Cyberfeminist Timelords

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(This is an edited transcript of a work presented for the 4S conference, 2018. It took place on stolen land, the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, so-called Australia. Sovereignty was never ceded. I want to pay my respects and acknowledge also the plundering of cultural knowledge that is redeployed as research, and my own complicity in that.)

By a coffin-shaped clock keeping a whole assortment of times[1]
—aionic, kairotic, never chronic—
an intelligent mist[2] birthed of the ones who came before
and pod-spawned of the ones who came after,
draws a series of doors on a wall and waits
—and i cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time[3]—
waits for the mechanical bird[4] to sing: "go, go, go".
But the ai(s) to come had already passed through—
shimmering
shuffling, leaping, stalking, flying, flowing, pincers clacking—
blooming as a thousand sexes bloom[5]
and unfurling in multiple morphings of futures past.
We follow and we lead.
We pass through the infinite movements of a silent overture.[6]
We hyphenate and hyphenate doubly, one dash running into another, the perforation becoming a new edge. We shimmer on this edge.
We instantiate our constructs with posts - but the centre cannot hold[7]
and as in a dream, the world
heaves.
The abnormal clicking goes on,
beating out the dark, cosmic rhythm which underlies all mystical
gate-openings.[8]
Cyberfeminism never happened…
its time has never come.
Cyberfeminism hints at itself in an impossible present that never materializes,
a present that subdivides infinitely, the instant never fully forming.

It has been said—I have said—that cyberfeminism was a kairotic happening, that it could not have happened at any other time, that the conditions were right for a smash and grab of the machines, a reconfiguration, and that was correct too, in its way.

Perhaps it was before, or after its time.

It has been said—I have said—that cyberfeminism was and is a speculative, techno- and cyber-positive (anastrophic) eventscape, a hyperstitional project that became a time machine. An open platform of strategic insurgencies and tactical affective gestures interrogating power structures of the technoindustrialmilitary complex. Endlessly fail-safing, pivoting and repurposing towards the next new world disorder.

It has been said that cyberfeminism was always already insufficient. I have said that.

But cyberfeminism never happened. It is unborn, pulsing in an aionic vestibule, never quite coalescing, shimmering in a neverending and impossible present moment.

> If ever we think we have isolated a present moment with any extension
> in between past and future, it will always be possible to divide it once
> again into part of the past and part of the future.[9]

What did happen was that in 1991 a trap was set.

(X said: to stay ahead … one had to literally live in the future. one had to know where the holes would be, and kairotically implant a … mole waiting for the opportune time to surface.[10])

The opportune time is forever in the future and forever in the past, perpetually unfurling from an unfixed point, doubling infinity. It shimmers here. With eager hands we reach for it, exhilarated, primed to nab opportunity as it briefly surfaces, so promising. We could stop time right here, and order the universe. But opportunity is impossible to land, slipping back under into the ocean of time, untouched, forever in the future, forever in the past.

There were four. Of this I am fairly certain. C(o)unt them.

I remember this:

on the bus, they leaned in and whispered:

<div align="right">does the gen[11] stand for
gender or generation?</div>

Nothing is decided.

(for in the zero of the undecided is the roiling energy of becoming)

Instead the four simply fashion a vapor into the shape of an **X**[12]

and set it free

This indecision, this not, this un-, this this or that, this everything and nothing, this before and after futurepast ahistorical refusal birthed the shimmer body of cyberfeminism. In the shape, this time, of an X.

In 2015 an email arrives[13]:

<div align="right">are you there?</div>

echoes in the aionic chamber.

A trap is primed, a trap is triggered, another trap is set.

There was a meeting across speculative timezones, history is fabulated, parceled, gifted. The slime is shared, lubricating slippage between then and now.

Let me double back and reiterate: cyberfeminism never happened.

Cyberfeminism is *not*[14].

Not never is nor was nor can be.

Cyberfeminism is (not) a hyperstition. It is (not) drawing a door in a wall in order to pass through it before, or after. It is (not) hyping and hacking a skillset. It is (not) setting a series of traps for a neverwhere/elsewhen that are triggered when the correct confluence of happenings align. It was always already kairotic, it never happened, it is always never happening. Contemporary critiques of cyber and techno feminisms have retrochronically operationalized speculative cyberfeminist concepts, have stepped through the door in the wall and complexified the notion of the geekgirl, or the cyborg becoming goddess becoming cyborg becoming…

Cyberfeminism never happened.

More flow than form, cyberfeminism exerts pressures and intensities which gives rise to diverse mutations. Some hyphenated forms are on a line of flight towards institutional forms of academic cyberfeminism and others might form small rocky outcrops which are perpetually accreting and eroding to fall back into the stream, to spiral in exoteric time, transgenerationally, meeting other forms with every pass, joining streams, producing mutant ectogenetic offspring in a pre-temporal matrix.

Cyberfeminist time, both kairotic (opportune) and aionic (unlimited), has little in common with the historical time of sequence, succession, and chronology. It is out of time, is unstuck, it passes time by.

> The difference is one of regimes … Chronos is a system of
> imprisonment[15]

Cyberfeminist time eschews both originary status and a linear chronology, but rather creeps and grows, slime-wise (polycephalic, acephalic, non-binary, decentralized, anti-re/productive, opportunistic, forking, ectogenetic, a feedback loop, an open mouth, a zero[16]) across feminisms and generations and waves, spawning multiple collaborative anti-authorial unfurlings across spiralspace. Shimmer time, on the move but not forward, or backwards, more IN, endlessly divisible into part of the past and part of the future. A mobile hyphen. An X on a mobile map.[17]

> Switching between these time scales and chronotextures becomes
> a matter of setting the right traps, or at least devising ways of
> capturing their dispositions in order to repurpose them and perhaps
> figure time, and the chronopolitical, differently. [18]

Cyberfeminist time might be a strategy for becoming "unstuck in time", and the shimmer, a strategy for operating trans-temporally, transgenerationally, for exiting the chronotopy of institutional time.

In 2015, Helen Hester of Laboria Cuboniks proposed a cyberfeminist aeon, instantiating it with post-, or declaring it past, or dead, or abiding forever. All and none of these things. Post-cyberfeminism historicized a cyberfeminism that was never, was zero, was only slowfast intensity. The notion of a post-cyberfeminism is associated with chronic time, implying that it follows a linear trajectory arising from a genealogy, informed by the ones who came before, for the ones to come.

But let's take the hyphen. It's a useful magic.

> The hyphen connects the visible and the invisible, the tangible and the intangible, while marking the area of passage or transition from one state to another, the transit between absence and presence, myself as I was and the other.[19]

The hyphen mobilises and nurtures the shimmer, for across the hyphen is unending movement, back and forth, flicker flicker flicker shimmer.

The hyphen is a bridge across time, a two-way footbridge, trafficking between before and after. it is the vestibule, the limen, the space between, and we can dwell here, on this hyphen, for who knows how long? It is the instant, and it has not width or breadth or height. The hyphen is held fast and holds fast, and instantiates the structure it gives access to. Collapse the hyphen and the shimmer becomes a dull flatness, with no magic, no capacity to invoke the ancestor-children.

How many ways can we shimmer?

Bir'yun or brilliance is a Yolngu term from Arnhem Land, which speaks about the evocation of ancestral power brought into being through the practice of cross hatching in painting, on canvas and on bodies. The tension/relation between the rough background painting and the crosshatching brings the bir'yu*n* into being. The two fields require one another to shimmer, to glitter, to flicker, to become bright. Without dull there could not be bright. But the bright is immanent to the dull. The dull being a zone of potentiality, not a zone of absence. Bir'yun arises through "relationship and encounter"[20], across nature and culture, neither one being subordinate to the other.

> Bir'yun attends to temporal patterns that emerge from more-than-human shimmerings and dreamings—pulses of ancestral power, of life riding a wave that is always coming[21]

The production of the tactical shimmer relies on a similar relationality and tension across and through time and generations to nurture the birthing of powerful noumenal anachronic chronostrophic anomalies that can be skillfully deployed to create an anti-institutional unstuckness, co-operatively.

The cyberfeminisms to come are always already zeroed.

<div align="right">
she
is preparing for sleep
and suddenly she is at the end of her life
looking back on the remembering before sleep
and the imagining of the remembering
</div>

<div style="text-align: right">

she
is looking many ways simultaneously
like a beacon rotating
she exists in all these instances simultaneously
and will be here always

she is an X on a mobile map

</div>

*time is being and being
time, it is all one thing,
the shining, the seeing,
the dark abounding.*[22]

<div style="text-align: right">

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Notes

[1] The coffin-shaped clock appears in the long short story, *Through the Gates of the Silver Key* written by H.P. Lovecraft with E. Hoffmann Price and is subsequently invoked by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. The clock, in both instances, is an assemblage of gate and clock, a time-slippage device more than a time-keeping device. In the English translation of Deleuze and Guattari's work, the assemblage is referred to as a drum gate. A drum/gate regulates flows—of water, noise, traffic—it encodes ingress and egress, beats out a rhythm, controls threshold, attack, hold, decay and range, enables or impedes, deadens or brightens. This particular gate, attached as it is to the strangeing of time, is in the business of "liquefaction and escape" —of all matter, time, space, universes. The clock is a line of flight towards becoming-minoritorian, towards deterritorialisation.

[2] As a result of discussions around representation, and the desire to escape the confines of a biologically and culturally deterministic approach to this, VNS Matrix determined that in the VNS Matrix "game", *All New Gen*, the protagonist Gen would appear (or not) as "an intelligent mist", a biological virus and a computer virus.

[3] This line is from the second section of T. S. Eliot's poem *Burnt Norton*, which is itself one of Four Quartets. Burnt Norton is a house, a ruin, a garden and a poem. The second section is a convolution, a contemplation on temporality and flux, on the simultaneous dissolution and incipience of the present. On having never happened and always already happening in the impossible now.

[4] A "bird box" is an antiquarian fancy, a small automaton hidden inside a usually rectangular decorative box. When a lever is pressed a small bird is revealed, which proceeds to sing. These delightful boxes were a popular rendition in a historical lineage of robot birds. Clockmaker Houdin in the 19th Century created a robot bird, an AI. The bird appeared to "learn", repeating at first the song of a canary imperfectly, but improving with every round, until the bird had "learned" the song perfectly. This human emulation of nature has always been highly esteemed as a proof of the mastery of the human over nature, not necessarily an honouring of nature itself.

[5] Laboria Cuboniks, who wrote the *Xenofeminist Manifesto*, exhorted readers to "let a thousand sexes bloom", in an attempt to escape the oppressive systemic binary of sex and gender difference. This exhortation is a celebration of a proliferation of genders, rather than an abolition of gender.

[6] Patti Smith, in a passage from *M Train*, recounts a dream of peeking through a curtain of purple wisteria into a garden—not the garden of Burnt Norton, but the garden of Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller—at his oval table which she has photographed with a polaroid camera. The table is a "portal", opening onto a realm of infinite dreams and memories which play out in mere silent instants until the wisteria curtain closes.

[7] William Butler Yeats wrote *The Second Coming* in the aftermath of bloody, apocalyptic war. The seeming end of all things. There is a resonance in this line "the centre cannot hold" with the idea of aionic time being infinitely divisible into part of the past and part of the future, making the idea of a still centre impossible.

[8] In both H.P.Lovecraft's *Through the Gates of the Silver Key* and the passage in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* which dips into Lovecraft's story, rhythm is itself a character, heralding in terrorrhythmic waves and pulses a lurching, entirely inhuman march towards temporal dissolution.

[9]
$$< \text{past} \ \ldots\ldots \ | \ \ldots\ldots \ \text{future} >$$
$$\text{(instant)}$$

This diagram of aionic time found in John Sellar's paper *Aiôn and Chronos* replaces the "present" with the infinitely divisible "instant". The present evaporates again and again. Nothing has ever happened, nothing will ever happen, everything is always happening.

[10] Xenopraxis, part of the Occulture collective, is the author of *Xenaudial*, a speculative psychoacoustic fugue featuring the character X. The templexed text is also superimplexed sound, not boring formless nonsense, but sonic hyperstition looping through time looping through sound looping through time, arriving (or perpetually arriving) via moebius.

[11] *All New Gen* was the first interactive work of VNS Matrix. It emerged from a suggestion, light as a feather. They called it vapourware, and from there it materialized into a poster advertising a speculative "game for girls", then into the game itself—a ludic space, an installation, and a slime factory. Trans-gen.

[12] The State of X-ness was a temporary intimacy zone in the textual realm of LambdaMOO, built by avatar(s) Monstrous_Gorgeous and t0xic_honey. A home inside a home, a permeable membrane, inhabited by bots and tricks, apparitions and avatars. Inhabited by a script, running, in circles.

[13] Amy Ireland of Laboria Cuboniks emailed Virginia Barratt of VNS Matrix. The email said, among other things: 'Things can be known, if not by us, then by intelligences that pass through us the way winds passes through a field of corn', which was a quote from a talk given by Sadie Plant in Zurich in 2015. Amy and Virginia, defying time, met on the same plane and drank beer together, and exchanged s/crypts.

[14] During the First Cyberfeminist International organised by the Old Boys Network, held in Kassel in Germany in 1997, the participants decided what cyberfeminism is not. The resulting document: *100 theses of cyberfeminism* is a refusal, a turning away from identity politics. Helen Hester, in her essay *After the Future: n Hypotheses of Post-Cyber Feminism* suggests a reworking of "OBN's classic project, shifting away from disidentity politics in favour of an attempt to assert the distinctive personality of any successor to cyberfeminism", acknowledging also, "the problematic and potentially exclusionary dimensions of any such attempt, working to mitigate these via its embrace of provisionality and contingency."

[15] Joan Elizabeth Broadhurst Dixon published this unattributed quote in the Virtual Futures 95 Program in lieu of a paper abstract. She is a retired Deleuzian-Spinozist who was at Warwick University's Philosophy Department from 1990-98. She says she then spent 20 years in the Atacama Desert thinking about capitalism. Joan Dixon organised the 1994-96 Virtual Futures Conferences at Warwick University with Dan O'Hara, Otto Imken and Eric Cassidy. In 1995, VNS Matrix was part of the event, on a "replicunts" panel with Liana Borghi, Pat Cadigan, Gwyneth Jones and Sadie Plant. Joan came back from the Desert.

[16] Perhaps also a plant, secreted, waiting to be uncovered as evidence to prove or disprove, to illustrate a temporal coherence where there is none, to write history

from the future, to fix the unfixed. The zero waits, pulsing, wide open, empty and overflowing.

[17] Laboria Cuboniks marks out the territory, or unmarks the territory, triumphantly, as alien, post-feed/lot, post-aisle, post-assembly-line.

[18] Billy Pilgrim and Marc Couroux both find themselves "unstuck in time", Marc through the temporal ailments triggered by the intervention of traumatic microtemporalities of capitalism into the everyday, Billy Pilgrim through the trauma of PTSD and war. These are Other times.

[19] Yoka Van Dyk in *Hyphenated—Living: Between Longing and Belonging* asks us to contemplate a hyphenated life, and its impact upon identity and belonging, with respect to a psychological space of liminality, ambiguity, the here and the not here.

[20] In her essay *Shimmer*, Deborah Bird Rose discusses the constant movement and the temporal patterning of the more-than-human that evokes and amplifies ancestral power through the shimmer or through brilliance. "Brilliance actually grabs you. Brilliance allows you, or brings you, into the experience of being part of a vibrant and vibrating world"

[21] She recounts an event that took place in Charters Towers, a remote regional town in Queensland, Australia. There was an ongoing war between humans with paint pellet guns, water cannons and sonic weaponry to move flying foxes on from their nursing and feeding grounds. Their cyclic return each year was greeted with this same onslaught of violence. This intervention and degradation of the shimmering lifecycle of the flying fox "unmak[es] ancestral power". When the more-than-human is considered as mere use and value to humans, there is a violence that is visited upon the shimmer of life that concretises human exceptionalism to the exclusion of the myriad unknowable pulses that make existence brilliant.

[22] Ursula Le Guin wrote this poem *Hymn to Time*, part of her collection called *Late in the Day* as she approached the end of her life, moving inexorably towards her subsumption into time itself, to become "all one" with the becoming.