(En)Gendering the Digital

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INTRODUCTION BY THE SPECIAL ISSUE EDITORS

3 X 0 X 1 = THE GENDERED ECONOMY OF THE INTERNET

It has been nearly 30 years since Sadie Plant's *Zeroes + Ones* rang a bell of optimism for women in the emerging digital age. A 'new technoculture' was spreading in the wake of the mass internet, and Plant saw in computing and coding 'the quintessence of the female condition (simulation, connectivity, patchworking)' (Slater, 2009). This was a technology to expose the artificiality of gendered performance. With the incoming internet, many of the so-called cyberfeminists saw a space where 'all physical, bodily cues' could be 'removed from communication' (Wajcman, 2006). Internet-mediated connection beyond bodies was imagined to set-aside the judgements and discriminations afflicting women, queer, non-binary and gender non-conforming people. Multiplicity could spring from zeroes + ones. Plant's evocation through *numbers* drew explicitly on French psychoanalytic feminist Luce Irigaray (1985)—finding in digital code a resonance of Irigaray's account of the female sex as both devalued as zero (less than), but also crucially 'not *one*' (more than)—sexuality as multiple, non-linear, and dispersed.

At the same time, elsewhere in the 1990s techno fug, a then 30 year old law graduate named Peter Thiel was gathering the seed funding for a mass technology empire—one that would go on to produce Paypal, Palentir and Facebook. Thiel began the industrial and intellectual enterprise that would forge his 2014 book, advising on the success that birthed these digital behemoths. His text—evocatively called *Zero to One* (Thiel, 2014)—saw digital culture through the prism of entrepreneurship, frequently now included on undergraduate reading lists for business studies. Subtitled *Notes on Startups, or How to Build the Future*, Thiel's book saw in the enigmatic move from 0 to 1 a singular "act of creation", when "something fresh and strange" could spring forth from the mind of the early-stage innovator. Even at the mathematical level, Thiel had reasons to be fascinated by the simple act of addition. As a baby, Peter probably learned to count by starting at One, as most children do. Going up from there to Two, Three, Four or even Five would have been taxing enough for a young brain. Starting at One is pretty fast and efficient but, as the Western Mathematicians of the Middle Ages came to realize, it is far from the whole story.

So, if the doyenne of cyberfeminism and one of digital culture's most controversial entrepreneurs agree on one thing, it appears to be the foundational importance of the number one and the number zero to our technological world. Zero is what Simon Steven called the "true and natural beginning" (Rotman, 1987)—a space out of which counting emerges, introduced into the West by the Hindu numerical system. Realizing that absence could be productive, calculated and even counted-upon was a significant disruption in the intellectual landscape that would form modern Western culture. Today, zero and one—the language of binary code—is felt in every digital interaction of a world increasingly reliant on computing. It resonates, too, in our lived experience as inheritors of modernism: a system of meaning involving binary pairs becoming binary opposition, productive categorizations of "nature/culture, nature/history, natural/human, resource/product" (Haraway, 2001). That enticingly easiest binary of all—man and woman—operates like all others to provide clarity and categorical calm in an unpredictable world, just flexible enough to set the two genders apart or to unite them as common conservations against anything daring to stand outside.

This is the background to the special issue you see before you—more likely on your screen than on a printed page. This special issue began with an open call for papers in 2025 by editors of KKF, aiming to revisit the various (en)genderings of the digital world that we increasingly find ourselves enveloped in. Submissions were received from across the Nordics from a variety of disciplines, with an encouragement for intersectional, feminist, queer/trans, decolonial, and posthuman perspectives. As editors, we felt that representation from junior scholars was of particular importance. In trying to cultivate a wide-scoping, non-hierarchical process arranged around

interweaved themes, we aimed to reflect the hope of early cyberfeminists in the emancipatory possibilities of the early internet. Yet, zeroing-in on the gendered world behind the textual journeys of Plant, Irigaray and Thiel's texts, suggests that such faith in the internet as a genderless space appear massively compromised. Rather, a powerful set of actors in the tech ecosystem benefit from a kind of 'digital patriarchy' (Little and Winch 2021). Plant's complementarity of zero + one becomes Thiel's assertion of progress: the relentless march from zero to one is the search for success at all cost, certainty at all opportunity, and splendid isolation.

In working around these tensions, our issue of nine articles and a book review is arranged in the following themes:

- Gendered Interventions in the Flow of Information
- Counterpublics and Digital Activism
- Mediated Misogyny, and
- Rethinking Methods in the Age of Datafication and Algorithmic Socialities

GENDERED INTERVENTIONS IN THE FLOW OF INFORMATION

As the immersion of the digital into everyday life becomes ever more intense, radical changes in information technology—notably generative Artificial Intelligence—provoke new questions and concerns. Within gender studies, GenAI is considered an epistemic disruption that may be compounding informational injustices – responding with answers "against women, girls and sexual and gender minorities" (Barry & Stephenson, 2025, p. 2). These forms of delegitimisation emerge from an account of AI as "rationalist and masculinist from its inception" (Toupin, 2024, p. 591). AI is just the later chapter here in a story of the proliferation of scientific knowledge as mechanistic and divorced from the body in its worldview. As Frederik Vejlin explores in his book review of Ericka Johnson's edited volume *How That Robot Made Me Feel* (2025), these dimensions even resonate across AI's application to emotional matters—that which (summarizing Jennifer Rhee's chapter) continues to make 'foundational commitments to the theory of basic emotions and the theory of mindblindness [which] reproduce patterns of deauthorisation along lines of race and disability' (Vejlin, this issue). When such a technology manifests not as an executive tool, but as a constantly available, proto-human companion, further questions of gender arise. Feminist labour scholarship identifies the continuity of women's socially accepted roles in the affective labours through which emotion is both produced and managed, with chatbots continuing to "comfort and reassure users, while reinforcing fantasies of inexhaustible and undemanding availability" (Pinzón-Arteaga, 2026, p. 143).

Several texts in this issue refer to contestations of the access to (and regulation of) data in specific gendered forms. For Mariam Khaled and Jakob Kleofas, GenAI technologies are more active than has been recognized in "the production, circulation, and stabilization of gendered meaning", not merely reflecting it but enacting it. This performative reading goes beyond Butler and Haraway to zone in on the enforcement of identity through "probabilistic citation". In exploring how several different chatbots perform gender, the study sketches that which is often less visible to human actors: that recurring and re-performed labour of establishing a gender is "mechanized and hyper-visible" to the readers of AI-generated texts. Their method is an original destabilization of human and AI relationships; the multiple case study sets up a challenge to 'the anthropocentric assumptions of qualitative research' by the interviewing of a 'non-subject'—seven different AI chatbot systems. The result—a Citational Logic of Algorithmic Mimicry (CLAM) – emphasizes cultural scripts as powered by data and set off a structural path of reproduction that should concern all those for whom gendered performance is an act of agency.

The proliferation of AI-related research, commentary and fervour should, however, not lead the information specialist into believing questions of retention, memory and archiving are only answerable in terms of a generative machine. Significant moments in the history of digital archiving are at risk of being elided by AI. Rachel Pierce's text in this issue makes an important intervention in the historiography of digital archiving by tracing women's and gendered archives in Sweden as an example of such tensions of informational retention. Pierce argues that what can be considered and approached as "an archive" has been radically changed due to the networked nature of documentation that digitalization has caused. Pierce finds archives linking their practices to "democracy and inclusivity" whilst also dealing with different interpretations of these terms—particularly for groups whose data may be in a less formalised state or may require more resources to be retained. From an institutional standpoint, whilst it is the 'capture' and 'deployment' of AI technologies by corporations that is currently of concern to many feminist data scholars (Klein & D'Ignazio, 2024), Pierce finds particular challenges in "the lack of preparedness on the part of state institutions"—those who still hold significant archival power. While the author is particularly interested in archival studies, questions about what constitutes data in the onto-digital turn—how such data could be collected, verified and analyzed, by whom–and what sort of knowledge they create is relevant for gender studies at large. By drawing on a 'feminist "information activism" perspective', Pierce's question uncovers from beneath the current AI fervour a more profound question of preservation in the digitalised world: "If our lives now extend into and are influenced by what happens online, what is the future of women's and gender archives?".

COUNTERPUBLICS AND DIGITAL ACTIVISM

As had occurred with earlier developments in communication technologies, the invention of the internet catalysed changes in our understanding of the public sphere and, consequently, in political participation. While having initially been theorised in Kantian political terms by the late Jürgen Habermas (1991) as a space of debate among equals on matters of common concern, the "public sphere" would come to be famously critiqued by feminist theorist Nancy Fraser (1992) on grounds of how its original theorisations universalised a particular class of bourgeois men and contributed to the hegemonisation of their thinking. If, following Habermas (1991), the public sphere could be conceived as the social sphere of "private people come together as a public," to "debate" through "public use of their reason" (27), Fraser highlighted the ways in which access to that public space of political debate was indexed to people's identities.

Yet, according to Michael Warner (1992, 2005), Fraser missed something in her centring of the ways in which social inequalities grounded on, inter alia, one's race, gender, class position or sexuality lead to different levels of access to the public sphere and create different counterhegemonic counterpublics. For Warner, identities and subject positions do not wholly determine the ways in which private individuals relate to a public. Our belonging to a public is not defined by who we are. For Warner, a public is always self-organised not by virtue of the identities of its members but, instead, by means of a mode of address. Publics are nothing but a discursive space that brings strangers together. What unites the members of a public is thus not a shared identity, but their experience of feeling addressed, interpellated by a particular discourse.

Given the centrality of discourse in the formation of publics, it is no surprise that studies of publics and counterpublics have often paid close attention to the media infrastructures that sustain them. From studies of postwar British youth subcultures that have discussed teen TV and pop music (Hall & Jefferson 1975) to later studies of club cultures that have attended to the role of mass-, micro- and niche-media in the production and reproduction of clubbing counterpublics (Thornton 1995), media

and communication infrastructures don't just bring together individuals with pre-existing attributes in common, as Habermas (1991) argued. Instead, they actively constitute that public through their mode of address, shaping the subjectivities of its members and their experience of commonality among strangers (Warner, 2005). In doing so, those technologies perform a mediation of the world, understood not as remediation—translation or recirculation of what already is—but as the bringing-forth of new forms of life, and new human and more-than-human relations (Kember & Zylinska 2012).

If twentieth-century counterpublics were forged and reproduced by peer-to-peer exchanges sustained by subcultural media such as commercial magazines and DIY zines (Hebdige 1979; Hilderbrand 2013; Johnson 2019; Meeker 2006; Thornton 1995), the advent of the internet and, later, Web 2.0 radically altered the shape of those communication networks. Defined through virality, the new digital networks bring forth digital counterpublics sustained by "many-to-many" forms of decentralised communication often conceived, by both progressive and conservative voices alike, as capable of "infecting" or "corrupting" hegemonic discourse and ideas (Florêncio 2024; Galloway & Thacker 2007; Hester 2018; Laboria Cuboniks 2018; Russell 2020). These technological changes have led some researchers to expand on what they perceived to be the limitations of counterpublics as a framework of analysis. Just as "subculture" was critiqued in the wake of a proliferation of composite mosaic-like identities at the turn of the 21st-century (Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003; Ulusoy & Fırat 2018), scholars of social media discourse have noted the ways in which these newer discursive formations, often studied in relation to the online growth of far-right discourse, complicate extant views of counterpublics as counterhegemonic by default (Kaiser & Rauschfleisch 2019; Kavada & Poell 2021).

Feminist hacktivists and digital feminist counterpublics, for instance, have for some time been taking advantage of online platforms for coalition building, advocacy, production of counterhegemonic discourse, and political education and consciousness-raising (Barker-Plummer & Barker-Plummer 2017; Bennett & Segerberg 2012; Berg, König & Koster 2020). While these had led to global movements such as #MeToo, these particular feminist strategies also received criticism (Banet-Weiser & Rottenberg 2020). Some argued that digital activism hypervisibilises individual activists rather than critical masses fighting for structural changes, as well as centring on neoliberal logics of individual action, responsibility and self-governance that reinforce the contemporary atomisation of the social (De Beistegui, 2018). Others, however, have argued that, despite all these challenges, contemporary feminist resistance continues to learn from and work around the limitations of platform activism (Lindqvist 2020, 2023, forthcoming).

Digital communication does not take place in a smooth, attrition-free network of information flows. Contemporary digital communication is structured by corporate platform architectures that shape processes of counterpublic address, counterpublic knowledges, and thus, counterpublic formations. One of the most significant ways in which platform architectures and their governance have impacted digital counterpublics has been through a blanket deplatforming of sexually explicit content, a practice grounded on the view that all sexual content is inherently dangerous, especially to vulnerable groups such as children and teenagers (Molldrem, 2018). Yet, this occurs at the same time as the whole of contemporary media culture is highly sexualised, when sex and sexuality dominate not only social media platforms but everything from fashion advertising, film, art, or indeed sexual education content, making decisions on where to draw a line difficult, arbitrary, or driven by political investments and ideologies (Paasonen et al. 2021, 92; Tiidenberg, 2021). Indeed, as Jenny Sundén, Susanna Paasonen, and Katrin Tiidenberg (2026) argue, this deplatformisation of sex constitutes "a categorical dismissal of the fact that human sociality is inclusive of sexuality, that sexuality is deeply social and builds social ties and attachments" (p. 9). Sexuality has always been central both to the

formation of the public sphere and to the proliferation of counterpublics. If "the personal is political" (Hanisch 1970), that is because intimate life is always "connected to, structured by, or regulated through the public sphere" (Plummer, 2003, p. 70).

Apart from this, the growing deplatformisation of sex has also had repercussions for research on sexual counterpublics, as Kristian Møller's contribution to this issue highlights. In his article, Møller draws from a corpus of 450 viewer comments on 41 DIY chemsex videos uploaded to Pornhub, that is, videos centring sexualised drug use among men who have sex with men. The comments, which Møller gathered in 2019, predated Pornhub's 2021 "purge" of content and search terms that did not meet the new standards the platform put in place to prevent the dissemination of potentially illegal content, including the blocking of "chemsex" as a search term due to the illegal nature of drug use, which in turn made finding chemsex porn more difficult. A consequence of this, the article shows, was the disappearance of a digital forum where chemsex participants were, under the protection of anonymity, able to comment on videos and articulate in narrative form their chemsex imaginaries. Through this, they forged digital counterpublics that mediated anti-drug societal norms with drugged-up sexual pleasures by means of a discursive construction of "chemical companionship" between the human body and the drug consumed.

Digital counterpublics structured by platform architectures are also at the centre of Emma Machado de Souza's study of digital trans health communities on Reddit in this issue. Through analysis of 826 discussion threads from six trans subreddits, Machado de Souza shows how digital trans health communities constitute what the author terms "engaged counterpublics." This refers to counterpublics that emerge not merely by opposition to hegemonic medical discourse on trans health but through a more complex strategic move that involves both appropriation of biomedical knowledge and construction of experiential authority. This, as Machado de Souza argues, offers insight into a contemporary digital counterpublic that can't be reduced to Fraser's theorisation of "subaltern counterpublics" precisely due to the way appropriated medical knowledge is central to the formation of trans health counterpublics.

Similar dynamics of counterpublic formation structured by both affective practices and critical engagement with—and active resignification of—content also emerge in Lena Sotevik's contribution to this issue. Drawing from eight interviews with eighteen Swedish school girls aged 16–17, focusing on their responses to and engagement with food and eating content on social media, Sotevik shows how young girls are not mere passive consumers of what is often content governed by highly gendered norms concerning food and femininity. Being active agents in the affective economy of social media content, these girls took meaningful, critical and often ambivalent stances towards the content they were shown. Importantly, participants described how eating videos can be used as ways of managing the stress or shame associated with particular gendered expectations regarding eating habits and body image. In that way, watching someone eat on social media can provide a sense of companionship between the viewers and the people on screen, especially when the viewers, too, are eating.

MEDIATED MISOGYNY

While misogyny is often defined as the hatred of women because they are women, Kate Manne's influential notion that "[M]isogyny is not about hating women. It is about controlling them" (Manne, 2016) makes way for a broader conceptualisation of misogyny as structural and systemic. Misogyny thus operates within a system of patriarchy where it functions to survey, control, and police individuals and punish those that do not submit to the required, normative gendered behaviours. Loewen-Walker further notes that such a conceptualisation of misogyny allows for intersectional analyses where the logic of misogyny policies not only control women's behaviours but enforces "intersecting systems of white supremacy, heteronormativity and cisnormativity"

(Loewen-Walker, 2024, p. 66).

Networked misogyny, which Banet-Weiser and Maddocks define as "the structural, cultural and technological conditions through which misogyny circulates" (Banet-Weiser & Maddocks, 2023, p. 369) comprise the violent and hateful expressions directed at women on digital platforms. Research evidences how social media platforms facilitates the spread of online misogyny as well as (and often in conjunction with) other harmful ideologies, such as racism, homophobia, and transphobia.

Scholarly attention has thus also been focused on the economy of the platforms. First, is the critical attention to the neoliberal economy of visibility (Banet-Weiser, 2018) where platform algorithms encourage constant engagement by content creators while pushing misogyny and other forms of harmful content on platform users. Second, is the role of recommender algorithms that push misogynist and anti-feminist content to boys and men.

Significantly, misogyny operates within a patriarchal logic which enforces both women's subordination and male dominance (Manne, 2017). Thus, much research has been focused on how online networks reproduce masculinist, anti-feminist, and misogynist ideologies—i.e. the manosphere. Traditionally characterised as a diverse ecosystem consisting of male-supremacist and anti-feminist groups (Gerrand et al., 2025), the manosphere has been the centre of scholarly attention for a decade while public, media, and political attention significantly increased in 2025 with the release of the TV show *Adolescence*. Based on the fundamental belief that feminist politics equals a misandrist 'war against men', the manosphere ideology frames feminist aims of gender equality as aiming to disadvantage men which in turn justifies misogynist discourse as well as the incitement of violence against women—both physical and sexual (Banet-Weiser, 2018). The early research on the manosphere identified the content as primarily existing on subcultural forums mainly consisting of men's rights activists, pick-up artists, Christian conservatives, male separatists (Men Going Their Own Way), and involuntary celibates (incels). However, recent years have seen a shift in the type and spread of content, as algorithms push the content on mainstream platforms such as TikTok and YouTube, and the content is to large extents now produced by high profile 'manfluencers' (manosphere influencers). Following this also means a shift in the type of content which now includes neo-masculinist paradigms of wellness, stoicism, and 'grindset' (i.e. self-improvement through hard work) as well as the monetarisation of male insecurity whereby manfluencers push pseudoscientific wellness rituals and products, as well as selling 'self-improvement' courses teaching dating strategies as well as financial schemes such as Andrew Tate's "The Real World".

Research is also emerging in the Nordics on online misogyny, particularly in Sweden where research on anti-feminism, misogyny, and digital violence has been particularly prominent (Hansson et al., 2024). Research and reports are starting to document a distinct Nordic manosphere characterised by hypermasculinity, misogyny, homophobia, and anti-gender (Cybernauterne, 2025; Langeland et al., 2022; Mogensen and Rand, 2020; Prøitz et al., 2022; Slaveykov et al., 2025). Furthermore, a Nordic Manosphere Research Network has been established to strengthen manosphere research across the Nordic countries and develop potential avenues for collaboration. Some research is emerging which aims to map and characterise manosphere participation, influence and characteristics of the individual countries. In Sweden much research has been conducted tracing extremist misogynist discourses in far-right digital spaces (Askanius et al., 2024; Francis, 2025), as well as research documenting the role of sexual violence and rape culture in the misogynist discourses (Brock & Askanius, 2026; Hansson et al., 2024). In Finland, some research has emerged on the manosphere (Venäläinen, 2022, 2023) and incels (Lounela, 2026) while the research in Norway has primarily been focused on incels (Langeland et al., 2022; Prøitz et al., 2022). Denmark has only seen very limited research on the manosphere, mostly in the form of reports by

NGOs (Beyer Gregersen et al., 2025; Cybernauterne, 2025; Mogensen & Helding Rand, 2019).

Some researchers focus on constructions of masculinity as a crucial way of understanding the logic and the practices of misogyny. Norocel et al. (2020), for example, explore the construction of white Nordic masculinities in Finish and Swedish far-right populist media and find that idealised Nordic masculinity is contingent on both hegemonic masculinity, heterosexuality, and whiteness. A significant amount of research has focused on the overlap of mediated misogyny with far-right rhetoric and white supremacist discourses. Askanius (2021), for example investigates the intersection of misogyny and racism in Swedish far-right digital cultures while Fangen (2020) demonstrates how a femonationalist (Farris, 2017) logic is employed in Norwegian anti-Muslim Facebook groups to simultaneously frame white Norwegian women as in danger of Muslim men and Muslim women as always oppressed. Finally, an emerging scholarship investigates how anti-gender discourses have spread in online space in the Nordic countries too, promoting misogyny, anti-feminism, anti-queer sentiments, and especially anti-trans discourses (Engebretsen, 2022; Hansen, 2021; Martinsson & Ericson, 2023).

Some of the articles in this issue address issues of misogyny, masculinities, and the manosphere in different ways. The article by Fredrik Langeland investigates misogynist and reactionary discourses of a Norwegian manosphere influencer. The influencer employs strategic ambiguity to his public persona navigating between a position of ideological entrepreneur (Finlayson, 2023) and ideological intermediary (Arnesson, 2023). Utilising humour and irony, he blends the playful with the political thus preserving plausible deniability in relation to some of the more overtly misogynist content.

Online misogyny is also the focal point in the article by Ozan Félix Sousbois and Hande Eslen-Ziya. Here the authors have applied affect theory and creative ethnography—specifically what they coin as "stamping methods"—to explore how young Norwegians reflect upon issues relating to online hate, misogyny, the manosphere, and anti-feminism. The participants engaged with affective orientations, such as anger, fear, ambivalence, and hope, which enabled them to negotiate critique, resilience, empathy for the victims, and engage with questions about the future. The authors then argue that affective engagement with online misogyny is both reactive and productive which demonstrates the value of art-based methods for developing feminist knowledge production.

The article by Marie Naja Lauritzen Dias discusses notions of masculinity and femininity in relation to the way military war efforts and personas are represented. Discussing the phenomenon of *cutified military aesthetics,* the author explores how a feminised, cute mode of militarized imagery reorganises how militarism is perceived, felt and normalised. While the figure of the soldier traditionally has functioned as an emblem of masculinity in visual culture, the visual styles explored by the author demonstrate a turn from a hyper-masculine war-imagery towards a feminised and cutified military aesthetics in contemporary digital platform culture.

The three articles have in common that they warn against potential misogynist and gender reactionary tendencies that are repackaged (in humour, ambiguity, etc), contributing to a potential normalisation of misogyny and hypermasculinity.

RETHINKING METHODS IN THE AGE OF DATAFICATION AND ALGORITHMIC SOCIALITIES

The proliferation of online spheres and digital innovations—combined with big data/thick data economy and AI-fication of bodies, identities, and everyday life—has not only shifted the epistemological planes in research, but also methods and methodologies. As Karen Gregory and colleagues (2015) argue, such digital transformation has created a "new onto-logic of sociality or the social itself" that challenges and

escapes common sociological methods and theories. This "datalogical turn" (ibid.) urges researchers to rethink research methodologies and methods common in sociological studies and humanities, combining and/or reinventing old and new modes of data collection, processing, and analysis. For example, how to expand and reinvent ethnography into "digital ethnography" (Brudvig 2025; Underberg-Goode 2025), qualitative discourse analysis to Soft Data analysis (versus Big Data) (Lindgren & Eriksson Krutrök, 2024), visual analysis in arts and cultural studies to digital visual analysis of for instance memes (MacDonald, 2025), and media studies to social media studies (Caldeira, 2024).

Other methods are provoked by the appearance of newer and more complex technologies, in need of sophisticated analytical tools. Ericka Johnson's recent book *How That Robot Made Me Feel* (2025) is found by Frederik Vejlin (in his review for this issue) to display such a plurality of methods as to be considered a 'feminist intervention, asserting the legitimacy of introspection, design fiction, and ethnographic observation alongside the quantified experimental paradigm that, to an extent, still dominates HRI'. Other authors discuss the possibilities and limits of using AI in methods such as computational text analysis (Lindgren & Eriksson Krutrök, 2024), social network analysis (Knoke & Yang, 2019), platform analysis (Lindqvist, 2023), and algorithmic studies (Buolamwini 2023; D'Ignazio & Klein 2020) to capture "the digital datafication of everyday life" (Leurs, 2017, p. 130). Methods such as "digital mapping" (Fileborn, 2023), "digital iteration and digital mundanes" (Lee, 2025; Leszczynski, 2020), and "scrolling back, walking through, and going along methods" (Moran et al. 2024; Møller & Robards 2019) are now constructing a digital method toolbox in social sciences and humanities.

As algorithmic processing and big data are emerging as a "new regime of power/knowledge" (Leurs, 2017, p. 130) they also beg the question of what counts as data. For instance, doing archival research is not limited anymore to being physically in archives and going through material documents as massive amounts of various forms of data are produced, documented, and circulated on digital networks—a situation Pierce brings out strongly in this special issue. Pierce brings the example of feminist activism and how a great deal of such practices are taking place on networked publics. They further argue how matters of data and data collection become even more complicated as "women's and gender historical material" are fluid and contested. For instance, feminist activism online may not always be in pair with feminist conceptual traditions (such as intersectionality), begging the question of what constitutes data when working with such fluid yet highly regulated digital material (for instance by legal frames such as the GDPR or by business ownership). As such, drawing on information activism and community archives in the Swedish context, the author discusses Swedish institutions' preparedness "for future collection of women's and gender archival materials" as they ask what kind of "gender history will be available to future researchers, based on these materials".

Indeed, there has been a surge of research in gender studies engaging with social media, the online sphere, and platform studies, as these platforms generate new forms of data for understanding sociocultural and political articulations of gender (for example, in this issue, pieces by Møller and Stoevik). Other scholars attend to the affective and generative capacities of these platforms for feminist movements and for assembling networked feminist publics (Coffey & Kanai 2023; Poornimadarshini 2025; Vachhani, 2024), thereby committing to what Asma Mehan terms "digital feminist placemaking" (2024; see also Machado de Souza in this issue). The potential for engagement and resistance to the manosphere using arts-based methods is also explored by Sousbois and Eslen-Ziya in this issue, who discuss the potential for an affective engagement when research participants create art to negotiate their emotional reactions to online misogyny.

While methods attending to social media focus more on the sociocultural aspects of digital and gender

matters, data feminism—or more broadly, feminist engagement with digital data—addresses the politics and processes through which big data is produced, extracted, collected/archived, analyzed, and mobilized into action. For instance, scholars such as Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren Klein (2023; 2024), and Ruha Benjamin (2023) examine how digital data is entangled with power relations related to gender, race, sexuality, and more. They highlight cases in which the absence of data on gendered and racialized groups, as well as biased data (conscious or unconscious, including systematic bias), can harm marginalized groups—particularly in a context where data and datafication are increasingly framed as neutral and objective. In this sense, data feminism critically reflects on practices of data production, distribution, and ownership, as well as on the frames of engagement and politics underpinning Big Data (Michailidou, 2018). Data feminism as a methodology argues for a situated chain of representations in which data is understood as always already embedded and partial (Lee & Johnsson, 2025). Accordingly, data feminism aligns with what Wiens and colleagues describe as "materializing data," that is, moving data out of purely abstract or screen-based forms and into embodied, material, and sensory practices—such as making, handling, dwelling with, or spatially arranging data (2020). This perspective foregrounds questions of data's entanglement with uneven power relations, systematic and institutionalized exclusion, and the unequal effects of datafication in everyday life.

As our earlier description of feminist dimensions in AI research demonstrated, Feminist algorithmic studies is yet another methodological approach that has been influential in gender research. Ranging from human–computer interaction and robotics to synthetic data and algorithmic justice, this field aims to analyse the intersection of intersectional power relations with algorithmic cycles and artificial intelligence—from design to prompting, training, and performance—and how such power relations are reproduced, shifted, and transformed with and by algorithms (In this issue, Khaled and Kleofas; See also Benjamin, 2023; Buolamwini, 2023). It often adopts a posthuman perspective in which AI performativity and AI material infrastructures are understood as agential. The method seeks to understand these complex material–discursive and relational performative infrastructures by addressing which normative values and biases are encoded in AI solutions; how representation and representativeness are imagined and replicated, for example in synthetic data; and how these systems impact marginalized groups for better or worse (Devinney et al., 2025). Using feminist ethical and epistemological tools, the method aims to work toward the creation of more ethical and fair AI systems (Johnson, 2023; Winkle et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

In *Zeros + Ones*, Sadie Plant (1997) wrote that the emergence of the "Net" had been "that of a parasite, rather than an organizing host." (p. 49). The internet had, she claimed, "installed none of the hardware on which it works, simply hitching a largely free ride on existing computers, networks, switching systems, telephone lines" (p. 49). For Plant, the radical potential of the internet's own ontology did not, however, end at its lack of the Phallus—the ultimate organizing host—and the consequent parasitism of its existence in a phallocentric world. The very binary logic of its operations, whereby zeros and ones can code and recode a never-ending unbound stream of the new in all its difference, presented to Plant a pathway for the very liberation of the body and, by extension, of the sex-gender system. "Zeros and ones are utterly indiscriminate, recognizing none of the old boundaries between passages and channels of communication, and spilling out into the emergence of an entirely new sensory environment" (Plant, 1997, p. 185). Zeros and ones did not just extend the body; they informed and reformed it. The zeros and ones sustaining digital culture—or, better, what at the time would be known through the more poetic and utopian term "cyberculture"—had, according to Plant, revealed to us that "every unified body conceals a crowd," that "even the most unified of individuals is intimately bound up with networks which take it past its own borderlines, seething with vast populations of inorganic life whose replications disrupt even the

most perverse anthropocentric notions of what it is to have either a sex or sex itself" (p. 204).

As we approach the thirtieth anniversary of Plant's book it may be arguably hard to maintain such political optimism. The University of Warwick's Cybernetic Culture Research Centre (CCRU), of which Plant was one of the leading members, dissolved at the turn of the 21st century. Mark Fisher, committed leftwing thinker, author of *Capitalist Realism* (2009), and fellow CCRU co-conspirator died almost ten years ago, in 2017, with Nick Land—the other leading name in CCRU's mythology—having turned, moved to Shanghai, and become one of the leading voices of the accelerationist, neo-reactionary right wing. Closing in on thirty years after *Zeros + Ones*, the internet and digital cultures have also become increasingly privatised. Corporate entities govern and administer through surveillance, shadowbanning, and deplatforming; corporate digital infrastructures of our everyday lives turn personal data into profits, acting as avenues for the dissemination of some of the most violent and inhumane ideologies. So much for the liberatory potential of zeros and ones, so much for the internet's parasitic ontology, one could reasonably argue.

Yet, the articles included in this special issue paint a much more nuanced and, therefore, interesting picture of digital culture today. Rather than emerging as either necessarily liberatory or inherently oppressive, digital culture mimics and amplifies the messy, complex nature of our relations and lives. Our exploration of an engendered digital world reveals a place of intense contestation. Once hailed by some as "the world's public square", and through important cosmopolitan values of public speech, the internet's development into platform culture appears increasingly susceptible to state intervention, corporate manipulation and restrictions of content. The internet now appears to have the hallmarks of a "failed state" - a site that Sean Gallagher (IT editor of Ars Technica) describes as closer to 1970s New York: hate speech, low-level crime, and a lack of streetlights to guide those in danger through the darkness (Naughton, 2016). Navigating the digital world is increasingly one of living alongside objects coded by desire and excess–food, porn, drugs, and AI. Trying to stabilize forms of community in a failed state surrounded by these impulses may saturate the will and the engagement of many groups.

In closing, we wish to finally highlight the range of methodological and creative strategies represented across this special issue for engaging with, rather than resolving, the tension between digital fundamentalism/positivism and situated embodiment, intersectionality and cultural sensitivities. For instance, thinking through metaphors and imagination, staying with failure, and engaging in hands-on creative practices—such as "workshopping trouble," algorithmic biographies, and speculative fictions—these scholarships offer ways of (en)gendering and inhabiting the digital otherwise. An example of this is especially strong in the closing paper of this special issue by Schuster and Webster, in which they discuss the increasingly saturated digital landscape shaped by the widespread accessibility of digital technologies. This is a landscape where crisis-driven discourses about data and ubiquitous commentary on algorithms converge with the digitally amplified rise of anti-gender and paternalistic politics that reassert cissexist orders; in its face, they underscore the limited critical attention given to the human vulnerabilities reproduced by the cissexist logics embedded in socio-technical infrastructures. The authors do so by using thought experiments as a queer method, hence offering accessible ways to question relationships with data under techno-capitalism, unsettling dominant academic logics and challenging rigid divides between technical and theoretical approaches, while inviting reflexive, discomforting engagement and reimagining how data—and its governing power—is understood and navigated. Such scholarship contributions are not offering a singular "way out." Instead, they trace possible ways of living with and through digital culture—ways of rethinking, reworking, and, at times, resisting its conditions—while remaining attentive to the uneven, embodied, and deeply contested terrain in which it unfolds.

It is in the midst of such a complex digital culture that scholars such as Haraway, Leurs, D'Ignazio and Klein argue for working with methodologies of multiple/situated partial views—valuing both big data and small data—in order to stake out a nuanced position between uncritical celebration of the datalogical turn and outright dismissal of new methods as "data fundamentalism." As such situated, embodied and creative alternative knowledge production practices such as activism, art, poetry, speculative work not only provide possibilities for making life more liveable but also reimagining potential feminist and ethical futures.

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