology. It would also corner us into celebrating the fact that women *invented* the classification system; that men got recognition for it *before* women started doubting whether it’s the best system; that even though women were the ones entirely writing the programs that enabled machines to work, they were kept on the sidelines (Do you remember the term ‘kilo-girl’—1.000 hours of computing labor—in the 1940s? No? Look it up.)

I don’t want my main role in web development to be the constant retelling of the history of women’s (dis)placement within technology, as this is not *the only* way to build history. Yet for the sake of commemorating those women who contributed to computing throughout the history (1700s, a gap, then 1900s till present day), here is a full list of these women worth remembering from a publication called *Computers at Work*: Nicole Reine Lepaure (built a clock for astronomical observations), Ada Lovelace (first computer programmer), Anna Winlock (mapped the universe for 2 cents/hour, which was half a man’s pay back then), Antonia Maury (improved the system of classification by redesigning it), Annie Jump Cannon (developed a stellar classification system: Harvard Classification Scheme),[[3]](#footnote-4) Henrietta Swan Leavitt (discovered galaxies beyond the Milky Way), Dorothy Vaughan (NACA’s first black manager; self-taught in FORTRAN, prepared her staff for the transition from human to machine computers), Mary Jackson (NASA’s first black female engineer), Katherine Johnson, ENIAC (Kathleen McNulty Antonelli, Jean Jennings Bartik, Betty Snyder Holberton, Marlyn Wescoff Meltzer, Ruth Lichterman Teitelbaum, Frances Bilas Spence, Kathleen Booth, Grace Murray Hopper, Margaret Hamilton, Mary Kenneth Keller, Katie Bouman, and Donna Strickland.

Extending this list with Clara would end up proving that we’re competent enough for the industry. Doing ‘average’ development would disqualify us as developers; what’s more, we would have to be excellent just to get recognized. We would have to become the stoic men.

The hardest thing about building software is deciding *what* to say, not the act of saying it. More choice is never the answer to the question of online freedom. As Douglas Rushkoff said: ‘The more choices we make (or are forced to make) the more we believe our expectations will be met. But in actual experience, our pursuit of choice has the effect of making us less engaged, more obsessive, less free, and more controlled.’ More beta-versions of choices lead to final choices offered by a new software. We’re never *not* perceived as full of attention.[[4]](#footnote-5) In the potential failure of my software, new systems would emerge in its wake.

In all this confusion, what seemed to be an immense desire to build a software became an immense desire to just be *materialised* *thought*. Can I be Sadie Plant’s brain, or that of Guangyi Li, [Mindy Seu](https://cyberfeminismindex.com/), [Nancy Wu](https://a-website-is-a-room.net/)? Can I be this website,[[5]](#footnote-6) Carlo Rovelli’s whispers[[6]](#footnote-7) in *Real Review#11*, Ben Grosser’s Minus, the digital minister Audrey Tang, or Maggie Nelson’s latest book, *On Freedom*? But then I also know: I still want to continue writing code for others.

The web development’s history, full of evidence on top of evidence, of rights and wrongs about the way one can and should be allowed to code, makes it hard to see coding as a craft for establishing a ground where realistic ambitions between developers and users can be met. Only when a developer is able to explain to their clients the technologies used, the reasons behind using them, their effect, and how to engage with them, can be seen to what extent realistic ambitions could be met. The developer, then, is building in collaboration; not just with the aim to solve a problem. Not all collaborations are problematic: this is what Silvio Lorusso encourages us to do in his article ‘Code to Learn’.[[7]](#footnote-8) New bootcamp schools are popping up all over the place, new ones arriving as soon as the old ones go bankrupt, while start-up companies and corporations are increasing the demand for more developers. Yet no matter how highly paid or desired these developers are made to feel, there will always be a satisfying amount of workers or developers *hating* their jobs, wishing for a better standard.

*\*(the point) Is the point of the subject to empower users to also take control of the tools they*’*re using?\**

Were I to wrap up this book with a list of issues at stake, and another one listing the coping strategies for said issues, I’d definitely start from the main issue being the consequence of the tech industry’s promises of global governance: user’s inability to not participate in online activities from which data is extracted and accumulated. Imagine how a user’s conscious choice to move through the online world, with limited choice-making via the clicking of buttons, would reflect on their online existence? Furthermore, on their online history of the self? I do not know, but I’d like to start imagining. Plant knows what I mean when she writes how ‘zero was always something very different from the sign which has emerged from the West’s inability to deal with anything which, like zero, is neither something in particular nor nothing at all.’ — Sadie Plant, *Zeros and Ones*.

Reflecting on the current state of the internet, the production of digital histories, the hands behind it that enact its unseen labor, as well as the enabling of the users’ ‘superpowers’ while they’re on a hunt for that cultural spark to connect with, has led me to realize that the internet could be a space for feeling *offline*. Maggie Nelson, in her book *The Art of Cruelty*, asked an all-round relevant question: ‘Perhaps more controversially still, given our inarguable complicity in all kinds of systemic forms of global injustice: is there any space left for not watching, not focusing, not keeping abreast of all the events and atrocities unfolding in the world, as an ethically viable option?’

*\*(rising action again) Hmm, but what does the subject want????\**

I want to be free (from feedback loops), and I want others to be free, too. [[8]](#footnote-9) Demanding freedom4all seem too naive here. The constraints from which any urgency is born requires addressing its demands through its relations to the neighboring factors (such as alienation, agency, self-governance, survival, consumption, power, class) and which, I believe, are only to be addressed by the body that feels trapped in its own constraints. The disordered. Some grow wings in boxes; they adapt.

I can’t stop referring to Maggie Nelson. In *On Freedom*, she asks: ‘What if we don’t presume, however, that there is any bottom to our desire, that it doesn’t lie in a black box at the bottom of the sea? What if learning to notice our shifting drives, identities, curiosities, disinterests, or aversions, be it over the course of an encounter or a lifetime, is our truer calling?’

Were I to speak from a defined and more developed role (of a writer, web developer, artist), would I dare to materialize these ambiguities I have found within my own dubious relationships with these practices? In the end, it really doesn’t matter if you’re a stoic man, a female web developer or if you’ve developed your own software, what extravagant move you make to inject yourself into tech history, if you’re into coding, or part of a no-coding movement. What matters is how one chooses to relate to information. Meaning is not *in* the ‘document’, but in one’s relation *to* it.

In his book *In the Flow*, Boris Groys provokes a linguistic agency for the human or user when he writes that ‘today we practice our dialogue with the world primarily via the Internet. If we want to ask questions to the world, we act as Internet users. And if we want to answer the questions that the world asks us, we act as content providers.’ Thank you for this, Groys. So, then. Let’s *think*.

What’s the point of making a website when you can start an Instagram account instead? What’s the point of writing this book, in fact? Although revealed late, the starting challenge was to try and answer Scott’s question: *If writing semantic code is not your cup of tea, then why don't you just stick to your writing practice?* But to not necessarily answer it. Sorry not sorry, Scott.

If there’s one personal condition that this book tries to encover within my own usership, it is that of personal liberation from the circles I found harsh while dwelling on the internet. And that the amount of knowledge I’ve gained from writing this book summarizes not only the level of my commitment to the subject(s), but also the context I am writing from: my social status, the gain and/ or lack of my freelance gigs, my female ambiguity, my questionable convincing skills, plus the fact that sometimes, when the world around me gets too loud, starving is still my default defense mechanism.

\*fadeout\*

1. ‘When an uncontainable artist’s influence won’t go away, art history compromises by constructing hagiographies. At least that way the vision is contained. But you have to keep reminding yourself of the great dead artist’s situation. That he also had contemporaries. That thoughts are never thought alone.’ —Chris Kraus, *Aliens and Anorexia* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Hiring a female web developer gives a good image/face to the ecosystem where she’s been given a chance. She’s made to believe that she is the architect of her temple(exquisite), capable of being in control over her money, time, decisions, selfhood, and soul. And all of that shall tame her enough to not resist the aesthetic. But when she does, the aesthetic will either kick her out of its mechanism, or it will be adjusted by professionals to suit her. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Stars were organized into classes using seven letters: O, B, A, F, G, K, and M (abbreviation of Oh! Be a Fine Girl - Kiss Me!). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. In *Bitch*, Elizabeth Wurtzel describes the men Amy Fisher was surrounded by: ‘It seems that whenever people deal with the world in binary oppositions, choosing one thing only because it negates another, they are inevitably startled by the discovery that the quest for something completely different has only given them more of the same.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. <https://www.queeringthemap.com/> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. In the text, Rovelli structures the consistency of modern reality from a technical point of view, but also from a personal, poetic interiority. Through his model of reality, he claims that objects are temporary visual projections in the current construct of time. He distinguishes between, what I understand, a chunk of concrete information to nod to, and agreement through feeling. Rovelli states that modernity is long gone, exactly because of this complexity of understanding basic notions within the time that has become rich with content. There are multiple times: of the physicist, of a lover waiting for his love to arrive, of a young man dreaming about his future, of an industrialist planning economical strategies, and so on. These examples, in particular, touched me and made me think of attunement as an everyday exercise. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. <https://silviolorusso.com/publication/learn-to-code-vs-code-to-learn/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. In the second episode (‘The Use and Abuse of Vegetational Concepts’) of *All Watched Over by the Machine’s of Loving Grace*, Adam Curtis explains cybernetics: ‘Cybernetics said that everything, from human brains to cities and even entire societies, could be seen as systems regulated and governed by feedback…it seemed to offer a new insight into how order is maintained in the world…Cybernetics saw human beings not as individuals in charge of their own destiny, but as components in systems…They were just nodes in networks, acting and resting to flows of information.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-9)