

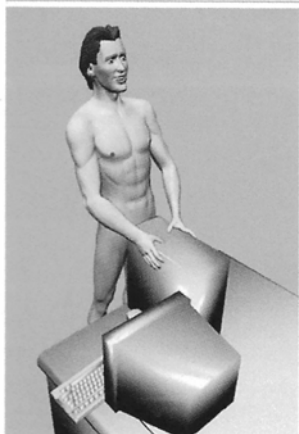
The scanned body pressed against the screen likewise appears in *Mouchette.org* (1996–present), a seminal early net art piece that claims to be the personal website of a fictional almost thirteen-year-old Amsterdam girl Mouchette; in reality it is the ongoing web-based work of artist Martine Neddam. On the “Flesh&Blood” page of this hypertext-driven interactive site, Mouchette appears mouth agape, lips smacked up against the monitor. The caption reads, “Want to know what my tongue tastes like? Try it on your screen and tell me.” Her flesh becomes one with the interface, itself a portal to her body. Despite the dematerializing nature of the internet, the Mouchette character asserts her corporeal self by presenting it upfront, licking, kissing, and ready for contact. A relic from an era that predates the wide use of touch screen technology, when users’ physical interactions were limited to tech appendages like keyboard and mouse, *Mouchette* nevertheless caresses the computer, seduced by its illusion and potential for connection.

Observing the radical ability of the early internet to detach the user’s mind and imagination from her physical self, digital media scholar Wendy Chun notes, “by enabling anonymous communications, it allegedly freed users from the limitations of their bodies, particularly the limitations stemming from their race, class, and sex, and more unimposed from social responsibilities and conventions.”¹⁴ Mouchette’s behavior, covertly constructed by a deliberately absent Neddam, seems to eschew this tendency as Mouchette foregrounds not only her body, but plausible details about herself such as her city, interests, and age (though eternally on the brink of thirteen). Mouchette’s face and the signifier of



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prepubescent femininity emblazoned across the site, such as bright pink flowers covered in glimmering dew and cute buzzing flies, also lend this piece the facade of authenticity. Mouchette is eager for personalized contact. One URL links to her flirtatious come on: "Would you like to have a private encounter with Mouchette?" Inviting viewers to enter their names and email addresses to connect, Mouchette aggregates her viewership, asking of them what she has seemingly already offered up—a glimpse into her life, enabled by dial-up.

As befits her fictionalized, girlish persona, Mouchette broadcasts her nascent sexuality into the network in a mode at once innocent and intimate. She sings, giggles, and moans. Is it in delight or in pleasure? Ruminating on the sites of femininity online, Heather Warren-Crow observes, "The Mouchette project [...] has much to tell us about feminine adolescence as a kind of networked participatory identity. What, really, does it mean to offer Mouchette as a public-access persona? What does it mean to maintain that service in perpetuity?"⁵ Mouchette, that is, Neddham, is just as interested in hearing from her viewers as she is in telling her viewers about herself. Various URLs link to prompts asking viewers to send her questions or join her fan club. Viewers, in this regard, become participants in her fiction, leaving questions and other marks of their visit to the site. While Mouchette is a carefully fabricated character, whose studied habits are an imagined albeit realistic net-based drama, she is also a document of the aesthetic, manner, and culture of the young teenager who, like those of Faith Holland's generation, came of age online.

While Neddham uses the internet to transcend her own body by generating an alternate identity, Alexei Shulgin regards the computer as a site of libidinal escape. His net-based commercial site *FuckU-FuckMe* (1999) promotes a fictitious product that enables users to simulate sex with remote partners by thrusting their organs into and against appendages and slots on a purchasable