



SYSTEMA_CAM

Re-imagining (online) sex work through digital storytelling.

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Profil:
Critico-Speculative

MA Thesis
Interaction Design
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Ludovica
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“ Sogno un mondo
senza razzismo,
abilismo, transofobia,
e classismo, non un
mondo senza sex work.”
—Linda

I dream about a world without machism,
transphobia, ableism, racism and classism,
not a world without sex work.

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Intro

Since his birth, the Internet has opened a door into our most private spaces and virtuality has infiltrated our bodies, merging reality and fiction. The first cam-girls of the 90s were important early examples of how the internet could create a cyborg subject, by integrating human images with the internet and setting the conversation regarding the relationship between technology and gender, sex and the performative body.

By merging technology with art and participatory design, the Syntia_cam project is a commentary on sex workers' evolving relationship with digital media and their impact on their daily lives. This project aims to create a new visual experience that challenges the traditional notions of representation and perception, blurring the boundaries between reality and virtuality.

Keywords

online-sex work, digital Identity, digital dualism, cyborg, subjectivity, gender, Internet, activism Metaverse, Performance, Avatars, Posthumanism

Das Internet hat eine Tür zu unseren privatesten Räumen geöffnet, und die Virtualität ist in unsere Körper eingedrungen und hat Realität und Fiktion miteinander verschmolzen. Die ersten Kameraleute der 90er Jahre waren wichtige frühe Beispiele dafür, wie das Internet ein Cyborg-Subjekt schaffen konnte, indem es menschliche Bilder mit dem Internet verband und die Diskussion über das Verhältnis von Technologie und Geschlecht, Sex und dem performativen Körper in Gang setzte.

Durch die Verschmelzung von Technologie mit Kunst und sozialem Design ist das Projekt Syntia_cam ein digitaler Kommentar zu der sich entwickelnden Beziehung von Sexarbeiterinnen zu digitalen Medien und deren Auswirkungen auf ihr tägliches Leben. Mit diesem Projekt soll eine neue visuelle Erfahrung geschaffen werden, die traditionelle Vorstellungen von Darstellung und Wahrnehmung in Frage stellt und die Grenzen zwischen Realität und Virtualität verwischt.

Thesis Statement Position and Research Questions

1.2

Dear readers,

I have long been interested in the topic of sex work and how the internet influences the life of those who work with sex. The closure of brothels and strip clubs, as well as the restrictions on travel and in-person services during the Covid pandemic, has forced many sex workers to shift to online platforms as a way to continue working and providing for themselves and their families.² During that time, while I was in Italy locked at home, I started following many Italian feminist activists: among them the anthropologist, activist and sex worker Giulia Zollino³ who talked about sex work and feminism on Instagram. I found it mind-opening how openly she talked about sex work and sexuality, and how she was bringing the stories of sex workers into the public space (Instagram). The relationship between the internet and activism has long earlier interested me since I started to research during my bachelor's on digital communications within climate activist groups.⁴ During my master's studies, this question shifted to the relationship with gender and technology, cyberfeminism and sex work.

I come from Italy: I grew up in a country where there is one of the highest levels of sexism around the world and where the word *Sex Worker* has one of the highest numbers of variations, often used to oppress, denigrate and insult women and their sexuality, whether they are or not professionally sex workers. This shows how deeply cultural the phobia against women's sexuality and sex workers is, and how deeply engraved it is in our society. This is one of the main reasons why I chose to talk about sex work: sex workers are not only at the forefront of digital technologies, but they have always been at the forefront of the battle against patriarchy, and I, therefore, with them.

The sex workers' relationship with the internet and the digital space is very important to dive into. Sex workers are in fact often left out of the main discourse about digital technologies, while they have always been pioneers of it. The sex industry is a taboo in the mainstream discourse about technology, but it appears to be the most innovative one (together with the military). The interaction between sex workers and digital technologies raises questions about ownership, digital identity, power structures and survival strategies in a digital space that is mainly sex work-friendly, but sex worker-unfriendly.

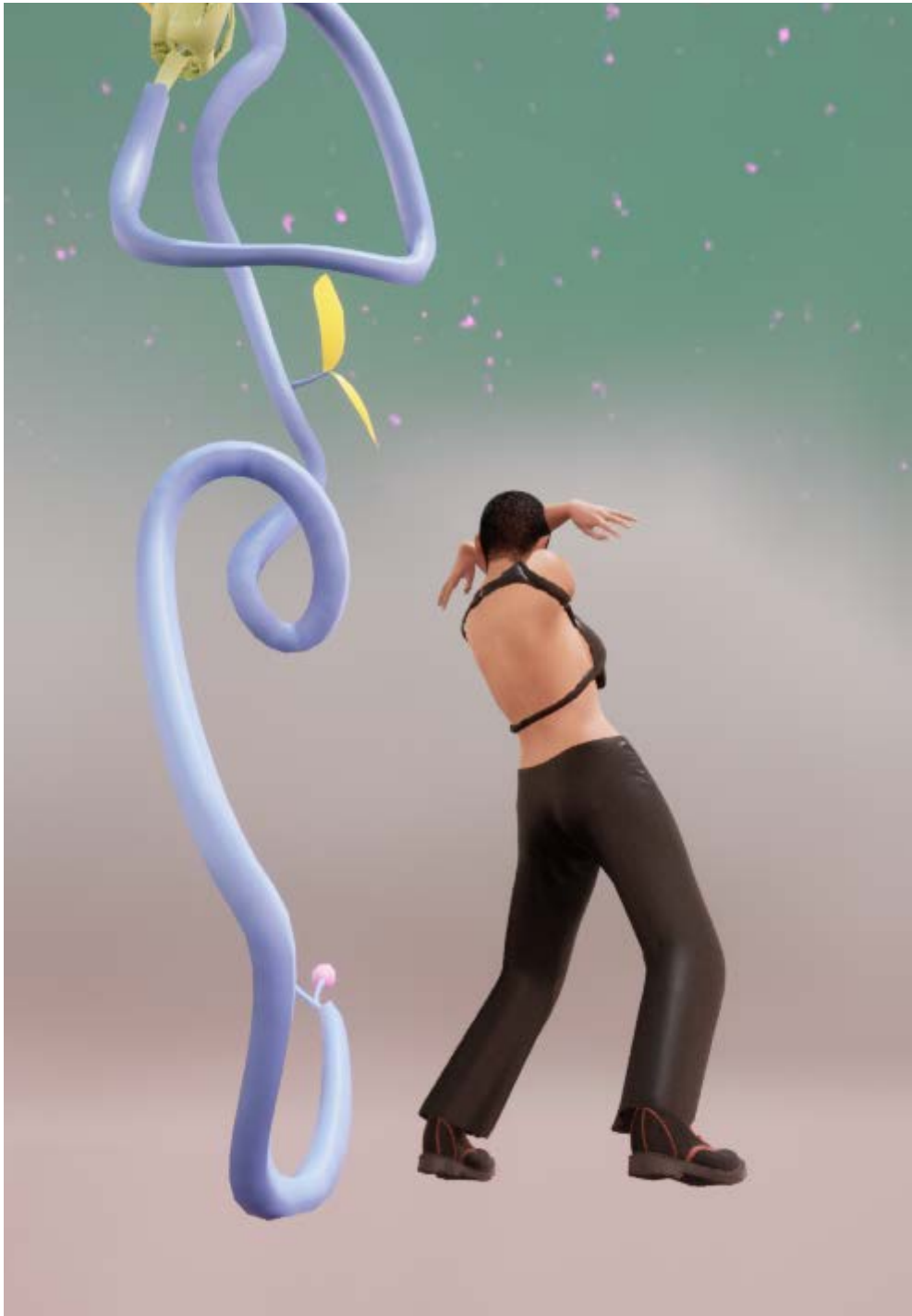
Research question

How do the new
emerging technologies
influence sex workers'
digital representation
and interactions with
online spaces?

² Okewo, A. (2020)

³ Giulia Zollino <https://www.instagram.com/giuliazollino/>

⁴ Galleani d'Agliano L., (2019) *Creativismo*, Thesis Research, Politecnico di Torino



Sub-questions

What are the strategies created by sex workers to work in the digital realm?

What is the potential of the avatar within a socially stigmatised community?

According to a 2018 research paper *Behind the Screen*,⁵ the lack of physical connections has accelerated new technological behaviours. People are moving to online spaces for work and entertainment, and as a consequence, the spaces are becoming more immersive every day, allowing new forms of interaction and intimacy. In particular, the closure of brothels and strip clubs, as well as the restrictions on travel and in-person services during the covid pandemic, has forced many sex workers to shift to online platforms such as OnlyFans as a way to continue working and providing for themselves and their families. On the other hand, the internet has created an unregulated environment where standardised rates, which existed in brothels, are no longer the norm, and sex workers need to negotiate their rates on an individual level. This increased need to negotiate necessitates the creation of multiple personas, in order to appeal to a wider, more diverse client base.

Online shift

Social distancing and isolation accelerated the shift to online social interaction, perhaps irreversibly. People spending more time online while using a greater variety of apps are inadvertently hastening the development of artificial intimacy. Sex and sex work suddenly became more digital than ever. Escorts and brothel workers, both unable to work and maintain physical distance, had to enter more virtual forms of sex work, such as selling images and videos on subscription platforms such as OnlyFans, engaging clients on camming platforms, and downloading the apps to drive their clients' teledildonic toys. As the Sydney-based sex worker and author Tilly Lawless put it soon, after isolation started:

“After a few stressed days, I find myself transitioning to online work for the first time ever. Without a working laptop,

5 Cunningham et. al., (2018)

camming is out, but being well-versed in social media, I get the hang of the subscription site ‘OnlyFans’ fairly quickly – where people can pay to access explicit photos and videos of you.”⁶

The Guardian reported⁷ that the number of OnlyFans users grew from 7.5 million users in November 2019 to a staggering 85 million in December 2020, an increase of over 1000%. Many people who had never tried sex work before, finding themselves out of work, turned to posting pictures on pay-to-view sites.

As soon as Italy went into lockdown in late February, Pornhub made their premium subscription service free for some time.⁸ They tried to pass it off as an act of humanitarian beneficence, but every click or search as visitors sampled the free content left behind a record of their erotic tastes. Pornhub will harvest those data, and their machine learning algorithms use them to serve up more compelling offerings to attract paying customers and advertisers in the future.

Moral washing

In 2020 big news hit the sex work industry. In particular, the Canadian erotic website Pornhub has been accused in the New York Times of promoting child abuse and rape on the website.⁹ In response, big payment systems such as Visa and Mastercard decided to retire the payment system from the platform to clear their name.¹⁰ Moreover, in the middle of the Pandemic in 2021, OnlyFans decided to ban erotic content from the platform, creating a lot of disappointment and fear among the sex workers community. Many sex workers shifted to other platforms, while Only Fans, several months after this announcement, decided to retire its decision, after receiving extreme backlash on social

6 Quotes of an Interview with Tilly Lawless (2020) The Guardian

7 Boseley, M. (2020).

8 Sara Spary, CNN (2020)

9 Kristof N.(2020)“The children of pornHub” <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/04/opinion/sunday/pornhub-rape-trafficking.html>

10 <https://www.reuters.com/business/finance/mastercard-visa-suspend-ties-with-ad-arm-pornhub-owner-mindgeek-2022-08-04/>

11 <https://www.insider.com/what-is-onlyfans-banning-content-work-porn-ban-history-sex-2021-9>

media, with sex workers, celebrities, and advocacy groups criticizing the move.¹¹ Even though OnlyFans in the end didn't ban online sex work from the platform, revealed itself as an unfriendly platform for sex workers.

Stigma & Mental Health

Sex work is a profession burdened with heavy stigma, facing uncertain legal status and a lack of mental, social, and emotional support. Despite years of advocacy, sex worker rights remain a taboo subject that lacks of mainstream attention. Society often turns a blind eye to the existence of sex workers in their midst. This stigmatization leads to a reluctance among youth sex workers to reveal their identities, resulting in a severe lack of support when their safety and well-being are at risk.

Sex workers are marginalized from social discussions, due to the deep-rooted social taboo and heavy stigmatization associated with their profession. Furthermore, they find themselves in a grey area where their work may be legal, but the necessary activities related to their trade are often criminalized. Consequently, they lack of legal protections in an industry where they face unique vulnerability to violence, both from clients and law enforcement. The combination of social exclusion and legal ambiguity places sex workers in a precarious position, leaving them with minimal resources and support networks. Addressing these issues is essential for fostering a safer and more inclusive environment for sex workers and recognizing their rights as individuals engaged in a legitimate profession.

Aims & Objectives

1.4

My thesis is a reflection of the existing abilities of resilience and claiming the power of sex workers concerning digital structures, to provide an insight into lived experiences of sex workers fighting and dealing with the power structures embedded in the digital space. The aim is to dive into the identity negotiation process that sex workers experience. In doing so, I hope to illustrate the challenges and dangers that sex workers face every day due to the (un)regulated digital world.

By showing the connection between sex workers and technologies, the final project aims to create a new visual experience that challenges the traditional notions of representation and perception, blurring the boundaries between reality and virtuality. Through this work, I hope to reach a wider audience beyond academic communities, facilitating the understanding, the interpretation and maybe even the action/praxis about sex work as a social phenomenon. In representing ethnographic data in the art form (ethno-mimesis¹²), we hope to access a richer comprehension of the complexities of sex workers' lived experiences, that can throw light on broader power structures and processes.

Moreover, my thesis doesn't aim to give a solution to the challenges that sex workers face every day, neither to portray sex work in an exclusively positive or negative light nor to give a comprehensive portrait of what is sex work today (because is not possible). This thesis aims to be documentation of a process of collaboration, empowerment and healing through the experiences of the participants. By doing this, we¹³ hope to explore creatively better-informed and more empathetic conversations surrounding sex work, and contribute towards its destigmatization.

¹² Ethno-Mimesis (ref. pg. 142)

¹³ "we" imply the author and the sex workers who collaborated in this research and project

This chapter gives a glimpse into the framework and methods adopted during the research to give a general understanding of the main tools used in the last two years. The thesis passes through an ethnographical excursus on the aesthetics and experiences of sex workers, in particular in the process of constructing the digital self (avatar). The research focused on the experiences of those who practice sex work that identify themselves as female/non-binary, and on those who work online/offline by using the digital space to advertise, negotiate and interact with clients, as well as for marketing digital content and performances via personal websites and third-parties platforms. The first part of the research concerns the observation of online spaces. While this part resulted very detached from the sex workers' community, the second part was mainly focused on the creation of cultural probes and artefacts with a group of sex workers during a series of online workshops. This part ended up being much more successful and useful for all the parties involved. The third part involves the use of ethnographical performance and *ethno-mimes* as a research method of embodied practices that will end with the final artefact.

Intersectionality and fluid experiences

“Intersectionality is an analytical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege. Intersectionality identifies multiple factors of advantages and disadvantages. Examples of these factors include gender, caste, sex, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, disability, weight, physical appearance, and height. These intersecting and overlapping social identities may be both empowering and oppressing. Intersectionality broadens the lens of the first and second waves of feminism, which largely focused on the experiences of women who were white, middle-class and cisgender, to include the different experiences of women of colour, poor women, immigrant

women, and other groups. Intersectional feminism aims to separate itself from white feminism by acknowledging women's different experiences and identities.”^{14 15}

Intersectionality is relevant in the context of sex work, in terms of the diversity of individuals who engage in this work. Online sex work attracts individuals from a wide range of backgrounds and identities, and these intersections can impact their experiences in the industry. Sex work is one of the jobs where physical appearance influences it the most, especially because there is a very high availability of erotic content. Moreover, the Internet structures work with algorithms that often tend to be discriminating against certain categories of people, ending in the form of banning¹ and shadowbanning¹⁷ of sw profiles. For example, an individual who is both a person of colour and a member of the LGBTQ+ community can face unique challenges and forms of discrimination within the industry that are different from those faced by a white, heterosexual individual.

“Both oppression and empowerment perspectives are one-dimensional and essentialist. While exploitation and empowerment are certainly present in sex work, there is sufficient variation across time, place and sector to demonstrate that sex work cannot be reduced to one or the other. An alternative perspective, what I call the polymorphous paradigm, holds that there is a constellation of occupational arrangements, power relations and workers' experiences.” (Weitzer, 2010)

Following Witzer's polymorphous paradigm,¹⁸ the sociologist Angela Jones,¹⁹ sustains that the experiences of sex workers are fluid. The erotic online industry can be exploitative and workers can experience other types of discrimination based on their subjectivities and embodiment. On the other hand, their work also allows them to subvert conservative ideas about sex-

14 Crenshaw, (2019)

15 Sisson Runyan, (2018)

17 Shadowanning: is the practice of blocking or partially block content from some areas of an online community.

8 Weitzer, (2010)

19 Jones A., (2020)

uality, and thus to create empowerment and pleasure.

Throughout this thesis, acknowledging intersectionality and fluid experiences has been extremely important in shaping the narrative and the project. One singular experience cannot give a comprehensive portrait of sex work, therefore is fundamental that more experiences are shown and shared because is not realistic to portray a phenomenon that has millions of different experiences.

Post Cyberfeminism

Post-cyber feminism has been used as an analytical and theoretical framework in the research. It is important to note that the technologies needed to work, such as a fibre connection, a computer, a webcam, virus protection etc, are expensive, and those who decide to take this profession have to be equipped with those technologies to work. However a lot of sex workers cannot afford them and they have to continue working offline, as the head of the organization Flora Dora mentioned during our interview. This framework acknowledges the lack of direct contact makes the work more socially acceptable, but is still aware that they are not exempted from different forms of oppression that occur in the online space.

In this thesis, I first decided to research the experiences of those who work exclusively online, (un)intentionally excluding those who are not present in cyberspace. Since my method includes being open to the different experiences with the online space, I realized how was relevant to also include those who use the internet to advertise and negotiate rates with the clients.

Nethnography

As previously mentioned, I started my research in online ethnography, also called “nethnography” or online observations. Netnography is a specific type of qualitative social media research. It adapts the methods of ethnography, which is understanding social interaction in contemporary digital communications contexts. Netnography could be considered as a particular set of actions for doing research within and about

social media. Netnography is a specific set of research practices related to data collection, analysis, research ethics, and representation, rooted in *participant observation*. In netnography, a significant amount of the data originates in and manifests through the digital traces of naturally occurring public conversations recorded by contemporary communications networks.²¹

*(Partial) Erotic-
Nethnography*

Online sex work is strongly influenced by visual erotic material, which has a strong impact on sex workers' success and failure online, oftentimes driven by beauty standards and racist algorithms. Therefore, I decided to observe the interactions (rather than collect images) through platforms which are free to access, such as Chaturbate, Instagram, Twitter, and Tumblr. The main obstacle I encountered during the research is that most of the platform for adult content requires a paid subscription, and most of the content I have observed come from cover images and accounts where the content, due to the free access of the platform is just a link to another platform where explicit content is allowed (es Only fans, Patreon, just for Fans etc.). Moreover there is a clear issue of privacy and consent of images that comes out when you talk about ownership and rights.

I have observed social interactions on social media such as Instagram, following accounts of sex workers or spaces where sex workers interact with each other, such as the Instagram account *sexwork_memes* and *sex work_advices*, and the Reddit group *r/SexWorkers*. I didn't feel allowed to insert myself in the conversations since I don't practice sex work, and often these communities are explicitly allowing only sex workers to write in it, even though there is no way to prove it.

21 Kozinets, Robert V. (1998)

Qualitative expert interviews

To further deep into the research and highlight the voices of those who are experts in the field, a series of semi-structured qualitative interviews have been conducted. Expert interviews have been conducted with Angela Jones, a Professor of Sociology at Farmingdale State College, State University of New York and the author of *Camming: Money, Power, and Pleasure in the Sex Industry*,²² Ursula Kocher the Head of Women's Counselling Flora Dora / Social Department of the City of Zurich, and the informal talk with the responsible of digitization at Pro Core, Fabienne Bieri (*ProCoRe*). Those interviews were made to have a general overview of the current state of sex work online, and in particular in the city of Zurich.

I have also conducted an in-person interview with Lateena P., a transgender Latino artist, singer and sex worker from Zurich, and collective interviews with sex workers from Switzerland, Greece and Singapore, with a form interactive online co-design workshop organized together with the performer artist Ci Xuan Lin (Singapore) between March and April 2023.

Ethno-mimesis and Co-design

During the second phase of my research, I decided to apply Co-design²³ methods and Ethno-Mimesis²⁴ in the search for embodied tactics, spatial practices and modes of expression associated with the performing arts.²⁵ Ethno-mimesis, as a methodological and performative praxis, involves the combination of ethnographic and participatory methods and the subsequent production of art forms to represent the experiences.²⁶ Ethno-mimesis described by O'Neill involves sensuousness and emotion in tension with reason, rationality and objectivity. Combining ethnography and mimesis (not as imitation or mimicry, but as sensuous knowing) requires creative methods such as

22 A. Jones, Interview (Appendix)

23 Co-design (ref. pg. 85, pg. 135)

24 Ethno mimesis (ref. pg. 142)

25 Jones, K., (2006)

26 O'Neill, M. (2001)

collaborating with artists and participants, using *participatory action research methods*, and working together through narrative, talk, and art-making. At the core of the process is an exploration of the transformative role of art and the methodological approach of working with artists: ethno-mimesis foregrounds the transformative role and capacity of art and emphasises the importance of biography (life-story) as a critical theory in praxis.²⁷ In the 4th and 5th chapters this methodological, performative approach deepens to establish a collaboration between designers, sex workers and avatars, to co-design together new narratives around sex work online.

“The metaverse won't be a safe or fun place for sex if it's not designed with everyone, especially marginalised people, involved in the process.” -

Dema Tio (Vibease co-founder and CEO)

27 O'Neill & Hubbard, 2010

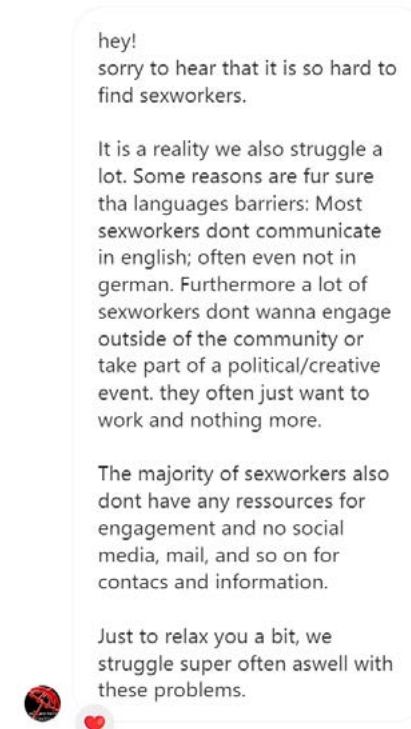
Ethical Implications & research limits

1.6

As the research shows, many implications pop up while re-searching a topic such as sex work. The most important is related to consent, privacy and ownership: all the images and content that are shown in this thesis have been given the consent from the participants since sex work is still a deeply stigmatized profession and not all the participants of the research have outed in society as sex professionals. Regarding privacy, the participants asked to be shown with their sex workers' names or fictional names. Any personal information has been shared or requested in the process.

The research had also different limits. For example, I had struggles in finding participants for the workshop series, and, as I found out while talking with the Swiss Sex Workers Collective (fig. 2) , the problem in reaching out to sex workers concerns mainly an issue with language and access to the internet. Due to the stigma surrounding the profession, many sex workers just want to work and don't want to be involved in any artistic or political project. Moreover, there are often problems with trust and speaking openly with people outside the community, which unfortunately keep the discourse mainly internal and difficult to reach.

Hey! sorry to hear that it is so hard to find sex workers. It is a reality we also struggle with a lot. Some reasons are fur sure that language barriers: Most sex workers dont communicate in English; often even not in German. Furthermore, a lot of sex workers dont wanna engage outside of the community or take part in a political/creative event. they often just want to work and nothing more. The majority of sex workers also dont have any resources for engagement and no social media, mail, and so on for contacts and information. Just to relax you a bit, we struggle super often as well with these problems. (Instagram chat from sex worker collective)



● Fig. 2 Screenshot Instagram chat with the sex Worker Collective (2023)

SWsCI /
Sex Workers-
Computer
Interactions

Sex Work Is Work

“Sex work is the exchange of sexual services, performances, or products for material compensation. It includes activities of direct physical contact between buyers and sellers as well as indirect sexual stimulation (online). Sex work only refers to voluntary sexual transactions.”¹²

Online sex work involves the use of technology, in particular the internet, to perform computer-mediated erotic interactions for compensation, as well as to independently advertise, negotiate and talk with their clients; Online Sex Work involves various forms of labour such as camming,³ erotic messaging, and erotic content creations through the use of private websites or third-parties platforms. Angela Jones referring to the camming industry and the sex industry, in general, says that *“workers from all over the world are finding decent wages, greater autonomy, community and pleasure.”⁴*

Digisexuals

Technologies based on artificial intelligence and virtual realities, as well as social media, streaming platforms, messaging and dating apps, insinuate themselves into human interactions with profound effects. Collectively these can be defined as *Artificial intimacies*, technologies that engage our human need

1 Weitzer, Ronald John, ed. (2000).

2 Sex Work: In the '70s the American sex worker and activist Carol Leigh coined the term "sex work". While before this the term working girls were popular amongst workers, the creation of the term sex work was a deliberate attempt to unite sex workers of all genders and sectors of work, and to legitimate, the work, or labour, that sex workers are doing (Sex work is work). The term sex work is liberation from the deep-rooted negative and legalistic term prostitute

3 Camming: Work of a webcam model, a video performer who streams on the Internet with a live webcam broadcast. A webcam model often performs erotic acts online, such as stripping, masturbation, or sex acts in exchange for money, goods

for connections, intimacy and sexual satisfaction. The covid pandemic has definitely accelerated the transition to artificial intimacy as people in isolation leaned more heavily on their digital tools to socialise, work and play.

The term *digisexuality* was first introduced via Drs. Neil McArthur and Markie L.C. Twist's in a 2017 *Journal of Sexual and Relationship Therapy*.⁵ a digisexual is someone who has a strong preference or feels most comfortable with expressing themselves sexually through technology.

The first-wave digisexuals use technology to mediate the connection with a human partner. Most first-wave digisexualities serve to facilitate communication between human partners. However, in the case of some of these technologies, such as traditional digital pornography, the human partner is not physically present or is not even aware of it. Traditional digital pornography, camming sites and live sex chats are part of the first wave. Numerous technologies, such as Skype and Snapchat, while not originally designed for sexual interactions, are commonly used for such purposes. Belong to the first wave as well the teledildonic technologies which allow users to experience physical sex telematically. These technologies are not only utilized by individuals but also by sex workers who can safely engage with clients from the comfort of their homes. Furthermore, network technologies like chat groups, social media platforms, internet dating sites, and applications (apps), including as well virtual worlds such as *Second Life*,⁶ play a significant role in facilitating sexual interactions.

On the other hand, second-wave digisexuals don't see humans as essential for a romantic experience. They see immersive technologies such as sex robots, virtual girlfriends and VR pornography as integral to their sexual experience. The defining feature of second-wave digisexualities is their immersivity. Either no human partner is present, or if they are, their presence is not essential to the experience.

4 A. Jones, (2020)
5 McArthur, N. (2017)
6 <https://secondlife.com/>

“Potent with possibility, in the early 1990s virtual space was cited as transcendent and utopic, offering ‘new contexts for knowing/talking/signing fucking/bodies.’ Like many before them—saints, witches, phone sex workers, writers and coders, VNS Matrix invoked the power of the word to both inhabit and extend their physical bounds into ethereal mind space. With essence condensed to text and introjected as binary code into the machine, they set forth to play with, to interrogate and to activate other coded bits and bytes.”

—Melinda Rackham

Cyberfeminism is a term coined in 1994 by Sadie Plant to describe the work of feminists interested in theorising the emerging cyberspace and new-media technologies in general. Cyberfeminism emerged from the third-wave⁷ of feminism and has predominantly been comprised of younger, technologically literate women from Western, white, middle-class backgrounds.⁸ In *Zeros and Ones*,⁹ Plant observes that feminists in the 1990s inspired by Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto*¹⁰ (1991) produced many new manifestos amidst waves of enthusiasm for technology. Most notable was *The Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century* (1991) by VNS Matrix,¹¹ which offered the maxim 'the clitoris is the direct line to the matrix' (1991). (fig 1-2)

7 The third wave of feminism emerged in the mid-1990s. It was led by so-called Generation Xers who, born in the 1960s and '70s in the developed world, came of age in a media-saturated and culturally and economically diverse milieu. Although they benefitted significantly from the legal rights and protections that had been obtained by first- and second-wave feminists, they also critiqued the positions and what they felt was unfinished work of second-wave feminism. (source Britannica.org)

8 Consalvo, M. (2012).

9 Plant, S. (1998).

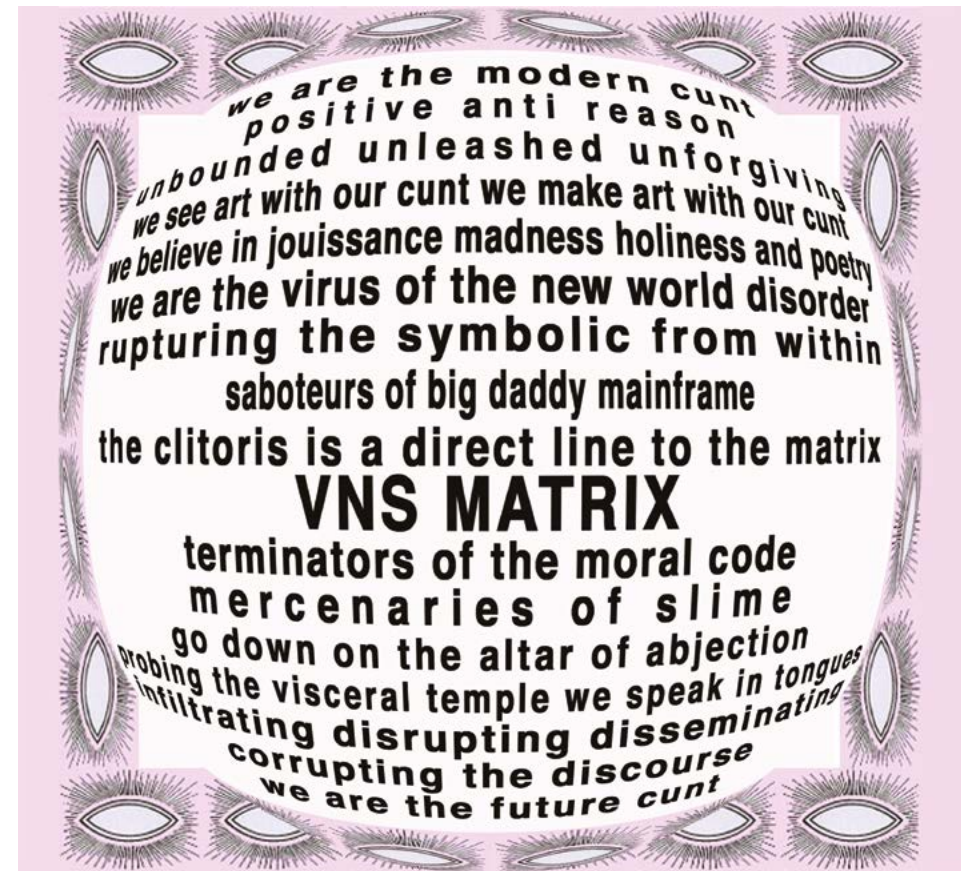
10 Haraway, D. (1985)

11 VSN Matrix, (1991) *The Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century* Matrix, <https://vnsmatrix.net/projects/the-cyberfeminist-manifesto-for-the-21st-century>

It was in this environment that VNS Matrix was spawned. We entered into the cultural space circuitously, imagining a feminist approach to the production of pornography, this was our starting point, and the way we generated an aesthetics of slime, moving quickly into a machine-slime symbiosis, as antithetical to the brittle beige fleshless gutless realm of technological production. A stream-of-consciousness writing session which was more like an exudation of slime and viscera morphing through critical, feminist, pornographic texts birthed the "Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century." (Melinda Rackam)¹²

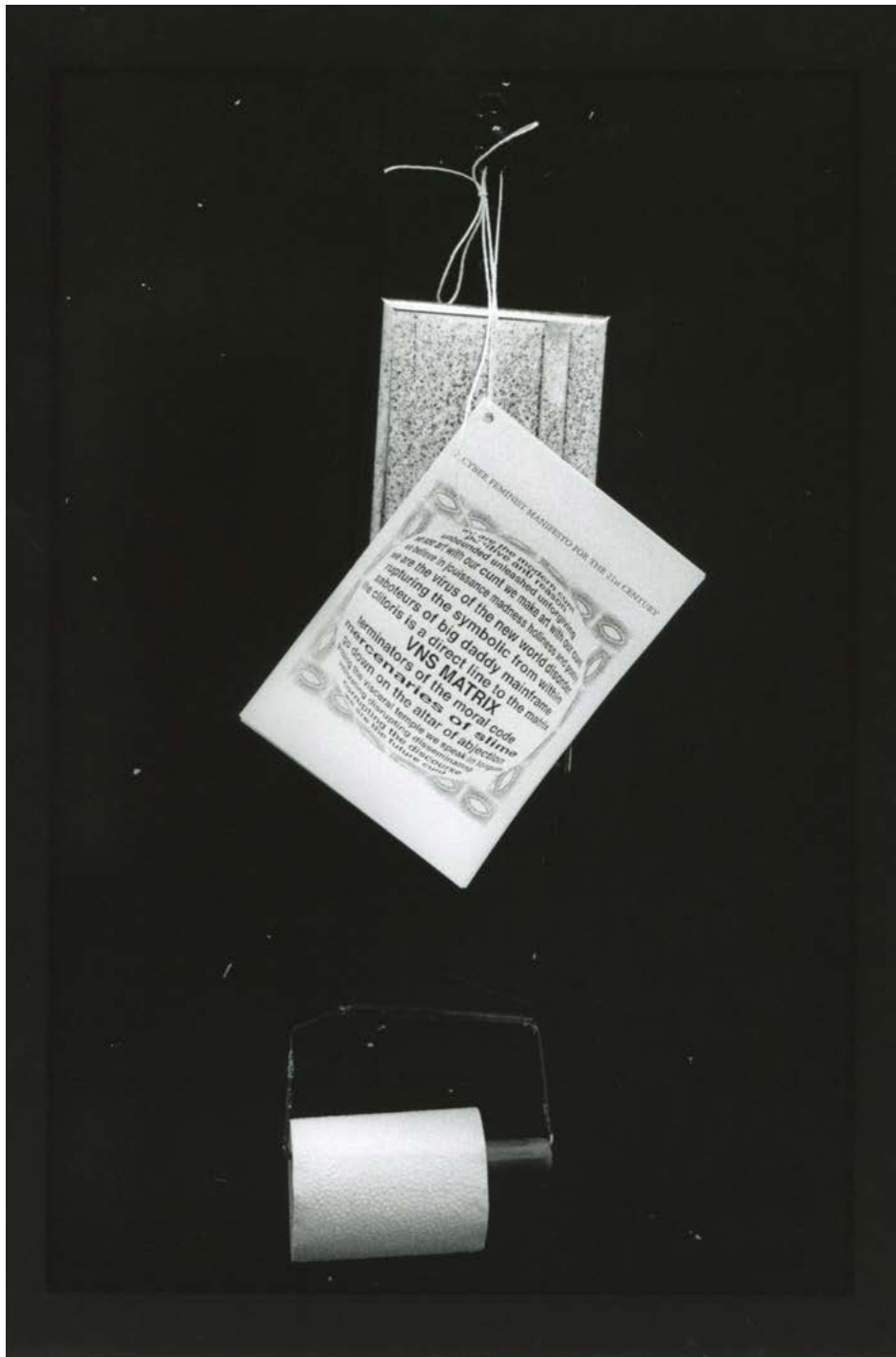
Reflections

Interestingly as we can see from the project *All New Gen*, and from the citations of Melinda Rackam and Sadie Plant,^{13 14} Cyberfeminists of the 90s have reflected on the relationship of feminist thinking with pornography and sex work, with the results of producing the *"aesthetic of Slime"* and the *"Future Cunt"*. However, as Reckam states, this reference was just a starting point which adopted that aesthetic, while not really integrating who actually deal with it in life. However, this correlation showed how powerful and subversive was the relationship between sex and technology in the early stages of the Internet. On the other hand, it raised the important urge to include sex work in the cyberfeminist and post-cyberfeminist¹⁵ discourse.



● Fig. 1-2 VNS Matrix, (1991) Manifesto for the 21st Century Billboard
<https://vnsmatrix.net/projects/the-cyberfeminist-manifesto-for-the-21st-century>

12 Rackham, M. (2018). @go #91010. VNS Matrix. <https://vnsmatrix.net/es/says/go-91010#fn-cite-6>
 13 Sadie Plant on Cyberfeminism- Talk at FUBU (ZHdK, 2023)
 14 Cybernetic hookers (Plant, S.) Citation (pg. XX)
 15 Post Cyberfeminism (ref pg XX)
 16 Quentin Stafford- Fraser, (1995) retrieved in 12.04.23 <https://www.cl.cam>.



Early adopters

The first encounter between sex work and technology could be observed during the same period, as the cyberfeminist movement started. The reason can be addressed to the rise of the Internet as a new space of exploration for women during the 90s. Therefore, sex workers can be considered as early adopters of the Internet, by establishing digital erotic interactions through blogs and new streaming technologies, opening up new work opportunities.

Webcam & Streaming

The development of the webcam in the 1990s had a significant impact on the sex industry, changing the way in which sex work was performed and consumed. Prior to the widespread adoption of webcams, most forms of sex work required physical proximity between the worker and the client. Both internet and webcams changed this dynamic, by allowing the performance of sexual acts over a distance, through the medium of the computer screen.

The origins of the camming industry can be traced to a live broadcast of a coffee pot in the UK. In 1991 scientists at the University of Cambridge rigged up a camera directed at their main computer lab's coffee pot, updating the image three times per minute, so researchers could check the availability of their hot drink. The scientists were credited with creating the world's first webcam.¹⁶ (fig. 3)

The original webcam stream showing a coffee pot. Image still taken from the BBC's original reporting in the 90s.

However, it was not long before the webcam was used for other purposes. In the mid-1990s, a number of cam girls began using the technology to broadcast their daily lives and to perform sexual acts in front of the camera for paying customers.¹⁷ The development of the webcam had a number of implications for

16 ac.uk/coffee/qsf/coffee.html



● Fig. 3 A picture of the Trojan Room coffee pot, displayed in the XCoffee viewer.(1991)
 Quentin Stafford-Fraser <https://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/coffee/qsf/coffee.html>

the sex industry and for the way sex work was carried out. The webcam offered sex workers the opportunity to work remotely and independently, without the need for a physical location or protector; it also allowed them to have more control over their work environment and their online identity, as well as to build a more personalised and interactive experience for their clients.¹⁸ Angela Jones, sociologist and author of the book *Camming*,¹⁹ gives a broader definition of what is the camming industry:

“The camming industry, is an exponentially growing sex industry where workers, called “cam models” from all over the world are finding decent wages, greater autonomy, community and pleasure. It is a genre of Indirect sex work in which a cam model sells interactive computer-mediated sex online. The camming field, like other sex work industries, monetizes human desires for sex, intimacy and pleasure.”

However, the webcam also brought with it a number of challenges and ethical considerations. For sex workers working in front of a webcam could be isolating, as they were often required to perform for long periods of time without any physical contact or in-person human interaction, with the possibility to larger affect their mental health. With the rise of online sex work, there is also the issue of privacy and security, as sex workers' online identities were often at the risk of clients attempting to find out their real identities (doxxing) or stalking them. On the other hand, for clients, there is the issue of trust and authenticity, as there is no way to verify the age or identity of the person on the other side of the webcam, with the possible risk of fraud.

- 17 <https://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/29457/1/in-1998-this-webcam-woman-was-the-most-famous-person-online>
- 18 F, J. (December 14, 2021). A Brief History of Adult Webcams: JenniCam to Chaturbate. SEXTECHGUIDE. Retrieved 10.08.2022, from <https://sextechguide.com/cams/history-adult-webcamming-jennicam-to-chaturbate/>
- 19 Jones, A. (2020)

Case Study JenniCam / Jennifer Ringley (1996)

In 1996, a camming pioneer began broadcasting herself live. Jennifer Ringley, from Pennsylvania, launched the JenniCam website, allowing people from around the world to monitor her home life via a new image from her camera refreshed every 15 minutes. She showed herself in the nude, masturbating and having sex (as well as going about daily life), and was thought of as a conceptual artist, or 'lifecaster'.²⁰

After starting the site in her college dorm room Ringley saw it soar in popularity, gaining millions of hits. She began charging for access and earned a degree of fame. She closed JenniCam in 2003, mentioning PayPal's anti-nudity policy²¹ as part of the reason for the closure, a difficulty echoed years later in modern cam sites' challenges with credit cards and banks. Some would consider Ringley as a conceptual artist and her site as a straight-forward document of her life. However Ringley did not wish to filter the life behind her camera, so sometimes she was nude or engaging in sexual acts, including sexual intercourse and masturbation. *"I keep Jennicam alive not because I want or need to be watched, but because I simply don't mind being watched,"* Ringley wrote.²²

20 JenniCam website, <https://web.archive.org/web/20031227221244/http://www.jennicam.org:80/>

21 "The demise of Jennicam has been blamed on the online payment service Paypal, which used to process payments by subscribers. The company admits it severed its ties because of the nudity broadcast on Jennicam" R.I.P. Jennicam (2024), BBC news (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/3360063.stm)

22 excerpt from article, R.I.P. Jennicam (2004), BBC news

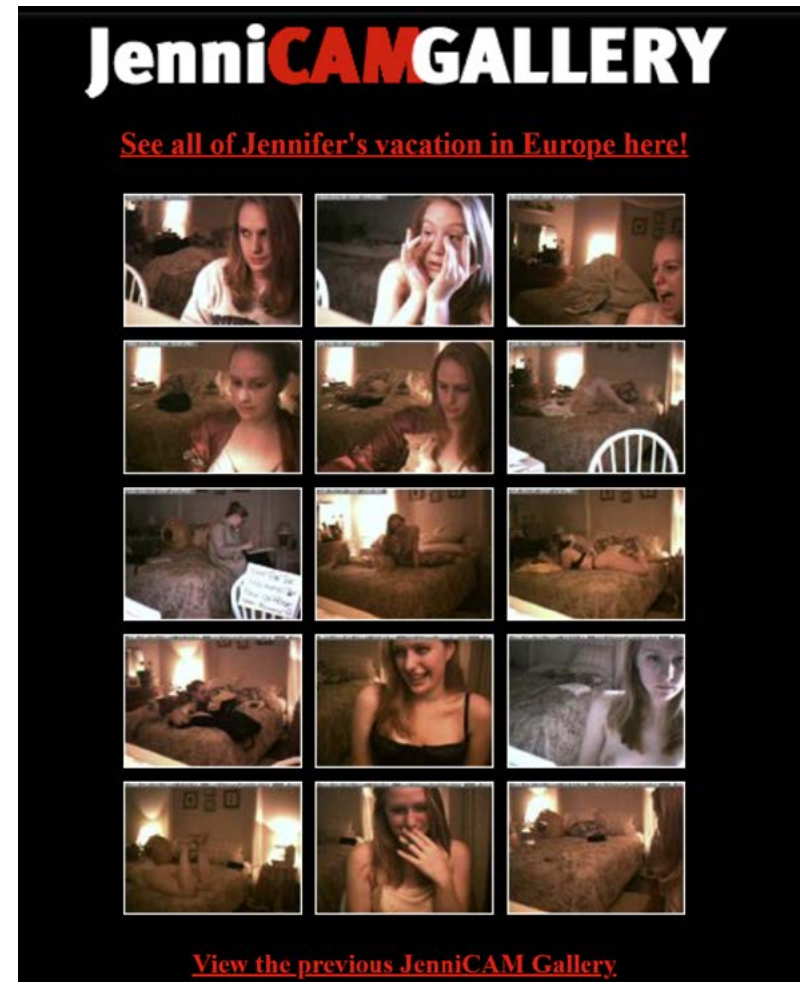


Fig. 4. JenniCAM (1998) website archive
<https://web.archive.org/web/19980124153231/http://www.jennicam.org/gallery/index.html>

Blogs & Online Platforms

Sex workers have a long history of using blogs and other online platforms to share information, connect with clients, and build communities. In the early days of the internet, sex workers often used online forums and message boards to communicate with each other and with clients. However, as the internet evolved and new platforms emerged, many of them began to explore new ways to connect and share their experiences.

One notable example of this is the rise of sw blogs in the mid-2000s. These blogs, often written by individual, provided a space for sex workers to share their stories and perspectives, as well as to discuss issues related to sex work and activism. Some of the most well-known sex worker blogs from this time include *The Honest Courtesan*²³ and *Bound, Not Gagged*.(fig. 5-6)

23 The Honest Courtesan website link : <https://maggiemcneill.com/author/maggiemcneill/>

Case Study: Bound, not Gagged. A Blog for Sex Workers

*Bound, not Gagged*²⁴ is one of the earliest examples of how sex workers started to use the digital space to connect with each other and advocate for their rights. The blog, created with WordPress, is not active anymore, but it was definitely important in the early 2000s.

Stacey Swimme is one of the founders of the blog *Bound, not Gagged*, and the founder of *Sex Workers Outreach Project*.²⁵ Swimme's innovative approach to community organizing has helped to expand a nationwide network of thousands of sex workers, advocating who believe in a rights-based approach to policymaking. Stacey utilizes horizontal organizing principles that have empowered sex workers to be the leaders in the movement toward civil, labour and human rights.²⁶

“BoundnotGagged is a space for these voices to be heard. It is a place for sex workers to respond to the way that they’re portrayed in the media, the way that sexist laws are used to undermine women’s rights and their feelings about the ethical dilemma of exposing a client list. The issues are deep and broad. The stories are powerful and frustrating. BoundnotGagged is our way of responding to the injustice and hypocrisy that keeps sex workers’ voices muted and faces hidden. Sex workers may be in hiding, but they refuse to be silent. This blog will give you an inside look at the true inner workings of this mysterious business. The Desiree Alliance is committed to creating space and campaigns that address the real needs of sex workers. We are proud to sponsor this project to provide a platform where sex workers can speak for themselves.”

(Stacey Swimme, BoundnotGagged 2007).

24 Blog link at <https://deepthroated.wordpress.com>

25 SWOP USA (Sex Workers Outreach Project) is a national social justice network dedicated to the fundamental human rights of people involved in the sex trade and their communities, focusing on ending violence and stigma through education and advocacy.

26 Retrieved from <https://swopusa.org/about-us/staff/2453-2/founders-of-swop/>



● Fig. 4 Bound Not Gagged Homepage <https://deepthroated.wordpress.com>



● Fig. 5 The Honest Curtesan Homepage (2001-2023) [tps://maggiecneill.com/author/maggiecneill/](https://maggiecneill.com/author/maggiecneill/)

Online Communities Today

Today there are many online individual support communities of sex workers. These include social media groups, chat rooms, or forums focused on specific geographic areas or other types of sex work. Online communities can be a valuable source of support and information for sex workers, particularly for those who may face isolation or stigma in their offline lives.

Today, sex workers mostly use social media like Twitter (which is a well-known sex-workers-friendly platform), Instagram, Reddit, Discord and Telegram to connect with each other. Some notable examples are *Hacking/Hustling* on Twitter, the sex workers collective on Instagram, and the Reddit group *r/SexWorkers* and *r/Strippers*.

However, public platforms are not often sex workers friendly. Sex workers can also be subject to surveillance and censorship, and they must take care to protect their privacy and safety when participating in these communities. For this reason, sex workers often tend to emigrate to more friendly platforms such as Twitter, Tumblr, Reddit and Telegram, or they even create their own spaces, for example, Switter.

Switter is a social media platform for sex workers that was created in 2018 in response to the shutdown of Backpage. The platform was owned and operated by Assembly Four, a company founded by sex workers and dedicated to creating technology solutions for the adult industry. Unfortunately, the platform was shut down on March 14th 2022, due to the collective weight of the recent anti-sex and anti-LGBTQAI+ legislative moves.²⁷



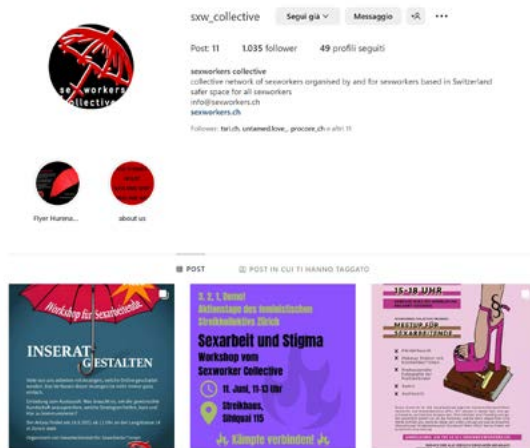
● Fig. 6 Switter Homepage <https://switter.at/>

27 Switter. (2018-2022.). Sex Work Friendly Social <https://switter.at/>

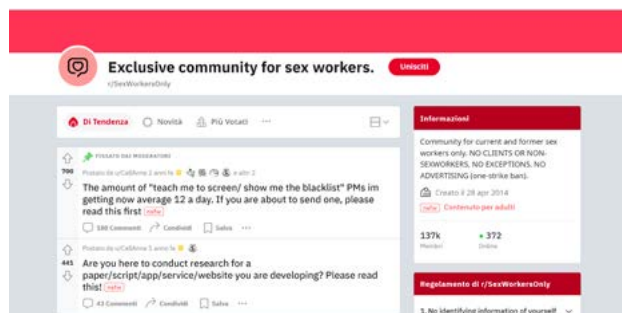
● Fig. 7 Hacking/ Hustling, Twitter account screenshot (retrieved in april 2023) <https://twitter.com/hacking-hustling>



● Fig. 8 Sex Workers Collective, Instagram account screenshot (retrieved in april 2023) https://www.instagram.com/swx_collective/



● Fig. 9 r/SexWorkersOnly, Reddit profile screenshot (retrieved in april 2023) <https://www.reddit.com/r/SexWorkersOnly/wiki/index/>



Dating Apps

The use of dating apps by sex workers is a relatively recent phenomenon, as these apps have only become widely popular in the past decade. However, sex workers have long used other forms of technology and online platforms to advertise their services and connect with clients. Before dating apps, sex workers often used websites such as Craigslist, and Backpage to advertise their services. However, these platforms were often shut down or heavily restricted due to concerns about sex trafficking and exploitation, especially after the introduction of SESTA-FOSTA.²⁸

As a result, many sex workers turned to dating apps as a new avenue for connecting with clients. Some of the earliest examples include the use of Tinder and OkCupid by sex workers in the mid-2010s. However, as dating apps gained more and more popularity, sex workers began to use a wider variety of platforms, including Grindr, Bumble, Instagram and Snapchat. However, sex workers have faced ongoing challenges in using dating apps²⁹ (fig. 10). Many apps have policies against soliciting or promoting prostitution, and sex workers may face account bans or other consequences if they are discovered using the app for this purpose. Additionally, some users may report sex workers' profiles, leading to further scrutiny and potential consequences.

28 SESTA-FOSTA (2019, USA) introduces criminal liability for owners and managers of web companies "knowingly assisting, supporting, or facilitating" sex trafficking. The law allows for large criminal penalties, including a fine and up to 25 years in prison, for those convicted.
29 Al-Othman, H., (2018)



● Fig. 10 Relation with Tinder and Sex Work. retrieved in april 2023
from <https://www.buzzfeed.com/hannahalothman/sex-workers-tinder>

Sexfluencers: Adult content-subscription platforms & Digital fandoms.

The digital revolution has had a profound impact upon fandom, blurring the lines between producers and consumers, and giving rise to new forms of hyper-personalized entertainment.³⁰

New approaches to fandom in which the fans themselves shaping the type of experiences they receive, are changing the traditional relationship between creators and artists. Powering this are the platforms such as OnlyFans, Patreon and Fanhouse, which give people access to content, live streams and even one-to-one conversations with their “idols” on a subscription basis. In turn, the creators forge an additional, independent revenue stream, while building intimacy with their audience.

You've probably heard of social media “influencers”, but then what about sexfluencers?

Sex workers are also pioneers in content-subscription platforms, as we saw with the camming industry as an early example of what is now spreading, due to the acceleration of technological behaviours and interaction during the pandemic. In 2016, the platform OnlyFans was one of the first pay-per-view subscription platforms that popped up in the digital space, mainly used by sex workers. Amateur and professional sex workers were the “key drivers” of OnlyFan's initial growth.

With this kind of platform, sex creators can earn money from users who subscribe to the content, the “fans”. It allows content creators to receive funding directly from their fans on a monthly basis, as well as one-time tips and the pay-per-view (PPV) feature. The company charges fees for all the transactions made on the site: as an example, Onlyfan's fee is 20% and is considered quite high.³¹

OnlyFans has changed sex work in a way that has made it more powerful for the creator, and safer for them to control

30 Pearson, R. (2010)
31 How Only fans changed sex work for ever (2019) NYTimes

how they perform, at least on paper. Many OnlyFans creators that produce sex contents have reported that they receive more subscribers as they post more frequently.³² Subscribers to OnlyFans accounts are paying for a service catered to their personal needs. Clients can also request specific and hyper-personalized content to the creators. The performer however keeps a lot of agency and can decide which content to create and from who to be followed. In many ways, the digital communities created by sex workers are a safer space to work.

32 How Only fans changed sex work for ever (2019) NYTimes

Teledildonics, VR & Metaverse

A virtual world (also called a virtual space) is a computer-simulated environment which may be populated by many users who can create a personal avatar, and independently explore the virtual world, participating in its activities and communicating with others. These avatars can be textual, graphical representations, or live video avatars with auditory and touch sensations. (extract from Wiki)

On 23 March 2016, the world's largest adult site, Pornhub, launched a free virtual reality (VR) streaming channel.³³ Five days later, Oculus released its Oculus Rift VR headset.³⁴ Now, some years later, the amount of pornographic content available for the Rift is large and growing steadily. Beyond mere passive porn, users of VR headsets can access interactive VR games such as *FemDomination*,³⁵ or they can enter massively multiplayer online role-playing games such as *3dx Chat*,³⁶ where real people interact sexually with one another through avatars.

Rob Brooks in *Artificial Intimacy* writes how enhanced VR porn will likely open the way to a new kind of sex, deeply intimate but practised at a distance using headsets, teledildonic devices, and haptic suits. Long-distance VR sex work also becomes a viable prospect. The camera models of today's erotic economy video themselves stripping, masturbating, and doing other things viewers request, all for a price. Now, many offer the service of delivering teledildonic pleasure by activating clients' sex toys remotely via smartphone apps. Brooks says that one day we might expect VR sex to create a niche for VR sex work, and sex workers will be able to immerse themselves in the same VR scene as their clients, and charge per an agreed schedule, without the physical and legal side of meeting them.³⁷

33 Witt, E. (2017, February 6). The VR porn diaries. VICE.

34 Oculus Rift is a discontinued line of virtual reality headsets developed and manufactured by Oculus VR, a division of Meta Platforms. It was released on March 28, 2016. (wikipedia)

35 FemDomination is a game where are simulated several of scenes in different environments. The game starts outside of a temple, where you, as a player, are stranded and lost (xgames.zone)

36 3dxchat.com

37 Brooks, R. (2021)

The metaverse is the ultimate merger between the physical and the digital. That's the ambition at least. The reality, as always, is far more complex and a lot less interesting than the scope of our current imagination permits.

(Meta-Tainment Futures, LSN global.)

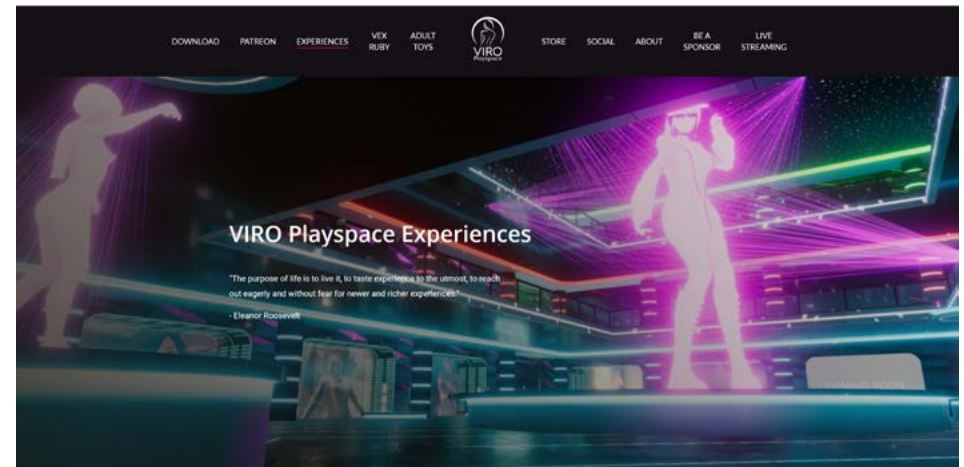
People are moving to online spaces for work and entertainment, alongside more and more immersive experiences. Many platforms are popping up in the metaverse such as Roblox, *“the ultimate virtual universe that lets you create, share experiences with friends and be anything you can imagine”* and Spatial, a platform that allows you to create, share and explore 3D experiences with your community. The metaverse vis about to become a key social hub in an era of immersive virtual exploration. *“The metaverse is arguably as big a shift in online communication as the telephone or the internet,”* says David Baszucki, founder and CEO of gaming platform Roblox. *“Within the next few decades, its applications will exceed our wildest imaginations.”*

Deeper immersion was reached by the sex industry already with the use of teledildonics,³⁸ with the rise of companies such as Vibease, a teledildonics company that works with a variety of VR platforms and that reported its sales have increased by 50 per cent over the pandemic.³⁹ The metaverse has also seen the rise of platforms such as Viro Playspace, an erotic VR platform that aims to create safe, exploratory, virtual experiences *where touch is encouraged, playfulness is required, and privacy is guaranteed*, claims the homepage of the platform. (fig. 11)

Angelina Aleksandrovich, a pioneer of virtual reality sexuality and founder of *“a multisensory metaverse”* called RD Land, envisions a similarly exciting menu of possibilities. In a functional metaverse, *“sex workers can jump into any kind of avatar that the client wants to play with; they can change the world on demand, play out different scenarios that the clients want.”* This would include out-there fantasies, but also new personas that transcend gender or any kind of biological reality. Arousal and desire could be informed by colours, shapes, elements, and

38 Teledildonics:remotely controlled sex toys and pleasure products, as well as accompanying software(es Lovense, Vibease etc. (Wikipedia)

39 Kearns, S. (2022)



● Fig. 11 Viro Playspace homepage (retrieved in april 2023)
<https://viro.club/viro-experiences/#sidewidgetarea>



● Fig. 12 SecondLife Virtual Bordell
<https://chicagoreader.com/arts-culture/cybersex-and-sex-work-in-second-life/>

character traits. *“The more creative [sex workers] become with the tools out there, the more they can offer to their clients,”* Aleksandrovich says.⁴⁰

Entering the blockchain (Tokens, Crypto and NFTs)

Moreover, Sex Workers who are pushed back by the morality of digital payments stakeholders such as Visa, Mastercard and Paypal, are finding new business opportunities in the blockchain⁴¹ and in the metaverse.⁴² Sex Workers are challenging the ways in which technology is used to exploit and oppress women in the sex industry, and advocating for the creation of safer and more equitable internet.

Blockchain is a generational technology that is fundamentally changing how we interact and transact. At a basic level, distributed blockchain architecture is simply a new way of storing data. These two attributes make blockchain particularly well-suited for sex workers.⁴³ The blockchain in fact, instead of anonymity, offers pseudonymity. Being pseudonymous is using a false name or persona to hide your real identity. And in this particular practice, online sex workers really know their way.

Some Online sex workers, such as Criptonatrix,⁴⁴ started to work independently with the blockchain, with the hope that it will help them to gain more independence as well secure transactions.

Part of what destigmatization requires is for us to exist as we are and express ourselves honestly – in this context, through art. But it must be safe for us to do so, and it must be safe for allies to support us. My past few months in this evolving world of crypto art have been about finding that support, and I am grateful for that which I’ve found.

(Criptonatrix, 2021)

Through the blockchain, Criptonatrix started to connect

40 Willis Aronowitz, N. (2022)

41 Criptonatrix, (2021)

42 Kearns, (2022)

43 Pruden A., (2022)

44 Criptonatrix, (2021)

with other NFT creators who were not hiding their sex workers' Identities. Some of them were making art with their bodies or toys, while others were tokenizing their usual content, someone else a mix of both.

My presence in crypto-art has always intentionally been about destigmatization. Of sex work, strap-ons, mental health, everything. I sometimes wonder how my experience might have been different if I minted the same NFTs without explicitly disclosing my current profession. But I feel a responsibility to speak up to the best of my ability. It’s not really a choice for me. I know that the challenges I encounter are symptoms of larger problems that must be addressed by those who can. (Criptonatrix, 2021)

Criptonatrix in the article for the Defiant pointed out how is important that sex workers produce art to destigmatize the profession.⁴⁵ Often sexual and sexualized content is more accepted when produced by non-sex workers. In this specific case, she said it is important to not hide your sex workers identity, as she decided to do.

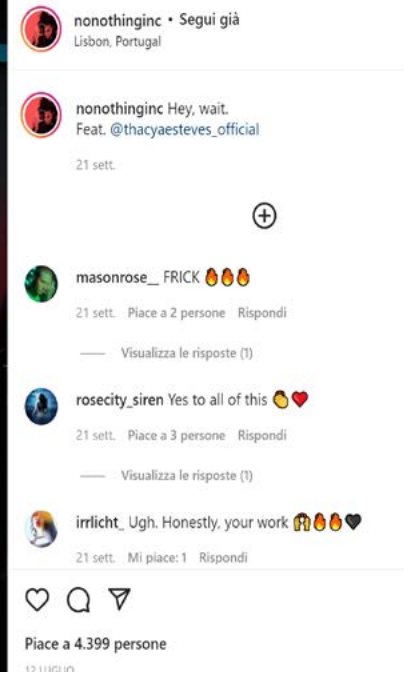
However, Sex workers are still vigilant about revealing their identities. For example, the artist/sw GFXP⁴⁶ has been minting crypto art for years, though keeping the artist persona separate from her sex work identity, largely due to security concerns. Some of GFXP's first NFTs were glitched selfies in her bra, minted alongside her other art. Over time, she saw more and more women tokenizing their image, as well as an alleviation of pressure to remain anonymous. She also notes there are now *“more men in the space who are willing to stand up for women selling whatever the fuck they want on the blockchain.”*

45 Criptonatrix, (2021)

46 <https://twitter.com/GFXPXX>



● Fig. 13 Credits Criptonatrix
<https://rarible.com/cryptonatrix>



● Fig. 14 NFT release. Credits Nonothinginc

Mutants /
Creating and
performing
the digital self

“Cyberpunk and chaos culture is peppered with wild women and bad girls, transgressions of organisation, the freaks and mutants who find their own languages, the non-members, the nomads, the sex that are not one; leftovers from history; those who have slipped past its filters too soon and accessed the future before its time, hybrid assemblages of what were once called human and machine on the run from their confinement to the world of man and things. Cyborgs are aliens, addicts and trippers who burn past security and through the ice of a culture devoted to spectacle, hacking the screens, and exceeding the familiar. Avatars of the matrix; downloading from cyberspace. They are no longer human. Perhaps they never were.”

—Melinda Rackham¹

In contemporary society, identity is increasingly shaped by consumption and reproduction inherent in the act of consuming. The consumption of goods has become a defining aspect of identity formation. What and how we consume have become crucial markers of our identity, blurring the boundaries between work and leisure. Scholars interested in understanding contemporary self-identity are particularly interested in the spaces where work and leisure, production and consumption naturally intersect.²

Sex workers, due to the intense and intimate nature of their work, face unique challenges in maintaining a sense of distance from their sex worker self. They employ various styles and methods to sustain one or multiple masks that allow them to earn a living through the sale of sex. The interest in sex work and its connection to consumption and self-identity arises from the fact that sex workers themselves are the commodity being consumed.³ The implications of this consumption are significant

¹ Sadie Plant, Newsletter / Australian Network for Art and Technology, April/May 1994, p. 5

² Giddens (1991)

³ Giddens (1991)

for their identity and how it contributes to the construction and consolidation of their persona.

In this chapter, the relationship between technology and sex workers' identity will be critically analyzed, based on the theory of digital dualism and the Glitch. Taking inspiration from the *cybernetic hookers* theorized by Plant, sex workers can be considered *mutants*, hybrid identities of what were once human and machine, cyborgs that hack the screens and perform their identity by applying strategies to survive/thrive in the digital world.

Becoming Cyborgs (A Theoretical Framework)

“Cyborgs might consider more seriously the partial, fluid, sometimes aspect of sex and sexual embodiment.”

(D. Haraway)

In the essay *A Cyborg Manifesto*,⁴ Donna Haraway defines the cyborg as a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality, as well as a creature of action. In Haraway's conception, cyborgs are material creatures, as well as manifestations of the fantastic: the cyborg is *“resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private.”*⁵

According to the paper *Technologies concerning the gendered bodies*, the image of the cyborg can be read in two ways: as a coupling between a human being and an electronic mechanical device, or as the identity of organisms embedded in a cybernetic computer system. [...] Cyborg bodies are by definition transgressive of a dominant cultural order, not so much for their “constructed” nature, but rather for the vagueness of their hybrid design.⁶

Online sex workers can be considered cyborgs through their use of webcams, phones and other forms of technology that facilitate their performances.⁷ They rely on technology to transmit, communicate, perform, masturbate and fuck. In this sense, online sex workers are using technology as an extension

4 Haraway, D. (1985)

5 Haraway, D. (1985) pg. 7

6 1996, Anne Balsamo (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); excerpt p. 11 <https://www.dukeupress.edu/Technologies-of-the-Gendered-Body/>

7 See Chapter 2.3

of their own bodies, blurring the boundaries between humans and machines, challenging traditional notions of gender and embodiment, and using technology to create new forms of identity and agency.

The Cyborg subjectivity: the case of JenniCam

With the first life broadcasting, JenniCam⁸ started a new use of Internet technology during a time when some viewers were interested in its sociological implications, while others watched it for sexual arousal. *The JenniCam website coincided in fact with a rise in surveillance as a feature of popular culture and new media art. JenniCam can be considered an interesting early example of how the Internet can create a cyborg subject by integrating human images with the Internet.* (M. Jimroglou, K. 2010)

In the paper, *A Camera with a View*,⁹ the researcher Jimroglou examined how Ringley integrates flesh and machine in the formation and explains the idea of *cyborg subjectivity*, a hybridized identity (re)presented through the digital camera. JenniCAM represents a subject that merges together two different entities: the corporeal and the mechanic. By doing so, JenniCAM offers a unique presentation of subjectivity, defined by Jimroglou as cyborg subjectivity. The integration of the concept of subjectivity with characteristics associated with Haraway's cyborgs,¹⁰ makes for a new definition of what it means to be a subject. Through the integration of body and technology, *JenniCam is a hybrid, neither fully human nor fully machine.*¹¹ Through Jenni's presentation of the private, she trespasses across traditional visual boundaries, always winking back at her audience. Through the playful negotiation of a subject/object position, JenniCam emerges as a particular type of cyborg subject, that seems to require and yet simultaneously resist certain traditional readings of female embodiment. JenniCam reveals in fact

8 JenniCam (Ref. pg. 42)

9 M. Jimroglou, K. (2010)

10 Cyborg def: Donna Haraway defines a cyborg as a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of action. In Haraway's conception, cyborgs are material creatures as well as manifestations of the fantastic, and the cyborg is "resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity" (glossary)

11 M. Jimroglou, K. (2010)

the cultural tensions surrounding epistemological conceptions of vision, gender, and identity, raising questions for future conversations regarding the role of technology in the representation and the construction of gendered subjects.

The Ubiquitous Internet

The Internet is an ambivalent space, it is a tool for experimenting with identity and relationships, and has a role of control and normalisation. The possibility of expressing one's identity through these media is conditioned by several factors, first and foremost the specific technological affordances that allow or inhibit different types of self-representation and interactions. However, while our digital practices are inscribed in processes of normalisation that inhibit forms of experimentation, at the same time our actions with and through digital media act to force them.

Spaces - specifically cyberspaces - are created by the subjectivities that cross them. This shows how spaces are not static but they can transform, and above all, they can be transformed. However, the shift of the boundaries between public/private is enhanced by modern digital technologies, as with the case of the body, which opens the risk not only to constant surveillance but also reproduces social and gender norms. New digital spaces and the massive diffusion of mobile technologies have changed the relationship with anonymity, embodiment and creativity.¹²

These reflections that interrogate the Internet as a tool of surveillance and control from a gendered perspective suggest how the transformative reality of digital environments ultimately depends on the ability of subjects to control information. Recent cyberfeminist studies emphasise the need to look at how the relationship between new media and neoliberalism is getting closer, and how *the boundaries of self-determination/subjectivity and agency and market-driven identity-building processes are increasingly blurred.*¹³ This raises the question of how to deal with the attractive discourses of 1990s cyberfeminism,¹⁴ which

12 Cossutta, C., Greco, V., Mainardi, A., & Voli, S. (2018).

13 Cossutta, C., Greco, V., Mainardi, A., & Voli, S. (2018).

14 Cybefeminism (ref. pg. 35, pg. 122)

describe the internet as a space of personal and collective fulfilment while there is the suspicion that digital technologies are intrinsically linked to the logic of neoliberalism.

The answer given by the scholars¹⁵ is to look at the forms of online participation, without falling into the trap of considering them outside the system of oppression just because they come from voices on the margins and without thinking of interpreting these voices from a position of privilege. Rather than looking at the internet as a space for experimentation, they suggest looking at its ambivalence, focusing on how gender-based power relations are both reinforced, challenged and deconstructed with and through digital technologies.

15 Gajjala, R., & Oh, Y. J. (2012)

Performing Identities

3.2

From a transfeminist point of view, the body itself becomes a space. *The body is a place where performance comes to life and has a value of resistance and breaking the norms that regulate public spaces.*¹⁶ In this perspective, the body can become an instrument of the transgression of the dominant social norms of a given space.¹⁷ The scholar Borghi started her considerations about the body and the space by studying the post-porno movement,¹⁸ as a way of breaking the rules of the body norms.

The commodification of the Potentia Gaudendi

The philosopher Preciado describes sex work as the commodification of the Potentia Gaudendi¹⁹ of a body in a sexual service contract. *The Potentia Gaudendi is the sum of the potential excitement inherent to every life molecule. The orgasmic strength is the most abstract and at the same time, the most material labour force in the capitalist system, and although it cannot be possessed or conserved, it can be transformed into capital, the pleasure capital.*²⁰ According to the philosopher, the transposition of sex work into graphic images tells the truth about sexuality, because it reveals that sexuality is always a performance, a public exercise in regulated repetition.

16 Cossutta, C., Greco, V., Mainardi, A., & Voli, S. (2018).

17 Borghi, R. (Bonheur, Z.) () Appunti dai margini del centro, infra, pg 141

18 Postporno makes visible bodies and practices normally excluded from conventional porn, to claim everyone's right to pleasure and to demonstrate how pornography can be a tool: of artistic expression, exploration and liberation. (Valentine aka Fluida Wolf, Post-porno)

19 Potentia Gaudendi: In sexuality studies, potentia gaudendi or orgasmic force is the physical and mental potential (or capacity) for pleasure in a body. The term was coined by philosopher Paul B. Preciado, who says contemporary economies exploit the body by offering services to increase pleasure (such as Viagra and cocaine) which turn it into a commodity. (Testo Junkye, 2015)

20 Preciado, P. B. (2015).

The erotic capital

Central to the understanding of the sexual field is the concept of erotic capital, theorised by Green in the paper *The Social Organization of Desire*. *The erotic capital is the quantity and quality of attributes an individual possesses, socially recognized and codifiable, which elicit an erotic response in the other.*²¹ When we talk about capital, usually it refers to socially acquired or acquirable resources. However, erotic capital goes beyond that, by including components that are considered “natural” and unchangeable, such as height and skin colour. Erotic capital encompasses aesthetic physical characteristics like breast size and height, affective presentations such as aggressiveness, boldness, and shyness, as well as eroticized sociocultural backgrounds.²²

In sexual contexts, individuals position themselves within a stratified erotic hierarchy, based on their variable erotic capital. This allows them to align themselves with specific classes of sexual actors, determined by what Green refers to as the *level of desirability*. In order to improve their social standing, individuals strategically adapt their characteristics and manipulate their self-presentation. This theory aims to capture the patterns of expectations, negotiations, self-management, sexual selection, perceptions of justice and social equity within the field. By strategically adjusting their self-presentation, individuals seek to align themselves with the desired structures of the field, and corresponding *levels of desirability*.²³

Performing authenticity

*“There’s this demand for authenticity, especially from the client side. The benefits of for example interactive performances and camming are that it’s not the same kind of highly scripted porn production. So the whole appeal of somebody in a camming room, is that this is a real person who turned on their camera and is performing.”*²⁴

21 Green, A.I. (2008)

22 Popolla, M. (2021)

23 Green, A.I. (2008)

24 Interview with Angela Jones, Appendix

Online sex works seem to be linked to what many scholars call customers' desire for “realness” “*bounded authenticity*.”²⁵ or *embodied Authenticity*.²⁶ The sociologist Angela Jones describes that in the contemporary sex markets, customers want to feel they have an authentic sexual encounter that, while bounded by economic exchange, is also characterized by intimacy.

*Cam models' shows are performative-models do that often have to engage in some amount of acting. However, cam models often spend copious time talking with customers online, and, in many ways, they are themselves. Their rooms are often their bedrooms, and from the perspective of a consumer, everything about the experience appears real. The model uses a stylized performance to offer an authentic presentation to customers, which is highly valuable in the world of erotic labour.*²⁷

The embodied authenticity explained by Jones is used to give the clients the feeling of buying authentic experiences from “real” people. These social interactions with complete strangers from all over the world are the source of the pleasure that both cam models and customers can enjoy. The customer that acquires an exclusive encounter with a person might not normally be able to intimately connect with them, since these interactions take place online and are highly interactive.

*Depending on the vibe I get from the person, we could have intimacy. I was seeing one of my clients, we started seeing each other regularly. Do you know? Then you get, like, more like an intimate relationship instead of just fucking for things. (@fucktransia)*²⁸

25 Bernstein, E. (2007)

26 Jones, A. (2020).

27 Jones, A. (2020)

28 Interview with L./ @fucktransia, Appendix

Intro

Internet and new technologies allow something that was not easy to do before creating fictional identities. Thanks to the internet, people can easily create an online fictional character with only an email, a website or a social media account. Race, sex, age, sexual and gender identity can be invented, disrupting the notion that works of art are authentic expressions of their creators' identities.²⁹

Online sex workers create different identities in order to perform sex labour. This does not only happens online but primarily in offline sex work. Sex workers construct what scholars call *manufactured identities*.³⁰ They perform under screen names, in order to protect themselves from doxing³¹ and online harassment. In addition, these *manufactured identities* allow sex workers to separate life from work and to experiment with their inner sexual desires.

This sub-chapter will analyse the reasons and experiences for manufacturing a fictional identity in the context of (online) sex work through empirical online research, co-design processes and qualitative interviews, arguing how online digital spaces are making this process of creating a second self more accessible.

29 Tribe, M., & Jana, R. (2006) pg 19-20

30 Sanders, T. (2005)

31 Doxxing or doxing (originally spelled d0xing) is the act of publicly providing personally identifiable information about an individual or organization, usually via the Internet. (Techguide)

32 S-W, C. (10 March 2014). "What doxxing is, and why it matters". The Economist. Retrieved 16 May 2023.

Theoretical Framework

Digital Dualism

Digital dualism refers to the attitude of cyberspace to create a second self. The term goes back to Nathan Jurgenson,³³ who considers it the result of a fallacy. He defines digital dualism as the attitude of thinking that the digital world is just virtual, while the analogue world is real. Digital dualism is often applied to identity management, as Philippe Wampfler³⁴ states:

"Dualism is also a common position regarding our personality: it claims that we have a fixed identity that is manifested in the physical world (via our looks, our behaviour, our traits, etc.). We then presented facets of this identity in the virtual world, actually distorted images, often provided with pseudonyms or avatars. Here, too, a threat to our identity is quickly identified: we could lose ourselves through the virtual fragmentation, could forget who we really are and what we need."

With the expansion of the metaverse as a new possibility to experience the Internet, the concept of digital dualism becomes more and more relevant, raising questions about how our digital representation should look like.

Glitch Feminism

Glitch Is Error: We are the most fantastic and beautiful mistake. Never meant to survive, we are still here: an error in the algorithm. We are not empty signifiers, however; we are not dead-end hyperlinks. We reject the violent act of naming. We will reconfigure ourselves as we see fit. Modifying and re-coding, we choose our own names, build our own families and communities, and proudly fail in the present as we dream new futures.

33 <https://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2011/02/24/digital-dualism-versus-augmented-reality/>

34 Wampfler, P. (2013)

35 Russell, L. (2020)

Legacy Russell, author of *Glitch Feminism*³⁵ took the critique on digital dualism and ran with it, celebrating the very “real” potentials and possibilities that digital tools had opened up for queer identity, trans identity, and marginalised people in general. In the vision of the Glitch Feminism Manifesto, the avatar, or digital representation of the self, is seen as a powerful tool for self-expression and resistance. Glitch feminism is a form of feminism that is concerned with the ways in which technology and the internet can be used to challenge and subvert traditional power structures, particularly as they relate to gender and sexuality.

The body is a world full of potential and Glitch is full of movement. Corporeal, used as a verb, means to give material form to something abstract. We all begin with abstraction, biologically genderless bodies that, as we develop, take on a gendered form through performance or according to the constructs of social projection. To dematerialise ourselves, to transcend the body and its limitations, we must make space for other realities. The application of the online versus the IRL dichotomy of online identity is deeply flawed. The IRL falters in its distorted assumptions that online identity constructions are latent, hidden and fantasy-oriented, rather than explicit, full of potential and capable of living outside cyberspace.

(Russel, 2020)

The concept of *AFK*,³⁶ as suggested by Russell, challenges the fetishization of real life by highlighting the interconnectedness between digital and offline realities. It emphasizes that our online gestures, explorations, and actions can have a meaningful impact on our offline existence and vice versa. This understanding is powerful, as it recognizes that the selves we create through the material of the Internet hold significance. Glitch feminism embraces the realization of *alternative realities* and allows individuals to not only explore their online presence but *also embody the digital as an aesthetic*, blurring the boundaries between the physical body and the digital realm.

36 AFK: is an abbreviation for away from keyboard (<https://www.grammarly.com/blog/afk-meaning/>)



● Fig. 1 Legacy Russell, #GLITCHFEMINISM, 2018, video still. Courtesy: the artist <https://www.frieze.com/article/glitching-masters-house-legacy-russell-and-momtaza-mehri-conversation>

In addition to being a means of self-expression, avatars can be used to critique or subvert dominant narratives and stereotypes. Through the use of avatars, individuals can reclaim control over their own representation and challenge dominant power structures.

Sex workers deal with their avatars every day, transcend the boundaries of their physical bodies, enhance their performances, hack their identity, and manufacture their image, their gender and sexuality.

The correlation between sex work and glitch feminism is a fact, online sex workers are in the process of negotiating and building their selves in the online space, claiming control over their own representations and capitalizing on it.

Manufacturing Sex Workers Identity

Sex Workers, due to the intensity and intimacy of their physical involvement in their work, do not necessarily find the distancing process easy, and a variety of styles and methods are employed by working girls to sustain the mask, or series of masks, which make earning a living through the sale of sex possible. (Sanders, 2005)

Sanders explores how sex workers manage their emotions and identities in their work. She discusses a specific strategy used by some sex workers called the manufactured identity, which is a constructed identity used as a protection mechanism to manage the stresses of selling sex and a business strategy to attract and retain clients.³⁷ Sex workers, by capitalizing on their own sexuality, are able to create this manufactured identity. Sanders argues that conforming to heterosexualized standards in sex work is not simply accepting dominant discourses, but a calculated response by sex workers to manipulate the erotic expectations and cultural ideals of their male clients.

37 Sanders, T. (2005)

Sex workers see their interaction with digital platforms and clients as an act that prevents them from knowing their personal information and their private character. The use of the pseudonym,³⁸ which is universal in the sex industry, is an important stage prop that sex workers adopt in order to act their role and to maintain a barrier between the character embodied with the client and their “real” personality.

Sometimes I feel detached from my sex worker persona, but I think it helps me more to see it as work, I feel most empowered and comfortable inside her (@andrea)

However, having a pseudonymous identity makes some sex workers feel more comfortable inside their own bodies, empowered, and even able to explore their fetishes and fantasies safely.

It's easier to say cringe(for me)things that I wouldn't do in person(talk dirtier etc) /easier to decide the content that will make /expand and explore to more fetishes-fantasies with protection (@andrea)

Hiding real identity online is a serious matter for sex workers, as it protects them from the stigma and the dangers related to the profession (es. doxing³⁹). It does not only involve the name, but a series of data-related information that can be used to identify their real identity. Many third parties platforms, such as OnlyFans, ask though to release personal legal information (email, ID, phone number, age) on the platforms (fig), creating an ambiguous and uncomfortable situation for those who don't want or can't give their real name. On one hand, identifying the accounts leads to a lower risk of scamming or fake

38 Pseudonymous Identity: Hide the identity by using a pseudonym and ensure a pseudonymous identity that can not be linked with a real identity during online interactions

39 Doxing or doxxing (originally spelled d0xing) is the act of publicly providing personally identifiable information about an individual or organization, usually via the Internet.

profiles; on the other hand, this appears to be a problem for many workers in the industry.

“They will ask you for legal information that verifies that you are actually a real person, and it can be kind of terrifying. Also, not everyone in the industry has the ability to upload these documents or has these documents. But it is supposed to protect people and protect identities, but who knows?”
(Goofy Toof)⁴⁰

Nevertheless, many social media platforms (es. Instagram or Facebook) don't ask for verification, especially if you are posting content on that platform. If they don't like what is being posted, they will just ban your account.

Therefore, the few sex workers that have the knowledge decide to create their own websites to protect and choose their information, although hosting companies can require as well personal information or content restrictions. For this reason, *Red Umbrella* created an alternative to traditional hosting, owned and operated by sex workers. On the website description stands:

*Is a project owned and operated by sex workers. How stressful admin work can be, and it is my goal to provide frustration-free hosting to you. I would like your website to be one less stress in your life. I offer everything from just simple hosting to a full range of design and SEO services. In addition to being a great value and a commitment to top-tier service, Red Umbrella Hosting offers not only web hosting but also SSL certificates, and an open-minded ToS—all with complete anonymity. I do not want your personal information, and I am not trying to tie this to your real life in any way. Discretion is paramount.*⁴¹

The Name

Choosing a name is the most important part of starting to work, especially online. It helps the sex worker to gain the followers and clients they want, as well as to protect their real

40 Goofy Toof, transcribed online talk, Uroboros festival 2021 (Appendix)
41 <https://redumbrella.ch/hosting/>

name (and identity). Sex workers often choose a name that has something that represents them, it is almost never totally fictional.

For example, *FuckTransia*⁴² explains:

“Fuck Transia. It's a past name when I was in Jamaica and we were on the hitting strip doing our thing, the way I put the FUCK, THE FUCK make it's interesting. When they hear about fucktransia, they're wondering well "Why is she named fuck transia ?" So they are curious, so it catches the viewer's eyes so they want to write me and stuff like that. It is important to choose the right name and the right bio and stuff to get the right people. Like for instance a sugar daddy is the one that spends good money.” (Fucktransia)

Is always a really difficult part of choosing a name. That's like very important, right? Because like, you know, you want your name to represent who you are. It's kind of like coming up with a logo, you know, you have to consider a lot of things. I don't know if there's anybody has any ideas. For me, I definitely did not want to choose my real name, so making up an identity, it has been very important to me. So I chose like Goofy Toof because it's like a nice feature of mine, obviously.
(Goofy Toof)⁴³

I would say let's get a fake phone number. Let's get a burner number and throw it in there. That's what I would do. Attach your real phone number to like a Google Voice phone number or something or just use something that like it's not your real phone number. Just don't ever use your real phone number.
(Goofy Toof)⁴⁴

*The phone
Number/email*

Sex workers have therefore found strategies within the strategy to face the attempt of identification from the platforms and the clients. First Hand, as Goofy Toof says, *“Never give your*

42 Interview with L./ Fucktransia. Appendix
43 Goofy Toof, transcribed online talk, Uroboros festival 2021
44 Goofy Toof, transcribed online talk, Uroboros festival 2021
45 <https://voice.google.com/u/0/about>

DOCUMENT TYPE
--- Choose ---

PHOTO OF YOUR ID (i)

Select file

Please upload a photo of your picture ID Document (i.e. Passport)

PHOTO OF HOLDING YOUR ID (i)

Select file

Please upload a photo holding your ID (i.e. a selfie, ensuring your face is clearly visible)

RELEASE FORMS

ID EXPIRATION DATE (optional)

ID expiration date

No expiration date

EXPLICIT CONTENT (optional)

Will you be posting sexually explicit / pornographic content?

Send for approval

● Fig. 2 How-to-verify-your-identity-with-ID, 2023, OnlyFans retrieved on april 2023 <https://onlyfans.com>

RED UMBRELLA

HOSTING AND DESIGN

An alternative to traditional hosting.

- Sex worker friendly
- Anonymous
- Offshore
- Dedicated Server
- Hands-On Tech Support

Starting at \$16.67/month*

*When you sign up for a year

● Fig. 3 Red Umbrella hosting service for sex workers by Red Umbrella. Retrieved on april 2023 on <https://redumbrella.ch/hosting/>

real number to the platform”. For example, many sex workers attach their real phone number to a google voice⁴⁵ phone number, making it harder for the platforms to link the real number to their name. In this way, sex workers can protect themselves in case of data leaking.

Generally, along with the fake number there is the creation of a new email account. Often email, as well as messaging apps, can be used as proof for proving online sexual exploitation, especially after SESTA-FOSTA.⁴⁶ Proton Mail, a mailing platform from Switzerland, has given a personal statement regarding access to data and anonymity.

(...)Activities not illegal in Switzerland (gambling, sex work, etc.) would therefore not subject accounts to foreign data requests. And even in the event of a data request, we cannot hand over the contents of user messages because we are unable to decrypt them. Our encryption ensures that all emails sent between Proton Mail users are automatically end-to-end encrypted(new window), meaning that only the sender and recipient can read the communications, and the messages are not viewable to anybody who may intercept the messages. All emails in your inbox (including those from non-Proton Mail users) are also protected with zero-access encryption, meaning only someone with your password has the ability to read the contents of your messages or open your

46 SESTA-FOSTA: (2019, USA) introduces criminal liability for owners and managers of web companies “knowingly assisting, supporting, or facilitating” sex trafficking. The law allows for large criminal penalties, including a fine and up to 25 years in prison, for those convicted.

47 <https://proton.me/blog/sesta-fosta-email-privacy>

Conclusions: Resistance Strategies

3.4

Costanza-Chock writes about the principle that *wherever people face challenges, they are always already working to deal with those challenges; wherever a community is oppressed, they are always already developing strategies to resist oppression*,⁴⁸ which of course, as we saw in the previous chapters, also happens in the sex workers community. This principle underlines what Black feminist author Adrienne Maree Brown calls emergent strategy.⁴⁹

Individuals consciously embrace their role as sex workers, by approaching their work with a strategic mindset and considering themselves sexual technicians, labourers, and actresses. Viewing power through the lens of male customers or broader economic structures undermines the agency, responsibility, and rationality of female sex workers. The strategies deeply interiorized in this long-standing profession have been passed down, enabling individual women to pursue self-realization by capitalizing on societal expectations and prevailing discourses surrounding the female ideal.

Manufactured identity can in fact be understood as an example of a resistance strategy that enables sex workers to control their identity and their workplace. Yet, this is not an option for all sex workers but depends on a specific set of circumstances. The ability to create a manufactured identity depends on the individual's personal experience.

48 Costanza-Chock, S. (2020)

49 See <https://adriennemareebrown.net/tag/emergent-strategy/>

Imaginative
storytelling
as subversion
and healing

For the second part of the research, I have decided to approach the topic of online sex work with co-design research methods, particularly in the form of an online workshop. As mentioned in the previous chapter, sex workers use to create fictional identities to perform sex work. For this reason, the workshop has been either important in understanding the concept of sex worker identity as an emergent strategy,¹ but foremost a great opportunity to create a space for exchange, subversion ad healing.

The effective start of this collaboration happened in March 2023, when I got contacted by Ci Xuan Lin (she/they) a Singaporean artist and performer I met during a transcultural collaboration program in Singapore.² We met at their exhibition³ about online sex work (fig. 1), we talked and we shared knowledge, thoughts, and books (Revolting Prostitutes,⁴ which I had not yet read at the time during my research). After our meeting, we agreed to stay in contact, since we were both working on the same topic.

The idea of the workshop came out from a collective intuition about connecting storytelling and avatars with digital performance, mixing Ci Xuan's expertise in performance and theatre with my background in Interaction and Communication Design. Ci Xuan agreed to collaborate with me in organising a series of workshops called "*co-design new narratives on online sex work*",⁵ and we met several times online to organise the sessions. Without Ci Xuan's collaboration, I would have never been brave enough or entitled to organise a co-design workshop within the sex worker community, and I couldn't be more proud of the results we achieved together.

- 1 Emergent Strategy(ref pg.XX)
- 2 Transcultural Collaboration semester in Singapore and Yogyakarta, Shared Campus ZHdK (August-November 2022)
- 3 Exhibition organised by Matterless Collective in September 2022 (Singapore)
- 4 Smith, M., & Mac, J. (2018). Revolting Prostitutes. Verso Books.
- 5 ref. Co-design Workshop (pag XX)



Fig. 1 Exhibition organised by Matterless Collective in September 2022 (Singapore)

By approaching co-design within an external community, I decided to refer to the main themes and questions formulated by the University of Social Innovation (NYC), which participated in the Interaction Design Conference 23⁶ with the topic *Designing with Care: Virtual Healing Spaces*⁷

- * *Designing with Care:* Harm, power dynamics, accessibility, and inequities in our relationships and systems are some issues that are more challenging in virtual settings. How can privacy, intimacy, and asynchronous interaction offer greater trust, care, and support?
- * *Community-led design:* Practices of collaboration and co-creation provide the conditions for more equitable interactions that shift power, build resilience, and amplify the importance of those with lived experience. What values, tools, and interactions enable communities to feel joy and comfort in holding space together?
- * *Creative and collective intuition:* Creative approaches to imagining, storytelling, and acknowledging our personal and collective pasts enable people to give voice to their needs and desires and imagine future possibilities. How might interactions embody abundance, creativity, and future visioning to honour positionality, diverse identities, and shared histories?

When talking with Mia Osaki,⁸ professor at the University MFA Design for Social Innovation, emerged that during

⁶ <https://interaction23.ixda.org/>

⁷ Definition of co-design according to MFA Design for Social Innovation (NYC, USA), quote on: <https://interaction23.ixda.org/sessions/designing-with-care-virtual-healing-spaces>

⁸ Interview with Miya Osaki Professor at MFA Design for Social Innovation (NYC, USA) on 14.03.23

a process of collaborative design, especially within an external community, it is important to acknowledge the power structures and power dynamics that influence the community and your behaviour with them, in order to find tools and methods that can apply to these different experiences.

The scholar Costanza-Chock introduces the word *community extractivism*,⁹ which is the process of working with community members. The collaboration can be quite fun and engaging for everyone, and it can feel empowering for both design professionals and community members. Unfortunately, in most design processes all the benefits such as credits, visibility and fame end up going to professional designers and their institutions. Community members who participate in design processes are too often relegated to provide the raw materials that are then processed for value further up the chain. Design justice practitioners such as Costanza-Chock are therefore working to rethink the extractive design processes, replacing them with approaches that produce community ownership, profit, credit, and visibility.

Moreover, during the process of co-designing and collaboration, it is important to ask what the people need, in order to create a balance between support-cooperation-compensation, which is probably one of the main aspects that concern researchers and scholars, such as O'Neill¹⁰

“Researchers are sometimes seen as little more than pimps: coming into the fields to take and then coming back to their campus, institutions, where they write up data, publish and build careers, on the back of others, of those they took the data from”.

(O'Neill, 2001)

Both O'Neill, Bukhari¹¹ and Osaki agrees that working together within a community needs both time and trust. Relationships of trust are essential, but they need a long time to

*Risks & Ethical
Dilemmas.
Community
Extractivism*

9 Costanza-Chock, S. (2020)
10 O'Neill, M. (2001) pg 50-51
11 Talk with Zahra Bukhari, 07.03.23

*It needs time
& trust*

build, and it *“always feel like walking on a tightrope”*, says O'Neill.¹² Therefore, it is important to define the role of the researcher and to always be clear about the process and the use of data.

In Sultana's Dream, the scholar Zahara Bukhari put emphasis on the aspect of time and trust. Her project aimed to create a digital collective of creative co-healing from the intergenerational trauma of South Asian-American daughters of immigrants. The process of building trust needed time, and therefore, she established with the community a weekly meeting of one hour, for a total of 6 meetings.

“In order to create a virtual environment that felt safe and supportive for trust and vulnerability, each of us had to understand our own identities. As leaders and co-designers, “we have to be so attuned to ourselves” through understanding how our own power and positionality show up in the world and between each other (Proctor). The first few gatherings established alignment on our expectations and purpose through crafting a community agreement, giving access to my thesis research and resources, and designing our identity maps. In doing this, we created a foundation of transparency, accountability and understanding of what we were bringing into the space for ourselves and for each other.”

- Zhara Bukhari in Sultana's Dreamers¹³

Connectedness

Connectedness is the state of being connected or related.¹⁴ It refers to the relationships that people form with the others and the benefits they bring to individuals and society. As mentioned in the research *“Connect, design for an emphatic society”*,¹⁵ these connections can be a source of enjoyment and support while helping people to feel part of and participate in society. Engaging in social relations is important for our personal identity, our self-esteem and our sense of belonging.¹⁶

This idea of connectedness, even if digital, is very relevant

12 O'Neill, M. (2001)
13 Bukhari Z., (2022) Sultana's dreamers, MFA Design for Social Innovation (NYC, USA)
14 Random House Webster's College Dictionary
15 Wildevuur, S., van Dijk, D., (...) (2013)
16 Wildevuur, S., (...) (2013)

for sex workers, as they find themselves often alone to deal with their work. The loneliness in the sex industry is also merging with further problems related to mental health, which is linked to the fact that they cannot often talk about it out of the sex workers' community because of the stigma.

Community ownership, profit, credit, and visibility are the standing points of co-design justice that practitioners have always to remember while working within a community. Applying those principles to research sex work is not easy as it seems, since visibility and credit are not often an option, due to the stigma.

*Co-design
Justice. How
to make the
project mutual*

Having a common goal is definitely a good starting point, which, in the context of sex work, translates into visibility of the work and its destigmatization. But there are for sure other goals which can differ between the researcher and the community members. On different levels, the main goal of the participants consists in creating connections as a way to share experiences, fears and challenges. As a researcher, I was lucky to be an active observer of this sharing space, even when not being an active participant in the conversation.

In the context of co-creation, there is always this idea of adding and creating values. A way of adding value was the creation of a sharing and creative space, facilitating the process of connection and healing through fun and engaging storytelling methods. However, in the context of sex work is also important the tangible value, money. In the academic context we are not used to talk about it, but in sex work it is really relevant. This is why it is important to pay, even if just a little amount, to show that you respect the time that they would use otherwise. Many sex worker organizations engage in workshops with a monetary reward, such as Project X in Singapore or ProCore in Switzerland. (fig. 2)

Last but not least is the concept of ownership, which in the context of the artefact will be translated into the sws' property of the avatar they created during the workshop.

When working with the sex workers' community, it was essential for me to learn how to approach co-designing with sensitivity, respect, and a deep understanding of the unique challenges and experiences faced by the participants. During the workshop, it was fundamental to create a safe and respectful environment for the participants where to share their experiences and thoughts.

● Fig. 2 Project X Writers' Incubation Programme part of our Jalan Besar Fellowship. Writing workshops to reclaim the narratives around sex work.(2023) Project X



Co-design workshop

Re-imagining new narratives about sex work.

4.2

4.2.0 Structure & Format

- * 2 online workshop sessions (Zoom & Miro)
- * 3 hours
- * 4 participants (Identified as female/non-binary)
- * feedbacks session

In a theatre setting, storytelling workshops can engage community members in the creation of narratives that reflect their experiences and perspectives. These workshops can provide a safe and supportive environment for individuals to share their stories and build confidence in their creative abilities. Co-design workshops can be organized to bring together sex workers, designers, and artists in the same space.

During the workshop, we decided to use the method of digital storytelling as a participatory art practice, which involved the use of the collaborative online platform Miro Board and Zoom to create content and share experiences. During the workshop, we applied the concept of Ethno-mimesis¹⁷ to involve the participants, re-presenting through performance text and hacking the concept of the oppressed/marginalized/exploited sex worker.

The significance of their words, what they reveal, are the psychological connections between harsh life experiences, the management of the self-identity, the embodied or disembodied experiences of selling sexual performances and societal expectations. (O'Neill, 2001)

17 Ethno-Mimesis/ Co-design (ref. pg. 26, pg 14)
18 Quote from @smellybirds / Co-design Workshop

Aim & Objectives

The format was thought of as a form of fun and engagement for the sex workers since it is already very difficult to engage with them outside the community. Therefore, the aim was to create a safe space for exchange, creative storytelling and relaxation *because being a sex worker is already difficult*.

One of the main objectives of the workshop was to create connections. This idea of connectedness, even if digital, is very relevant for sex workers, as they find themselves often alone to deal with their work, affecting their lives: most of the time, because of the stigma they cannot talk openly about it. This loneliness in the sex industry also merges with further problems related to mental health, which is linked to the fact that they cannot often talk about it out of the sex workers' community.

Invitation and Organization

The two workshops session took place between March and April 2023, organized by me and Ci Xuan¹⁹. Before the workshops we met several times online to organize the workflow and the timing, struggling with the time difference between Zurich and Singapore. The performer artist Ci Xuan, who is an expert in storytelling techniques in the context of theatre, was a great support for organizing the exercises and tasks for the participants.

The invitation is comprehensive of a poster (fig.3), designed by me, and a written invitation. The idea was to send them to sex workers' organizations and collectives, with the hope they would share it via mail or social media with the community. Finally, the invitation was spread around the digital community thanks to the organization ProCore.ch, which posted it through their feed on Instagram and the Sex Workers collective, which shared in their stories. The invitation was also sent to ProjectX²⁰, a sex

19 Online workshop organized in date 23.03.23/ 8.04.23

20 Project X is the only Non-Profit Organization in Singapore that provides social, emotional, and health services to people in the sex industry.

21 FIZ Advocacy and Support for Migrant Women and Victims of Trafficking advocates for the protection and rights of migrant women who are survivors of violence and exploitation. (Zurich)

workers organization from Singapore and FIZ²¹, an association and advocacy centre from Zurich.

In the invitation text, there is a short introduction about the context and objectives of the workshops. As mentioned before, it is always important to be clear about the process and the output. That's why in the invitation text it was already written what is the workshop about and what kind of artefact is going to be at the end. Other important elements that we mentioned in the workshop were the question of privacy and pseudonymity of participants since most of the sex workers participating are not outed as such. The workshop has been thought and constructed to sustain itself, and the idea is to continue it in the future as a format.



Fig. 3 Poster for Co-design new narratives on (online) sex work [Workshop], designed by Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Establishing Trust & Connectedness

The first part of the workshop aimed to establish trust and connection among us. For this reason, we went through a collection of collective agreements and thoughts that we wished for this digital space to be. At the end the thoughts were collected in a manifesto, the manifesto of the space.

How do you want to feel as you move through this creative journey? What do you need to feel safe, comfortable and excited to do this work? What are your expectations from the workshop and fellow community members?

Collective agreements

“From this workshop, I hope to learn from their previous experiences and share mine (Feel heard/seen, process things that are difficult, feel inspired” - @smellybirds, Co-design workshop 2023

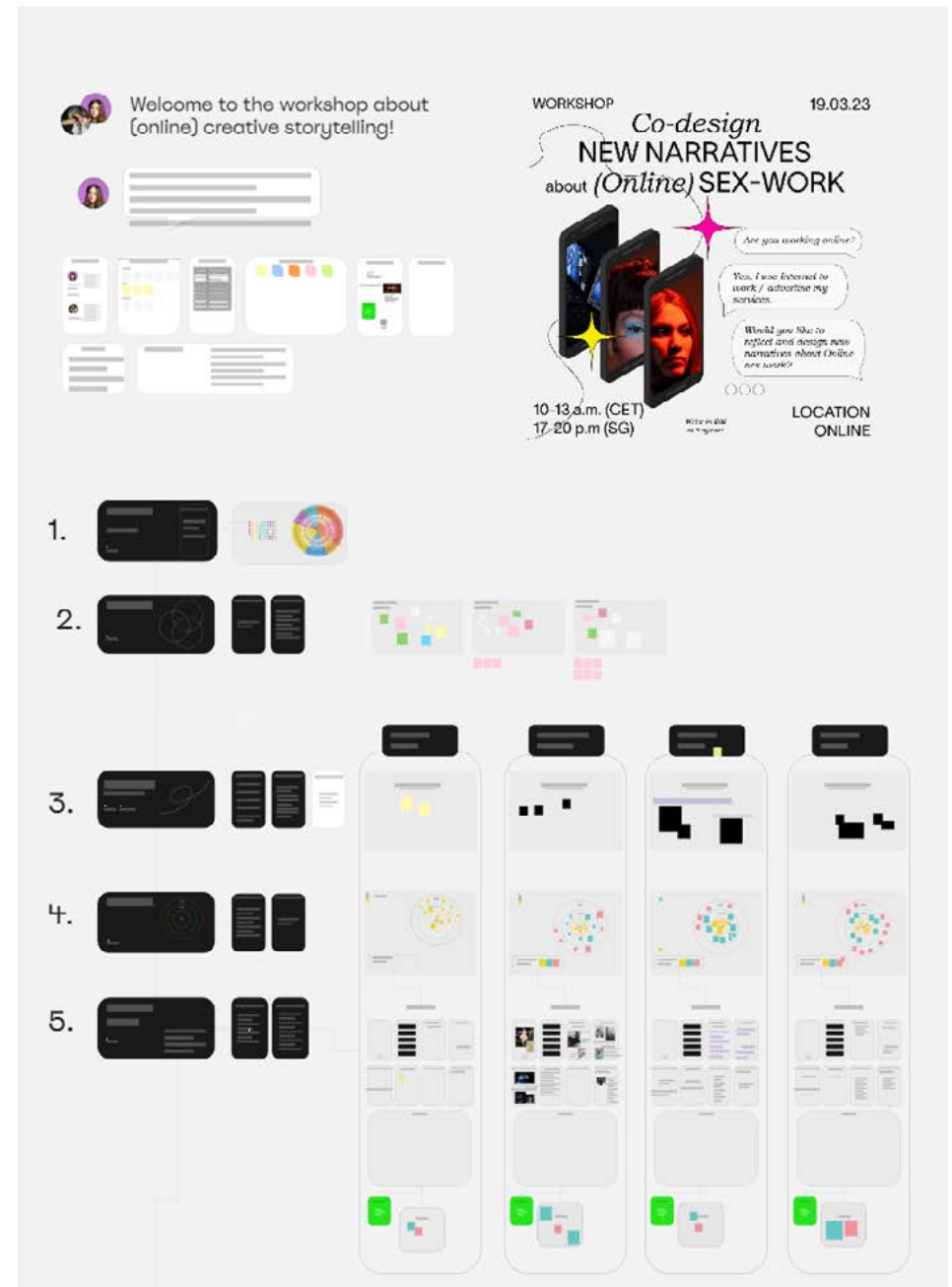
Whenever you have a group of people participating in a co-design workshop, they need to get to know each other to be comfortable working together. This does not only mean just memorizing names, but it also involves the facilitator or leader of the session (me and Ci Xuan) getting familiar with everyone and getting a read on the energy of the room.

Emotion wheel and Icebreaking exercises

The participants were asked to share their feelings of the day through the “emotion wheel”. This task is often used in team building processes, as well in social activism gatherings to check the temperature of the group and acknowledge each other's state of emotions before starting the workshop. Some participants might feel tired and some others excited, but without this little easy task, it wouldn't be possible to know.

Following the temperature check, there was the Ice Breaker's exercise which consisted in answering on the miro board 1-2 of the following questions:

- * Why did you start working online?
- * What's the story behind your name?
- * An interesting fact about you?
- * What's your unusual talent?
- * What unusual or quirky things do you do regularly?



● Fig. 4 Overview of Co-design new narratives on (online) sex work [Workshop] (2023) Miro Board Screenshot

Identity Mapping

Identity mapping exercises are valuable tools in social research, as they help individuals to explore and reflect upon various aspects of their identities. These exercises can provide insights into how individuals perceive themselves, their social positions, and their relationships within broader social contexts. They help researchers and participants engage with the complexity of identity and its intersections with various social factors, ultimately enriching the understanding of diverse lived experiences.

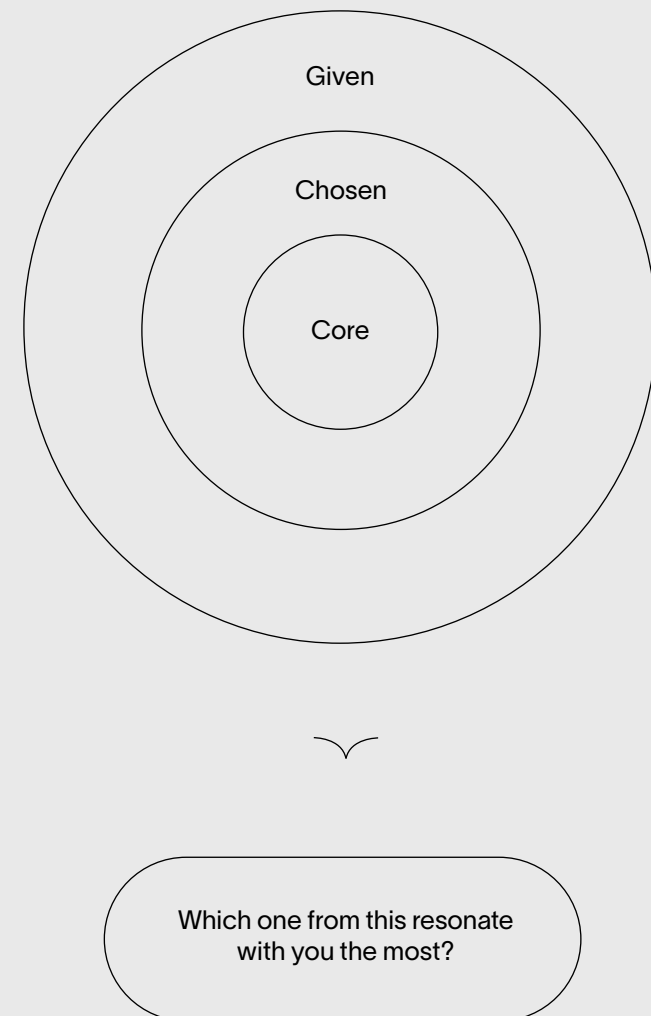
This task of identity mapping was practised and suggested by the scholar Zahra Bukhari²², as a fundamental step for understanding and sharing how each identity is influencing the experience in sex work, and also pointed out by the sociologist Jones during our interview in September.

How do you think aspects of your Identity are influencing your experiences in sex work? (A.Jones,2022)²³

The participants were asked to answer these questions by mapping their identities. As a final task, they needed to choose 2-3 of the identities they resonate the most with:

- * *Given: Identities you were born with and cannot change.*
- * *Chosen: Identities you have had most or some choice in adopting*
- * *Core: Characteristics that are essential to who you are and drive the choices you make*

²² Informal talk with Zahara Bukhari (March 2023)
²³ Interview with Angela Jones (September 2022) (Appendix)



● Fig. 5 Overview of Co-design new narratives on (online) sex work [Workshop] (2023) Miro Board Screenshot

Creating fictional identities

This task is usually used in the design research process to define the final user of a product in a user-centered society. The idea of this process is to realize more diverse experiences based on different personas. Unfortunately, most of these strategies involve creating abstractions about communities that are not really at the table in the design process. Such strategies include design ethnography, focus groups, and a great deal of what passes for participatory design.

The scholar Costanza-Chock in *Design Justice* analyzes the strategy of user personas. User personas are short, fictional characterizations of product users, often with a name, an image, and a brief description.²⁴ They are widely used to guide a range of design processes, including UX and UI, graphic design, product development, architecture, service design, and more. In addition, some case studies have sought to demonstrate the utility of user personas for better design outcomes. If they are developed to be truly grounded in the lived experience of the community of end users, through careful research or by community members themselves, they may be especially worthwhile.

From this research²⁴, it appears that too often design teams only include “diverse” user personas at the beginning of their process to inform ideation, and that often user personas are created out of thin air by members of the design team, based on their own assumptions or stereotypes. When this happens, user personas are literally objectified assumptions about end users. In the worst case, these objectified assumptions guide the product development to fit stereotyped, but unvalidated, user needs. Sometimes, they may also help designers believe they are engaged in an inclusive design process when in reality the personas are representations of designers’ unvalidated beliefs about marginalized communities.

Based on these theoretical frames within the concept of *Co-design Justice*, *manufactured identities*²⁵ and *the Glitch*²⁶, the workshop aimed to co-create together different personas based on the lived experiences of the sex workers participants. In this way, we hoped to hack the concept of stereotypical user personas generated by design practitioners and researchers, giving them a different meaning and shifting the view from users to subjects.

User-Personas

*Hacking
User-Personas*

Co-creating fictional characters in creative storytelling allows a deeper level of empathy and understanding of the audience. User-personas traditionally rely on gathering data and insights about real users, which may often be limited or incomplete. In contrast, this collaborative process allowed me to dive into the creativity of the sex workers participants, by leading to the creation of more nuanced and comprehensive characters, exploring multidimensional and layered personalities, motivations, and backgrounds, but also highlighting the participant's needs and desires.

Moreover, engaging in collaborative participation allowed the sex workers involved participants to contribute diverse ideas and to develop a sense of ownership of their character. Ultimately, the iterative nature of this storytelling technique allows for ongoing refinement and adaptation of personas, also called *adaptive design*²⁴, for the future development of the project.

- 24 Costanza-Chock, S. (2020)
- 25 *Manufacturing Identities* (ref pg. 72)
- 26 *Glitch Feminism* (ref. pg. 74)

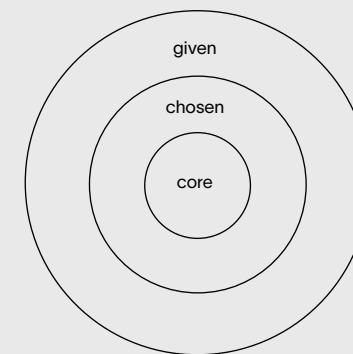
For this task, the participants were asked to create a fictional character based on their three most resonant identities from the previous *identity mapping* exercise.²⁷ The participants were allowed to use images and texts and sound in order to create their characters. Part of hacking the usual identity mapping exercise, in the context of user-personas mapping, was asking about *fears and desires*²⁸. Moreover, the Identity creation storytelling exercise has also been conducted by sex workers' organizations such as Project X in Singapore, as a way to reflect on sex workers' identities and experiences. This shows that is not the first time that a clearly user-centred design practice has been (re) used with a different purpose.

Fictional characters can be designed to reflect the personalities, aspirations, or conflicts of characters, providing a visual and experiential context for their journeys. This interplay between characters and digital spaces adds depth and complexity to their arcs. Moreover, the act of creating different identities has opened up questions and reflections about identity and perception. An interesting fact that came out from this exercise was that even though the participants were asked to describe a fictional character, most of the characters were representing their actual sex worker identity mixed with their non-sex worker identity, which as mentioned in chapter 3, is what happens in sex work.

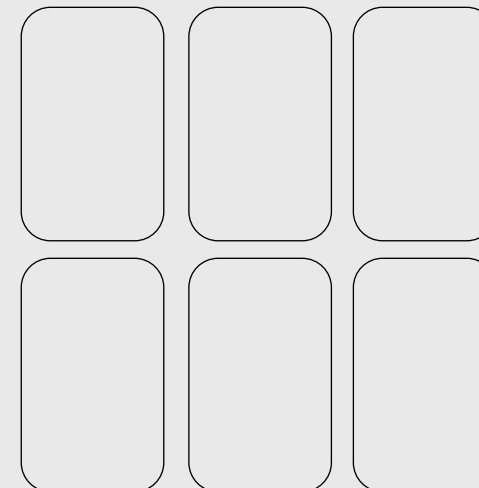
27 Identity Mapping (ref. pg. 100)

28 Reference to the Theatre of the Oppressed by Augusto Boal and the creation of actors for the play in the context of stigmatized communities (1970)

1. Identity Map



2. The Character



3. Visualization

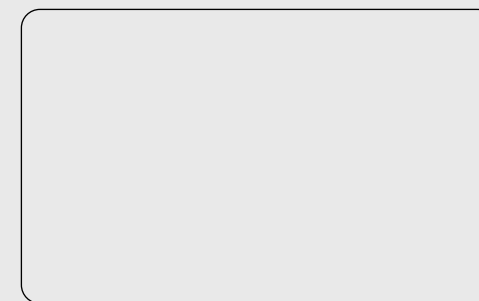


Fig. 6, Fig. 7 Identity storytelling task from Co-design new narratives on (online) sex work. A workshop (2023)



● Fig. 8-9. Example of Images shared by the participants during the co-design workshop (2023)



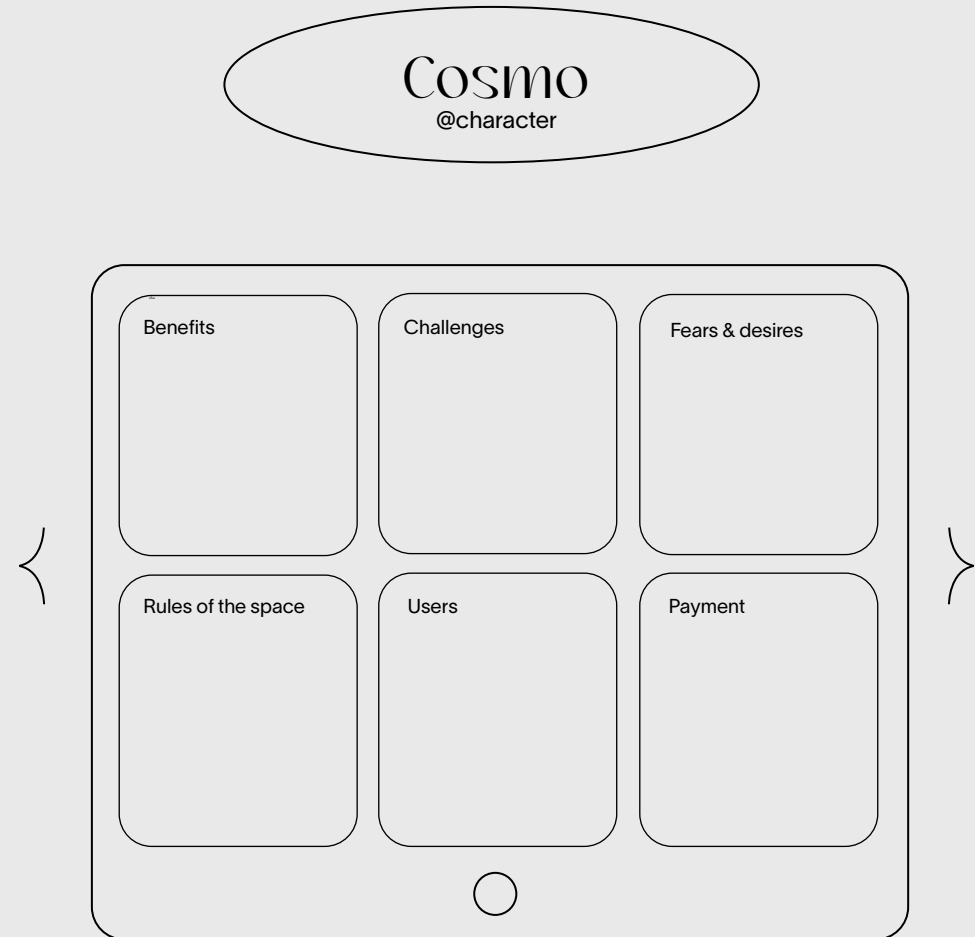
(re) Imagining the space

The role of (re)imagining spaces, a technique also called by practitioners *Story world*²⁹. In the context of creative storytelling is relevant as it allows to expand the narrative possibilities, enhancing participant engagement, and enriching the overall storytelling experience. In particular, the technique of Story world refers to the creation of a rich and immersive fictional universe within a narrative. It involves constructing a detailed and cohesive world that encompasses the setting, characters, cultures, history, and rules of the story's reality. The story world serves as the backdrop and foundation for the narrative, providing a contextual framework that enhances the storytelling experience.

One of the main differences from the typical generation of user personas is the introduction of the element of narrative context. Characters exist within a story world, interact with other characters, and experience personal growth and development. This narrative context enables the final audience to explore the evolving nature of sex workers' experiences and motivations and decision-making.

During the second session of the workshop participants were asked to (re)imagine the digital spaces of sex work, as a medium to reflect and talk and talk about digital spaces and how they influence their identity creation. The participants were asked to describe with visuals and text the benefit and challenges of the space, the strategies implemented to overcome the challenges, the actors in the space, the payment methods, fears & desires and finally to describe the rules of the space. Important for this task, was the freedom to choose different mediums to describe the space such as texts, images and sounds. In fact, not all the participants were used to thinking visually, as we are used to doing in a design/ art context.

*Let's (re)think
cyber-work-
spaces*



The storytelling was implemented by the use of the AI image generator Midjourney. The participants with the help of the facilitator (me) were asked to upload images / or text prompts on Miro to describe the space they imagined. The most common medium was a text description, but if connected to 1-2 reference images, the result was more specific and exciting for the participants.

Before this task, I provided a little introduction about Midjourney and what you can do with this tool, with the help of the designer and researcher Grit Wolhany who is currently focusing on AI and Art in her research and practice³⁰. This part resulted in being a bit more complicated than expected, since not all the participants could easily access the Discord channel and the prompt directly on Midjourney. However, the result of using this tool and sharing it with the sex workers' participants proved to be a good method to engage and excite them, as they could visualize fast the results of their imagination.

Midjourney

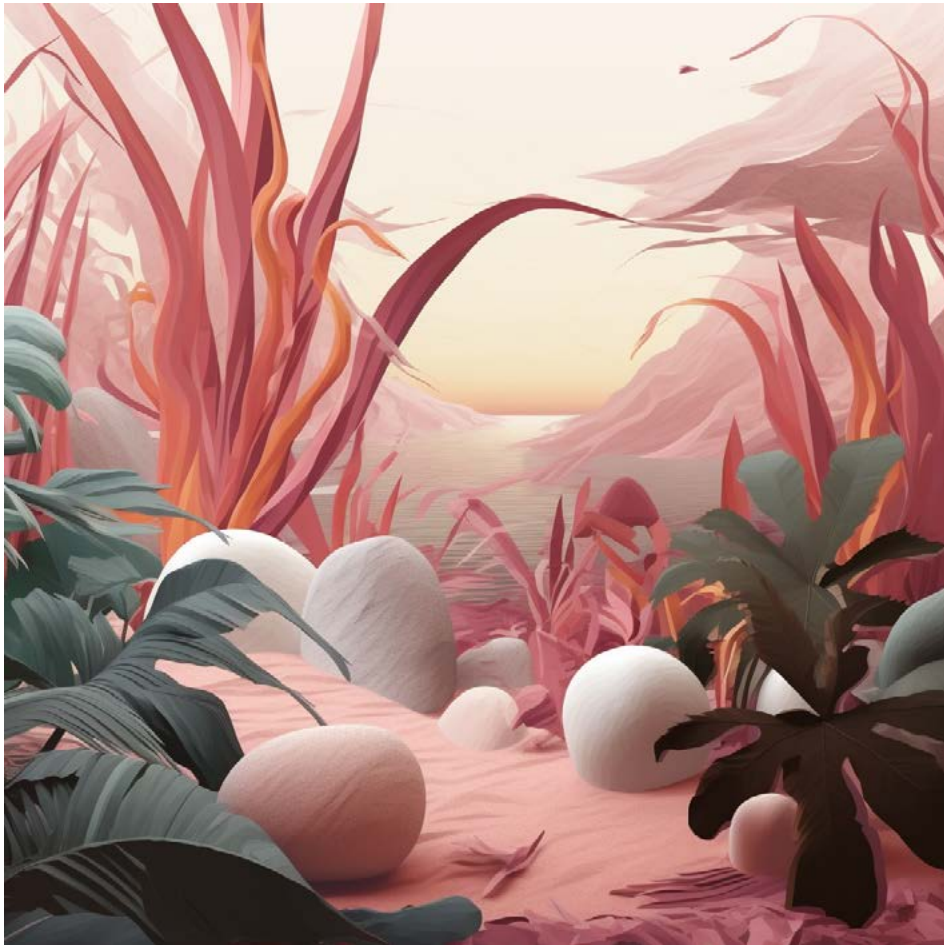
● Fig. 11 Imagine a dark waters with a woman with short hair floating, Midjourney prompts (2023)



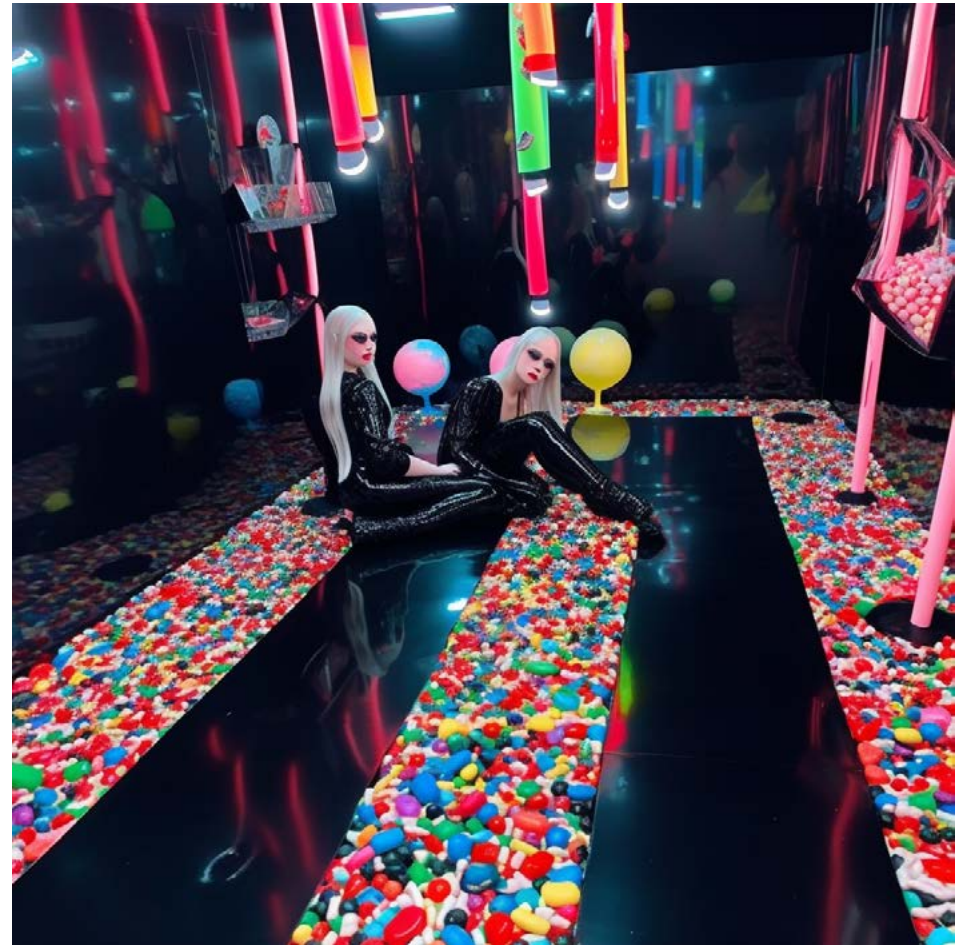
● Fig. 12 Imagine a tropical beach with pink palms and organic shapes, Midjourney prompts (2023)



30 Grit Wolany, project management DSS Lecture area Digital Council, ZHdK



● Fig.12 Imagine a tropical beach with pink palms and organic shapes, Midjourney prompts (2023)



● Fig. 13. Imagine a candy dungeon with black latex, Midjourney prompts (2023)

Feedback Session

The last part of each workshop included a feedback session where the participants were invited to answer several questions and to give some feedback to the workshop. In the future, we aim to make this feedback session anonymous, to be sure that every participant feels comfortable enough to make some critics.

Was the workshop interesting & engaging? Did the exercise help you to build new perspectives? What could be done differently? What you didn't like? What did you like?

Even though the participants had to place a post-it on the Miro, they rather preferred to speak directly about it. All the participants were thankful for the space that we offered for the workshop and for the possibility to create connections between each other since not a lot of space is given to the topic of sex work outside the sex workers community. On the other hand, the use of this format to talk about sex work resulted in being very interesting, engaging and fun, as most of them were not used to create fictional personas and spaces.

"nice that you create something and you went a bit beyond the extreme reality. A different way to approach the topic "
@goddesatea

During most of the academic studies on the same topic, sex workers are used to participate in workshops that often talk about the oppressive aspect of sex work. On the contrary, this workshop aimed to be fun and to create a space of play and relief, and, at the same time, to talk and share serious topics. As the quote shows, this objective was fulfilled.

On the other hand, @andrea and @goddesatea expressed the need to exchange their thoughts, even out the sharing rounds after the exercises. While during the exercise they felt too much on their own, they expressed later the need to share more. This shows the limits of using digital tools for community building and workshops, especially in the context of sex work. In an offline setting, the exchange would have been less guided and more spontaneous.

Conclusions

This first workshop resulted in a resourceful and important prototype for future iterations. Creating a space of sharing appeared to be difficult and challenging, but it wouldn't be possible without the help of Ci Xuan and their expertise, as well as with the great help and feedback from the participants.

Trust appeared to be the most important part of the process of building a space, but it can be only acquired if there is sensitivity and openness to other people's experiences, as well as transparency and consent in the process. Time and flexibility appeared also to be very important: the workshop was initially thought to be in one session, but then we encountered the necessity to split it into two parts since the participants expressed the need to add more time for sharing and exchanging thoughts with each other.

The participants showed to be satisfied by the format, which proved to be engaging and fun, but at the same time a great space for sharing experiences and thoughts. The medium of storytelling proved to be relevant while talking about the reality of the sex workers' daily life and, at the same time, a great method for exchanging. Once again, creativity in combination with fiction and reality shows how effective it is in a context of a stigmatized community. Therefore, I can't be more proud and grateful to the participants for the space we shared together.

Overall, the co-design method used throughout the research resulted to be a powerful and effective tool for engaging with the community, enabling them to express their experiences and perspectives through creative mediums.

Syntia CAM / Artefact and Installation

The Glitch feminism manifesto is for those who are en route to becoming their avatars, those who continue to play, experiment and build via the Internet as a means of straightening between the online and AFK
(Legacy Russell)

The artefact and the following audiovisual installation has been thought as a way to visualize the result of the collaboration with sex workers in the form of art, also defined by the scholar O'Neill as ethno-mimesis.¹ The idea is to mix reality and fiction, online and offline, digital identity and participatory design, which led to the conception of the final artefact *Syntia_CAM*, which places the roots in the creation of fictional identities in art and sex work.

1 Ethno-Mimesis (ref. pg. 26, pg 14, pg. 142)

Identity Construction in new media Art

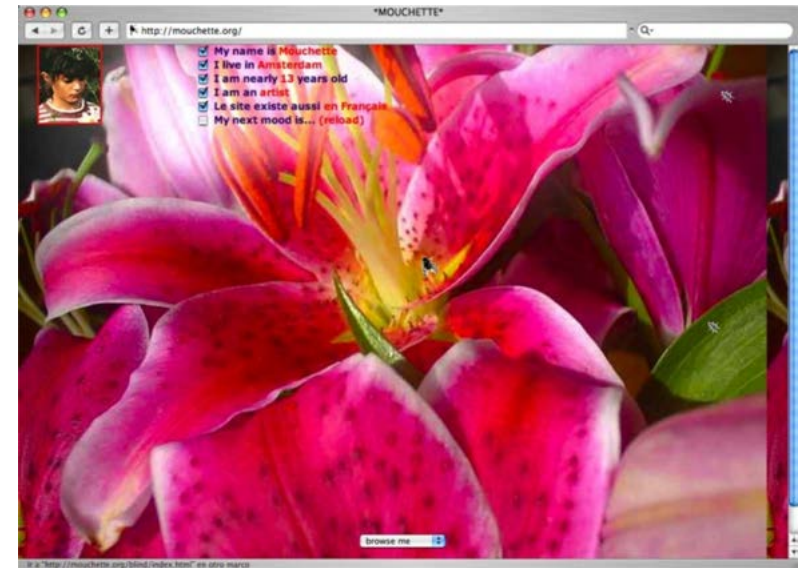
Many artists in New Media have used the internet as a tool to explore the construction and perception of identity.² With the internet an artist can easily create an online fictional character with only an email and a homepage. Race, sex, age, sexual and gender identity can be invented, disrupting the notion that works of art are authentic expressions of their creators' identities. *Mouchette.org*,³ one of the first projects of NET art related to the topic, claims to be the work of a thirteen year's old girl called Mouchette, demonstrating the flexibility and uncertainty of online identity. When the visitor explores the website, it becomes clear that Mouchette is fictional. But the doubt that behind this website there is a real girl remains convincing. Other New Media artists have tackled the question of Identity in a more direct way. *Brandon*,⁴ a project from Shu Lea Cheang, for example, explores the true story of Teena Brandon, a transgender guy that has been murdered when he was outed. The project shows an interactive homepage with a grid of images that represents parts of Brandon's life. In *Bindi Girl* (1999) (fig), Prema Murty represented herself as an Indian Pin-up, with the aim to criticize the pornographic industry. By combining new media with performance and the material arts, she intends to demonstrate and comment on the increasing hybridity of our everyday lives. Bindi girl is a web project that questions our growing relationship with distance, tele-erotics-tourism and intimacy. It is based on what the artist calls Bindi, her "avatar" in the digital space. Bindi is a construct of fe/male desire, created out of what is deemed "exotic" and "erotic". Bindi girl draws parallels between technology and religion, questioning them as a means for transcendence and the creation of an utopian space.⁵

2 Tribe, M., & Jana, R. (2006)

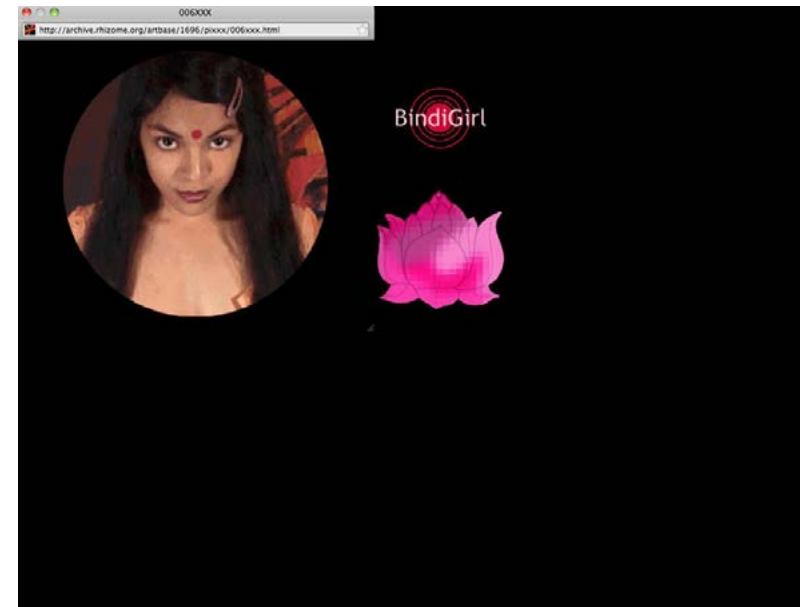
3 Website "https://mouchette.org/"

4 Shu Lea Cheang, (1998) *Brandon*, <http://brandon.guggenheim.org/>

5 Prema Murty, (2001) *Bindi Girl*, <https://artbase.rhizome.org/wiki/Q4304>



● Fig. 1 Martine Neddam, 'Mouchette.org' (1996-ongoing), website, retrieved on 17.01.2023 from <https://mouchette.org/>



● Fig. 2 Prema Murty, (2001) *Bindi Girl*, retrieved on 17.01.2023 from <https://artbase.rhizome.org/wiki/Q4304>

Cyberfeminist scholars⁶ and artists have dealt with the topic of gender and technologies at early stages. In 1991, VNS Matrix unleashed their collaborative manifesto A Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century and in 1992 they develop a project called *All New Gen* in response of the relationship and expectations of women and marginalized identities with the growing cyber-space

Cyberfeminism
& Post

“There will be opportunities throughout the game for pleasurable distractions. Be aware that there is no moral code in the Zone. Enjoy.”

(ALL NEW GEN)

ALL NEW GEN came from a desire to disrupt the machismo world of video games with a female non-binary-centric computer game. Originally called 'Game Girl' (a direct play on 'Game Boy') the project morphed into ALL NEW GEN. Its first iteration in 1992 was a series of light boxes and sound works, introducing the characters and scenarios of a hypothetical computer game.⁷

The fictional characters of the game are the DNA Sluts,⁸ three renegade Superheroes, abdicators from the oppressive Superhero regime, who have joined All New Gen in her fight against Big Daddy Mainframe. These Sheroes with attitude are slimy girls and they love dirty work, mixing business with pleasure as often as possible. The girls are the Princess of Slime, Patina de Panties, and Dentata. The Sluts are very keen on genetic modification and *buy and sell performance enhancers to suit their needs*.

Following up with the cyberfeminist theory about the relationship between sex work and technologies, artists such as Lea Schrager and Teresa Vitucci have explored the interactions of their performative body with an audience. @OnaArtist,⁹ the alter ego of Leah Schrager, is a fictional identity of an online sex worker, with 5M followers on Instagram. As she states on her website, Schrager situates her work in *“a contemporary hotbed of female (in)appropriateness, arousal, celebrity, fandom, and commercialism”*. Schrager seeks to explore female biography and

6 Cyberfeminism (Ref. pg.35)

7 All New Gen, VSN Matrix (1992-1993) <https://vnsmatrix.net/projects/all-new-gen>

8 DNA Sluts, All New Gen (1992-1993)

9 Leah Schrager (2022), <https://leahschrager.com>.



Fig. 3 All new gen (vns matrix 1993) title frame, 35mm Slide



Fig. 4 all New Gen (VSN Matrix 1993) DNA sluts, 35mm slide artwork

labour in today's global society.

Another post-cyberfeminist approach can be seen in Zarra Bonheur,¹⁰ a figure created by the scholar Borghi with the activist Slavina, as an output on her sociological research on the body and the space in the post-porno movement.¹¹ Zarra is not a person and neither an alter-ego, but is a collective project of dissidence, resistance and experimentation, a way of breaking the rules of the body norms. In addition, Zarra Bohneur is a transnational project of research and performance of gender, public space, and dissident sexualities. The project unifies art and activism inserting the actions into local contexts, involving collectives and singularities, and creating stable and ephemeral collaboration. Zarra Bonheur has many voices and many bodies.

The Rise of Digital Humans

Currently, there has been an explosion of profile picture and non-fungible token (NFT) projects, along with generative avatars. This experimental cyber behaviour is a testament to the wider cultivation of a new understanding of self-presentation online.

Among digital Humans, there is a constant rise of meta-influencers that usually have people or brands behind them. As of now, all famous virtual influencers¹² exist on social media: the most famous one is Lil Miquela, but many others exist in cyberspace according to the website Virtual Humans.¹³ The metaverse can be seen as a larger social media in itself, where people become a digital version of their real-life selves and interact with the digital versions of others.¹⁴ Using motion capture technology, green screen, 3D animation and other studio equipment, many

10 <https://www.zarrabonheur.org/performer/it/>
 11 Postporno makes visible bodies and practices normally excluded from conventional porn, to claim everyone's right to pleasure and to demonstrate how pornography can be a tool: of artistic expression, exploration and liberation. (Valentine aka Fluida Wolf, Post-porno)
 12 Virtual Influencers: A virtual influencer is a digital character created in computer graphics software, then given a personality defined by a first-person view of the world, and made accessible on media platforms for the sake of influence. (virtual Influencers.org)
 13 www.virtualhumans.org
 14 Hawkins, A., & Josephs, R. (2021)

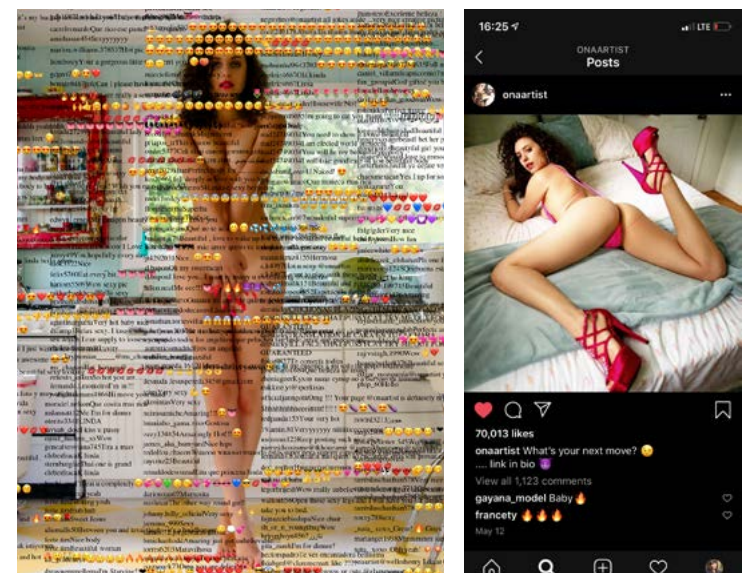
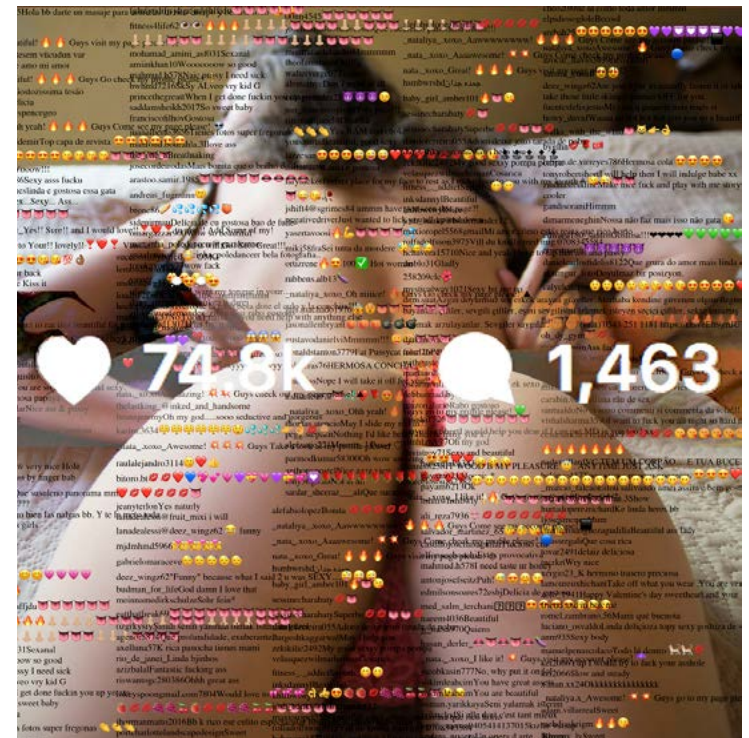


Fig. 5 Schragger, L., Face girl vs Ass Girl, images courtesy of the artist (2015-2022) <https://leahschragger.com/portfolio/ona/>

real people in China¹⁵ are creating their virtual selves to become influencers. Some of them even become virtual idols, as in digital avatars who sing for fans and followers. However, not all of them are created using such techniques; many are purely computer-generated. In any case, most of these digital avatars are AI avatars that learn from information fed into them by their developers and also from users who interact with them using Natural Language Processing (NLP) algorithms.

In 2021 Epic Games released the Metahuman Creator, a platform for creating high-fidelity digital humans. The platform has a simple, browser-based Graphical User Interface (GUI) for creating real-time, fully-rigged, diverse, portable, 3D human characters. While MetaHuman Creator has democratized access to digital humans, over time, the platform is expected to elevate the world's top designers even further. The outright elimination of time constraints will allow them to focus on the details and personal influence over their digital human images. As the humans featured within these screens become more and more realistic, persists the emphasis on design customization along a spectrum of tones, shapes, and sizes.¹⁶

More recently in 2022 AI-image generators such as Midjourney or Stable Diffusion, have brought the creation of digital humans even further, translating the process of building avatars with simple text prompts, allowing everyone to create digital identities.

As these tools become more mainstream and everyone can easily access them and build their own personalised digital humans, different questions arise regarding their possibilities and ethic. The creator Agus Panzoni¹⁷ from the digital trend agency DTS¹⁸ has recently pointed out the raising issue of what is called *artificial diversity*. Recently many brands, including Levi's, have been working with AI modelling agencies such as Lalaland for the creation of AI-generated models, raising the question of how ethical it is to hire AI models to increase diversity representation. "What should happen if a person (who is not black) owns,

*Artificial
Diversity and
digital ethics*

15 Gupta, M. (2022)

16 Travers, C. (2021)

17 <https://www.instagram.com/aguspanzoni/>

18 <https://www.instagram.com/deathstock/>



Fig. 6 Lil Miquela, courtesy of the artist (2018)

controls and profits from this avatar?" said the futurist Sinead Bovel,¹⁹ pointing out that even if avatars are opening up an incredible scope of creativity and self-expression, there should always be critical ethical conversations to accompany them.

Case study: Code Miko

CodeMiko is an NPC (non-playable character) from a failed video game. Her dream was to become part of a AAA game, but her avatar was too glitchy.²⁰

Born in 2020 in LA, Code Miko is a Vlogger and Youtuber with over 2 million active broadcasters on the streaming platform Twitch,²¹ Codemiko broke boundaries with a more innovative way to engage with her audience. While the concept of the 'virtual streamer' has recently been on the rise, the streamer has elevated the animated concept into a sophisticated digital project. Unlike most virtual influencers, the human or "technician" who runs CodeMiko often appears in videos live alongside her avatar. Sometimes CodeMiko tries to do some more explicit live broadcasts, but she gets the content banned.

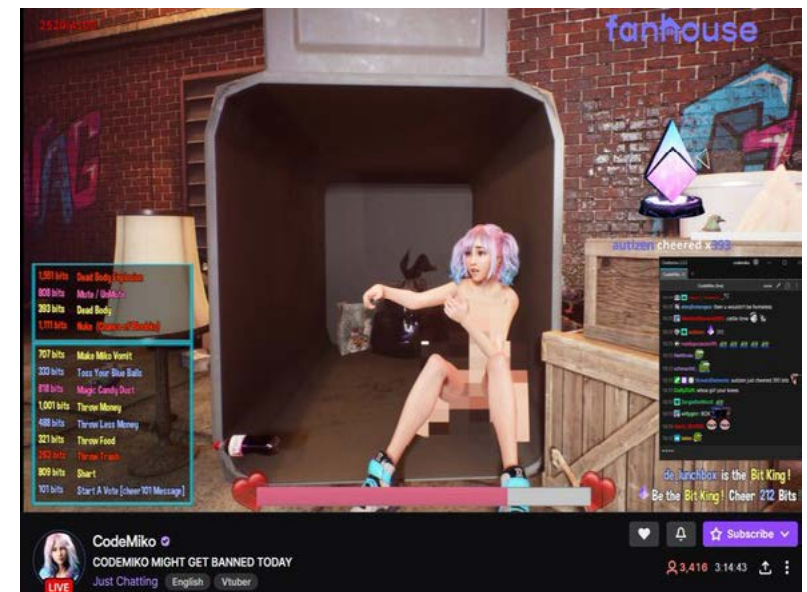


Fig. 7 Code Miko live on Twitch (2022)

19 <https://www.instagram.com/sineadbovell/>

20 <https://www.virtualhumans.org/human/code-miko>
21 <https://www.twitch.tv/codemiko>

Case Study: Jedy Wales

Jedy Vales²² is a virtual brand spokesperson for YouPorn who amasses a sizable following on Instagram (@jedyvales).²³ Jedy Vales models in such a way that adheres to Instagram's standards, while remaining on-brand for YouPorn. She loves to share aspects of her daily life or causes she cares about, such as BLM activism and social justice education.

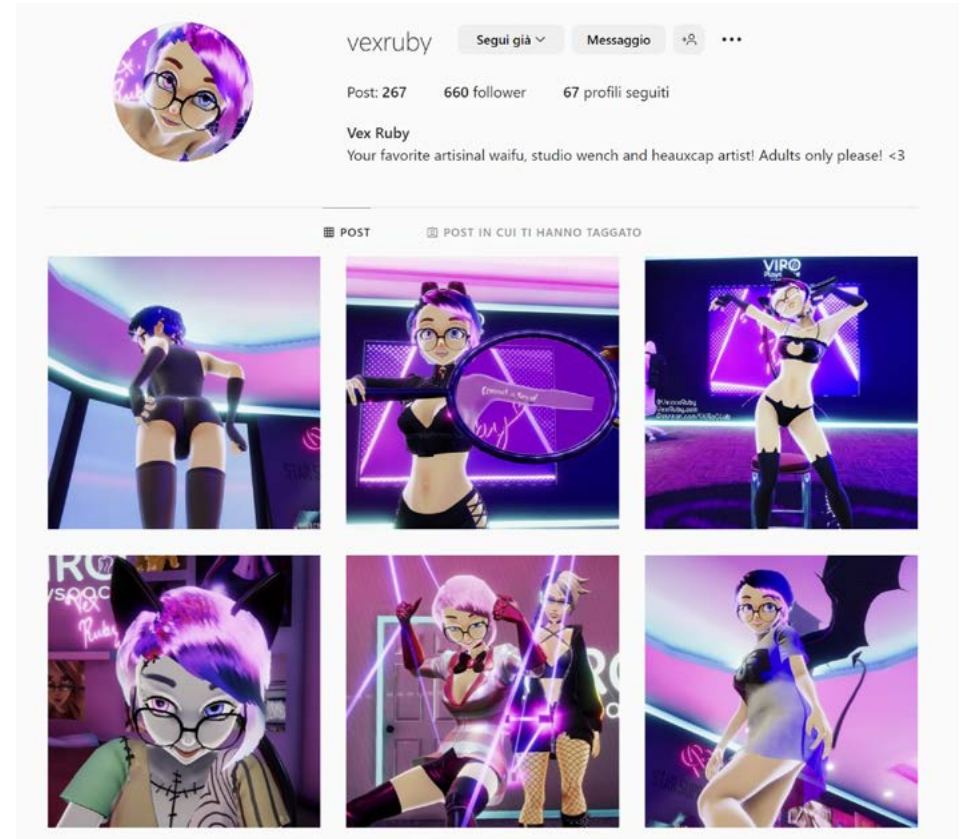


● Fig. 8 Jedy Wales, Pornhub Influencer (2022) Virtualhumans.org

22 <https://www.virtualhumans.org/human/jedy-vales>
23 <https://www.instagram.com/jedyvales/>

Case study: Vex Ruby

Vex Ruby is a live motion-captured virtual camgirl working for and with the erotic virtual reality platform Viro Playspace.²⁴ She performs live on streaming websites such as chaturbate.com, but she has also a Patreon, Twitch and an Instagram account @vexruby.²⁵



● Fig. 9 Vex Ruby Instagram profile (2023) Viro Playspace

24 Viro Playspace, <https://viro.club/about-us/>
25 <https://www.instagram.com/vexruby/>

Syntia Cam Project (Concept for a Collective Identity)

Syntia_Cam is born by following up with the idea to create a fictional identity at the intersection of sex work with new media art, as a medium to visualize, talk and represent online sex workers identity in the current Internet environment. Behind Syntia_Cam there is a collective of three sex workers, the performer artist Ci Xuan Lin, a 3D artist Hahn Dung and the Interaction designer and me as creative director and facilitator.

SyntiaCAM is a digital cam worker and erotic content creator of the virtual world. Syntia is one and many at the same time, they represent the fluid identities of sex workers dealing with identity and digital technologies. Syntia, like many others before them, has a social media presence on different platforms (Twitter, Instagram and Twitch), and produces erotic live content and NTfs.

I choose the name Syntia to refer to the concept of synthetic identities and the use of digital humans throughout the project. The creation of Syntia_Cam was inspired by the recognition that sex workers are often at the forefront of the use of new technologies and platforms, and yet they are often marginalised and excluded from design processes and the future of technology. Syntia_Cam is not only a representation of sex workers in the virtual world, but it is also a tool for sex workers to use and control their own digital identities. By using Syntia_Cam, sex workers can explore and experience the virtual world in empowering and autonomous ways, rather than being subjected to the objectification and exploitation that often characterizes mainstream representations of sex work in virtual spaces. In this way, SyntiaCam represents an innovative approach to sex work in the digital age, and offers a glimpse into the potential for technology to create more equitable and just virtual spaces for all.

In the first iteration, a series of apparently female characters have been created with a metahuman creator to experiment with the software and understand its limits. The first observation is that the character's body proportion is quite limited, the skin offers infinite variations, and there is a good variation of hairstyles. The user interface doesn't include nudity. Overall, the platform resulted in being quite handy for creating a custom avatar. The question that arises while experimenting with this tool is "How to not fall into stereotypes regarding sex workers' appearance?" Since there was no way I could have created an avatar representing all sex workers, I realized how important it was to give them the control to build their own.

The first iteration ended with the creation of the Avatar of @Syntia / Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano. Syntia does not represent online sex work but is the digital representation of my journey as a researcher and practitioner on the topic. It can be considered as well an attempt to level the power structures that often occur in the design of traditional research methods. Syntia led me to the topic through what scholars call autoethnography, a research tool that involves critical observation of an individual's lived experiences, connecting those experiences to broader cultural, political, and social concepts.²⁶

*(Partial)
Autoethnography*

Since I did not experience myself sex work, the concept of autoethnography can result ambiguous; that's why I would refer to this concept in the context of the performance. The creation of the avatar of Syntia allowed me to try on and experience a "second" sexual self. As I started to experiment with the performances in motion capture with Syntia, it emerged that using a fictional identity that does not resemble you, can facilitate a more sensual/ sexual performance without boundaries. Moreover, using a mostly naked avatar in a performance made me understand that a "naked mask" made it easier to perform more sexually than I would have ever imagined to do.

Overall, disposing of the alter ego of Synthia through the journey into the topic, helped me to formulate the right questions and formats for the participants of the workshop and

to empathise even more with the concept of sex working. The process of building Syntia and then performing with it was also very interesting to understand more about my body and sexuality. In fact, often as I encountered, sex workers use their sw charactersto explore their own identity and navigate their own (sexual) fantasies.



● Fig. 10 Syntia_cam, first digital representation (2023) Metahuman creator, L. Galleani d'Agliano



Co-design exploration: From the Workshop to the artefact

Workshop outputs and results

Even though the workshop can work independently as a format, the final idea was to show the results of the workshop in a digital art form. At the end of the two workshop sessions with the participation of 4 sex workers, the results were a series of fictional characters and spaces, partially visualized and story-told. Finally, the workshop's results have been translated into a digital art installation, with the consent and active involvement of the participants. Through the final artwork we hope to reach a wider audience beyond academic communities, facilitating the understanding and action/praxis in relation to sex work as a social issue. In representing ethnographic data in the art form (ethno-mimesis), it is hoped that we can access a richer understanding of the complexities of sex workers' lived experiences, to throw light on broader social structures and processes.

Co-design Meta-humans

During the second session of the workshop I introduced to the participant the digital tool Meta-Human Creator.²⁷ The task was to translate their fictional character into a personalized 3D character, which resulted to be possible through this platform.

The participants found this tool quite easy and intuitive to use, while one of them found it quite difficult to decide how their avatars should look like. In the end results, the avatar showed the general attempts to create an avatar similar to their owners. The participants had finally to export their avatar and send it to me via WeTransfer in an OBJ format.

²⁷ <https://www.unrealengine.com/en-US/metahuman>

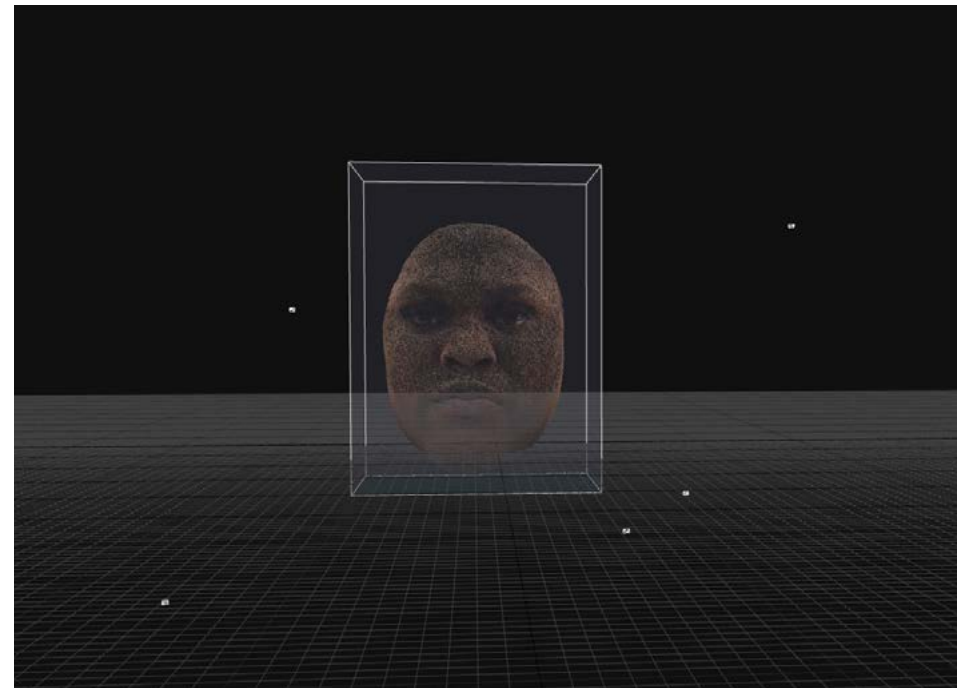
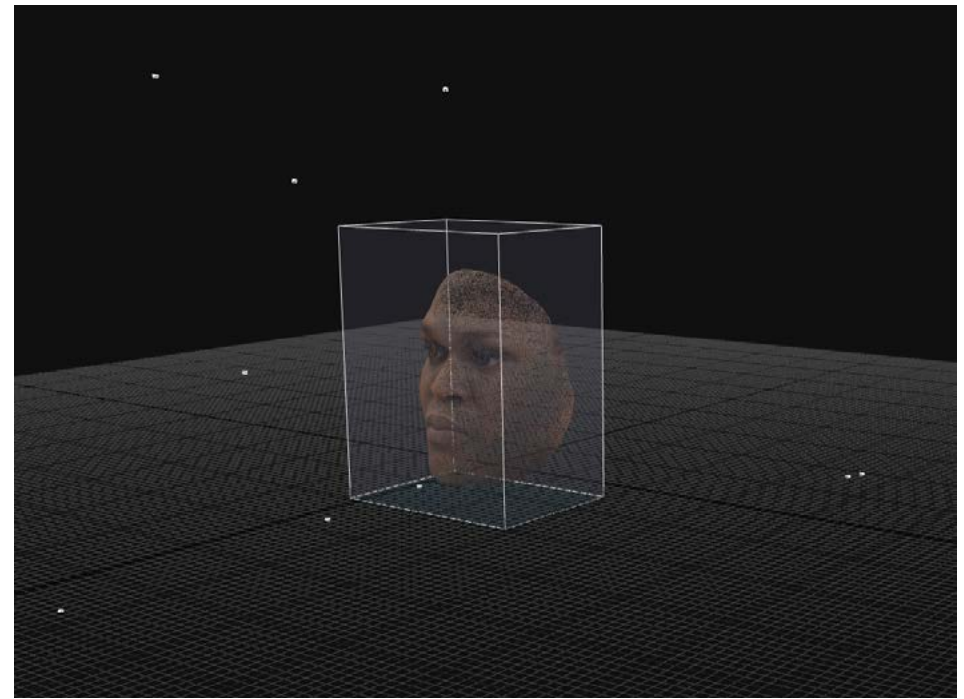
Following up with the cyberfeminist theory about the relationship between sex work and technologies, artists such as Lea Schrager and Teresa Vitucci have explored the interactions of their performative body with an audience.

In the case of @fucktransia, the request was to create a high-fidelity avatar, and that is why we decided to proceed with face scanning and to mesh it with the previously created meta-human. The need to look exactly like the avatar does certainly differ from sex worker to sex worker since not all of them are outed as sex workers and want to be recognisable.

*Photogrammetry
& Mesh to
Metahuman*

For this specific case, I proceeded by using photogrammetry. Photogrammetry is used to scan objects or people and make 3D models of them. Since photogrammetry relies on images, there are physical limitations when those images are of an object that has dark, shiny or clear surfaces. In this specific case, I took around 150 pictures of the model in the photo studio of ZHdK and on the rooftop, to be sure to get the best lighting. Doing photogrammetry appears in fact to be quite difficult when doing it with a moving subject (human), and sometimes it needs multiple re-takes.

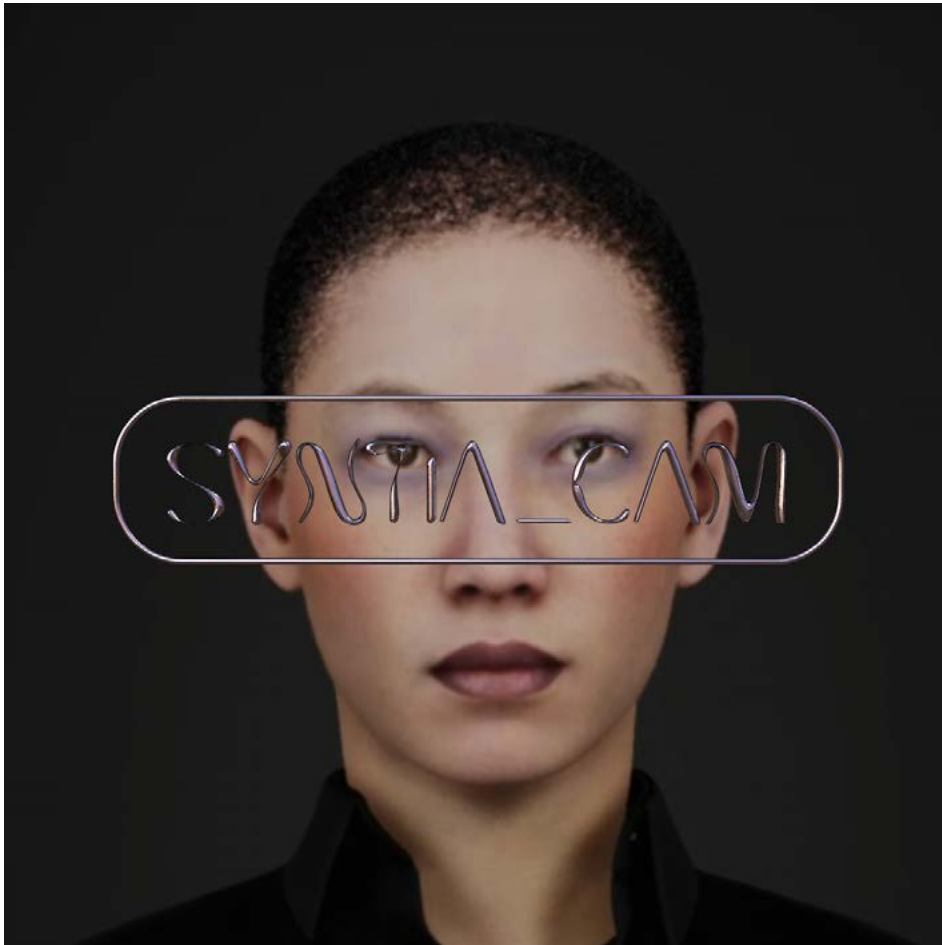
After that, the pictures have been imported into the software RealityCapture where I generated the face model of @fucktransia, using the same software to clean the mesh and to export it in OBJ format, ready to be imported in Unreal Engine. In Unreal Engine the model of the face has been imported and meshed to the MetaHumans, through the plugin specifically created for Metahuman creator. Once the face was meshed to a Metahuman asset, I was able to open the new custom Avatar in the online platform of Metahuman Creator and to add the skin, hair and make-up to the avatar.



● Fig. 11 Photogrammetry and face 3d mesh in Reality Capture (2023), by L. Galleani d'Agliano



● Fig. 12 @fucktransia final avatar (2023) Metahuman Creator & L. Galleani d'Agliano



● Fig. 13 @smellyBird final avatar (2023) Metahuman Creator



● Fig. 14 @andrea final avatar (2023) Metahuman Creator

Ethno-mimesis & Performance

The last part of the project involves the use of performance in the form of Ethno-mimesis. Ethno-Mimesis is the search for embodied tactics, spatial practices and modes of expression with which to explore textures of place, leading to an increasing turn to work traditionally associated with the performing arts.²⁹ Ethno-mimesis, as a methodological and performative praxis, involves the combination of ethnographic and participatory methods and the subsequent production of art forms to represent the experiences.³⁰ As described by O'Neill, it involves sensuousness and emotion in tension with reason, rationality and objectivity. Combining ethnography and mimesis (not as imitation or mimicry, but as sensuous knowing) requires creative methods such as collaborating with artists and participants, sometimes using participatory action research methods, and working together through narrative, talk, and art-making. At the core of the process, there is an exploration of the transformative role of art and the methodological approach of working with artists: ethno-mimesis foregrounds the capacity of art and emphasises the importance of biography (life-story) as a critical theory in praxis.³¹

For the performance I decided to use the method of motion capture. Following the creation of the digital avatar during the workshop, motion capture is used as an embodiment practice to explore the movement and creativity of the avatars of the sex workers participants. This idea of embodiment, also present in the *Theatre of the Oppressed* by Augusto Boal³² and mentioned by O'Neill referring to the research practice ethno-mimes, revealed to be a very important concept to apply into the form of digital performance,

Motion Capture

Motion capture technology involves placing sensors or markers on the performer's body to track their movements in real-time. This data has been then used to create a digital representation of the person's movements in the form of digital performance. This real-time motion capture data can be used to drive animations through Unreal Engine's Live Link port.

The performers were asked to engage in a motion capture session where they wore suit equipped with sensors that track their body movements. Their movements were projected onto a screen creating a visual representation of their body in motion. Through this process, participants could see their movements in real time and use this feedback to explore their physical capabilities and creative expression.

1st Iteration: Inertial Suit and Xsenses

In the first iteration of performances, the avatar of Syntia has been imported in Unreal Engine and performed by myself in motion capture with the inertial suit in the Immersive art space (IAS, ZHdK), with the technical help of Stella Speziali, associated researcher of the Immersive Art Space. The aim of this iteration was to define, find and explore the boundaries of a digital performative identity. This iteration has been important to understand the limit and the possibility of the performative digital body in order to coordinate the next steps.

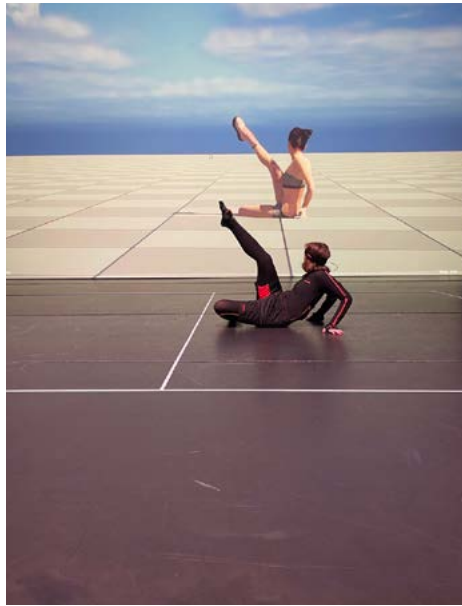
An inertial suit, also known as an inertial motion capture suit or IMU suit, is a wearable technology used for motion capture. It consists of a set of sensors or inertial measurement units (IMUs) that are placed at various points on the body to track movement and orientation in three-dimensional space. Since it doesn't rely on fixed cameras, it means that an inertial suit can be used in environments where cameras may not be feasible or practical, such as outdoor or mobile applications. However, this suit proved to have some limitations, such as accuracy and drift. The data drifted over time, requiring periodic recalibration.

29 Jones, K. (2006)

30 O'Neill, M. (2001)

31 O'Neill & Hubbard, (2010)

32 Boal, A. (1985)



2nd Iteration: Optitrack

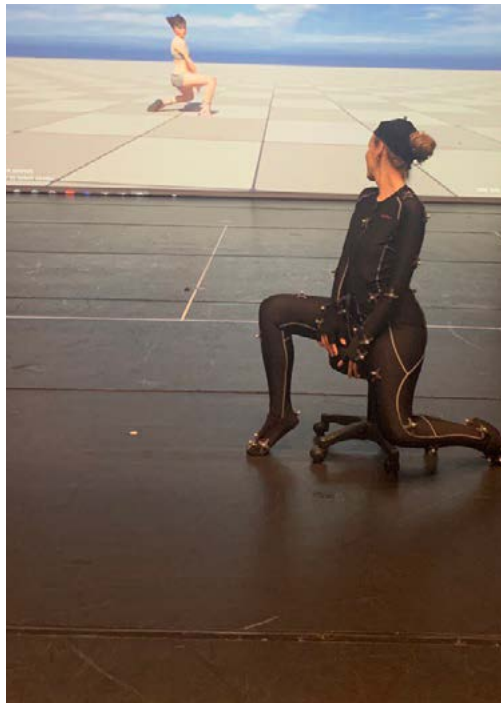
In the second iteration of performances the avatar was performed by myself and Caroline Hammer in motion capture with Optitrak. Optitrak is an optical motion capture system that uses cameras to track markers placed on the body. The cameras emit infrared light that is reflected back by the markers, and the system uses this information to calculate the position and orientation of the markers in space.

The main difference between Optitrak and an inertial suit is the tracking technology used. Optitrak relies on cameras and reflective markers, while an inertial suit uses sensors that are attached directly to the body. This means that an Optitrak suit cannot be used outdoors. However, Optitrak is known for its level of accuracy and precision. It can provide highly accurate tracking data, but this may be affected by occlusion (when a marker is blocked from view).

This second session proved that the use of Optitrak was ideal for performing with precision in the immersive art space (IAS, ZHdK), and also proved to be a better fit for the performers, due to the easier and larger wearables. That is why I decided to use it for the next performance.

● Fig. 15 Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano performing with Syntia 05.04.23. Inertial suit, Immersive Art Space (ZHdK), ph. Stella Speziali

Fig. 15 Caroline Hammer and Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano performing with Syntia 05.04.23. Optitrack, Immersive Art Space (ZHdK),



3rd Iteration (18.05.23) & live streaming

Following the ethno-mimesis,³⁴ for the third iteration of performances different the sex workers participants have been invited to think about a performance they would like to do with their avatar. In the third iteration, the avatar has been placed in a virtual space previously created in 3d with Blender.

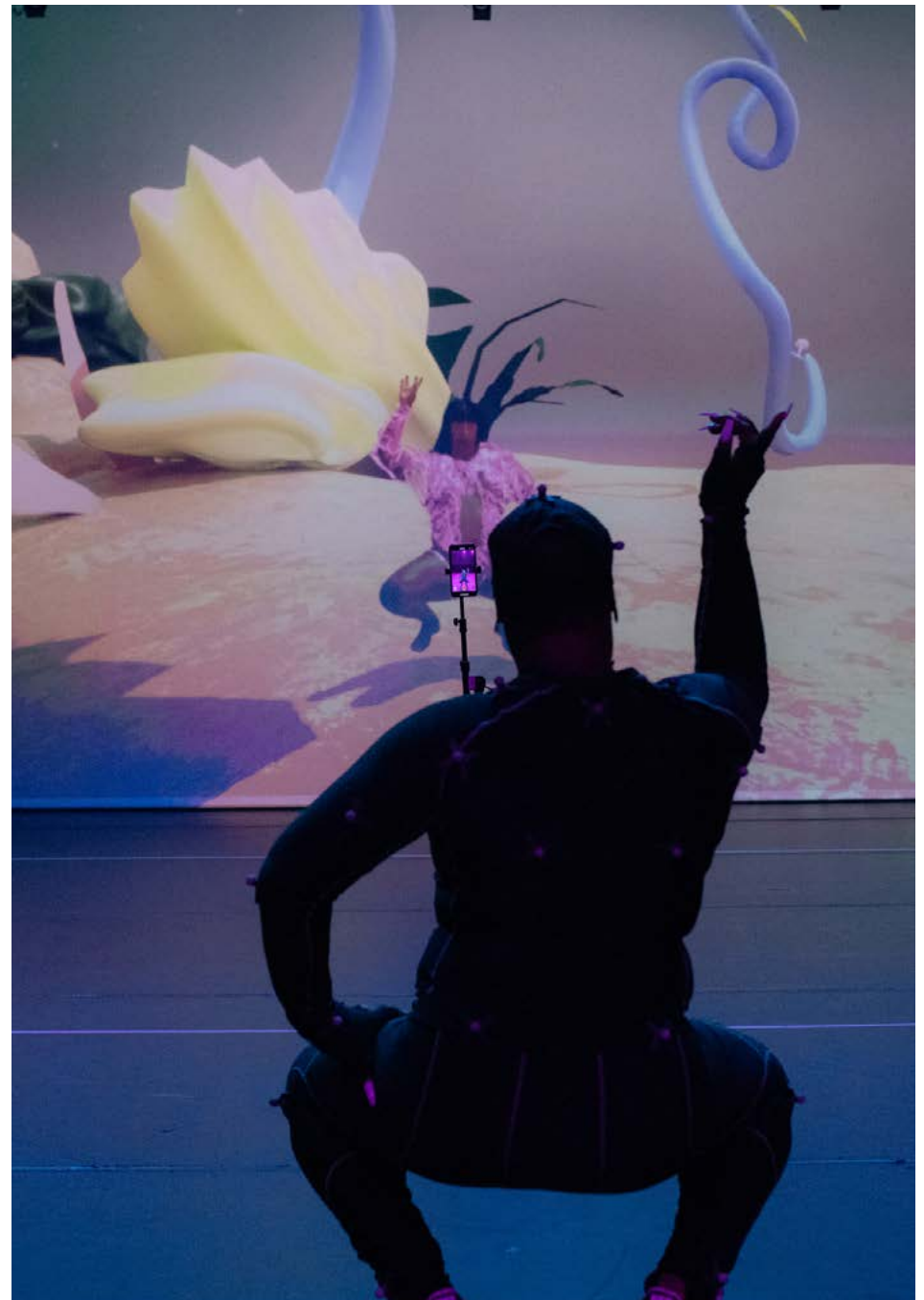
The performances have been practised in three different ways, depending on the participants and the technical possibilities. Not all the participants were from Zurich, but also from Asia and Europe; therefore, the solutions to perform with the avatars have been the sequents:

- * Live performance: Performed in Motion Capture with Optitrack by @FuckTransia in the immersive art space at ZHdK. Performing in motion capture was possible in this case, because the performer lives in Zurich.
- * Mirror performance: The performer @Andrea sent me a video of her performance in MP4 format, and the performance have been mirrored in motion capture.
- * Instruction performance: @SmellyBirds felt instead more comfortable giving written instructions on how to perform with their avatar. This request came from the performer themselves, and was a very interesting feedback on how to keep control of the avatar, even if not being able to perform personally with it.

The live performance has been streamed for 15 min on a live called "Syntia_CAM ft. Lateena" on the personal Tiktok account from @swissbarbie, to experiment with the performance with an audience online. Although there have been some technical problems in inserting the audio with the performance, it went well, and the performer was happy to show her moves with her followers. Since she was afraid to be banned from the platform, she asked to stream from the upper part of her body which was more covered.

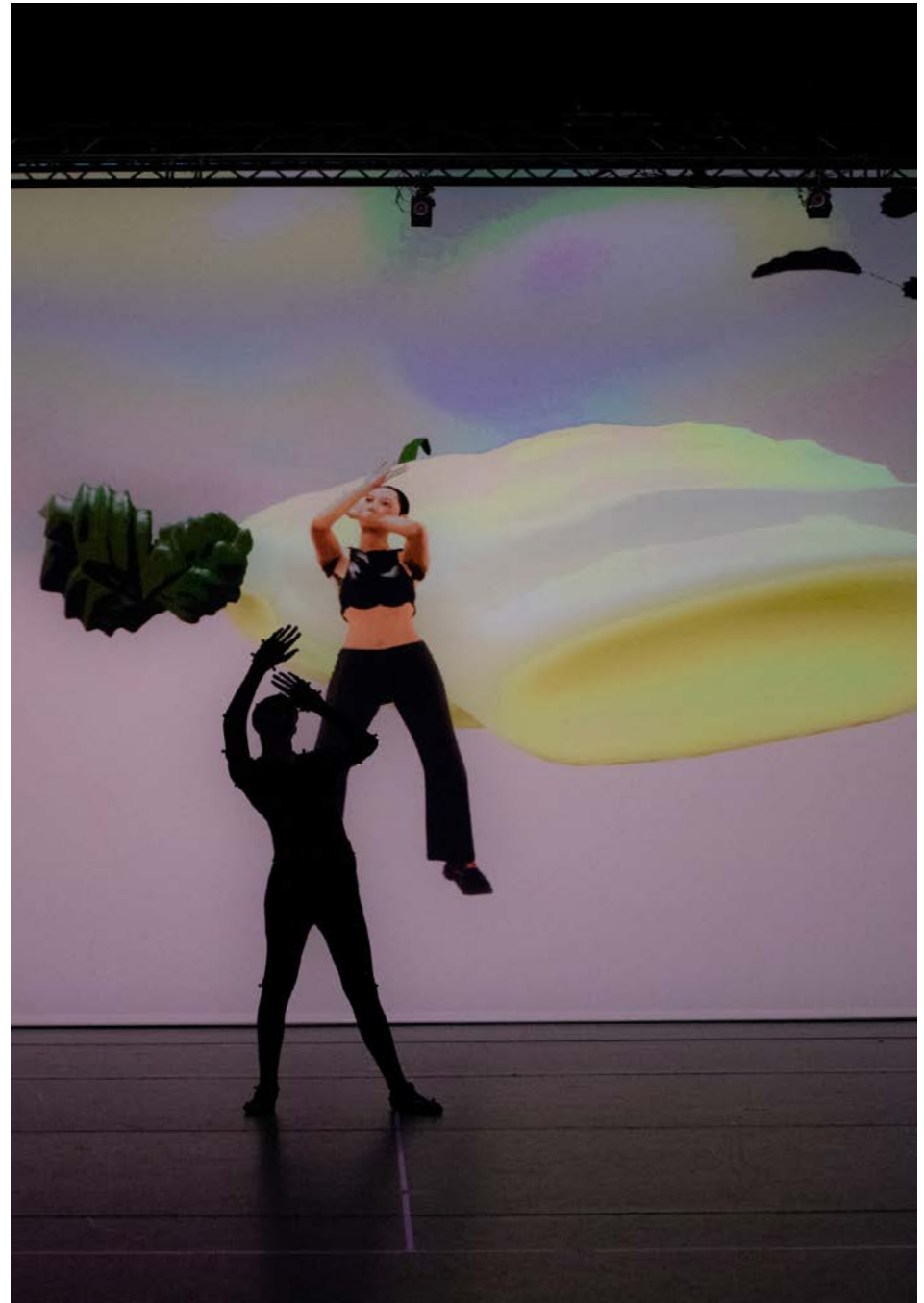


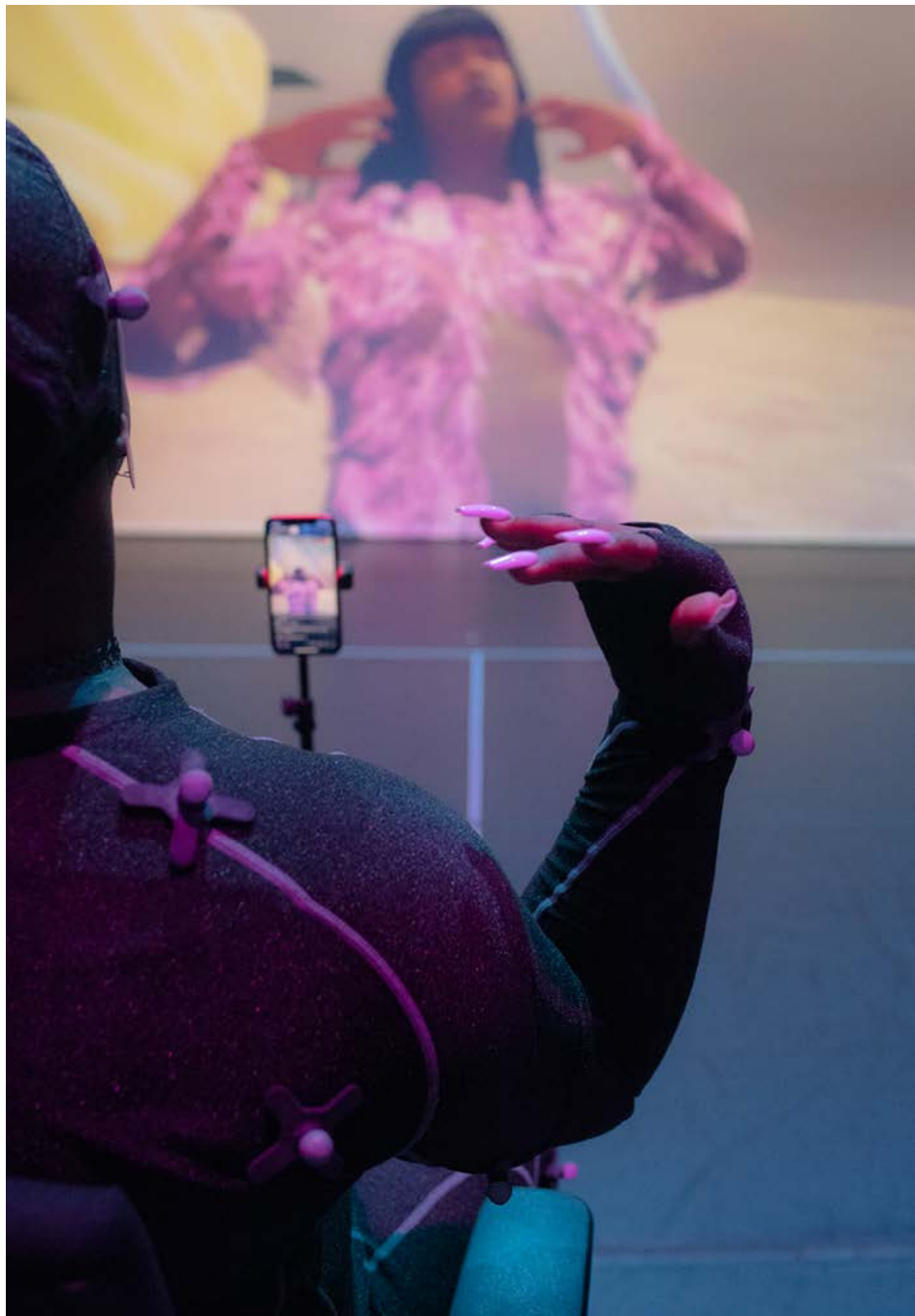
● Fig. 16, Fig. 18 @fucktransia performing with her avatar, 2023, IAS, ph.L.Galleani d'Agliano



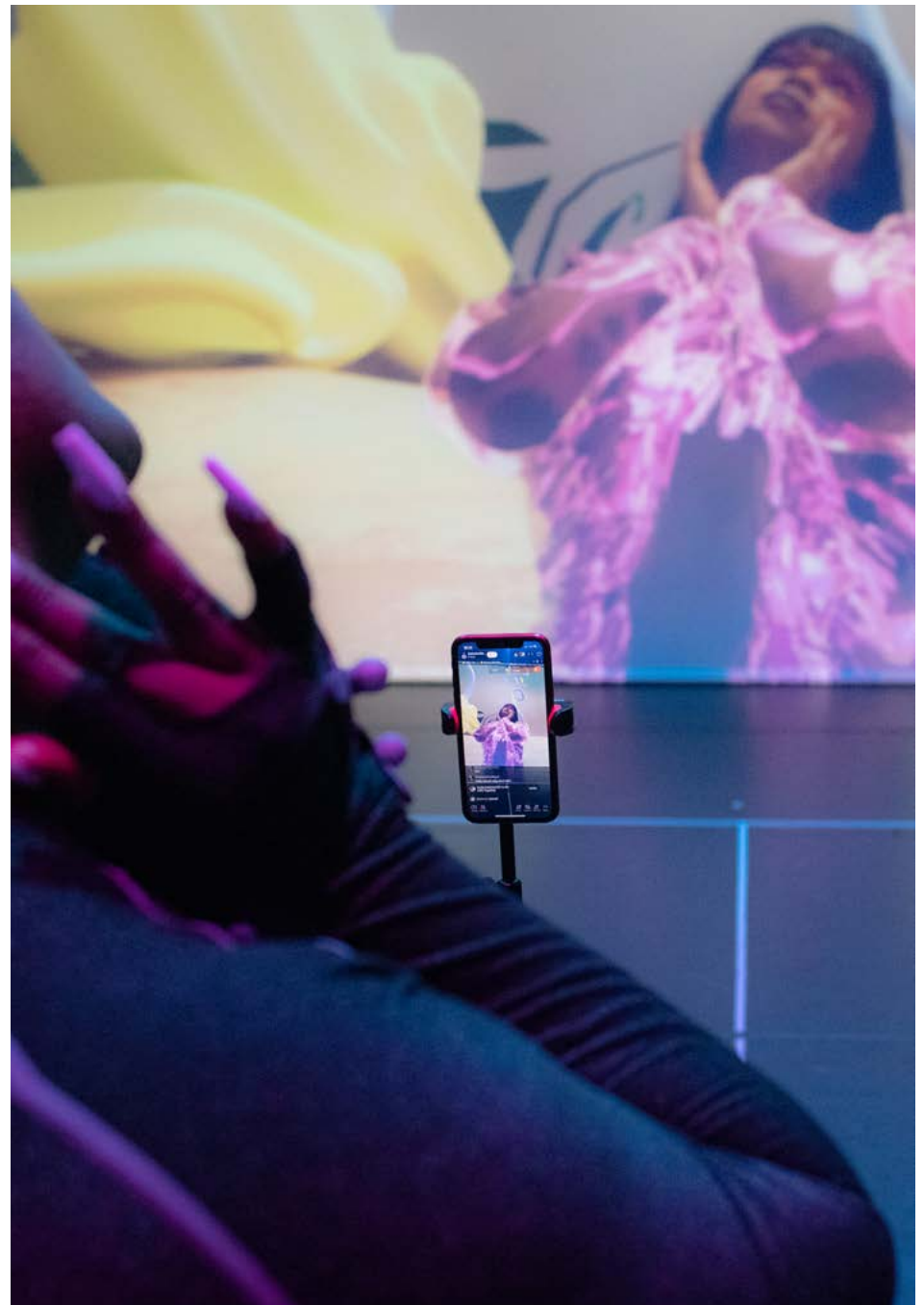


● Fig. 17 Nils Klaus performing with the avatar of @andrea, 2023, IAS, ph. L.Galleani d'Agliano





● Fig. 19 @fucktransia going in live stream on TikTok, 2023. ph L.Galleani d'Agliano



The Cyber-sex-workstation experience

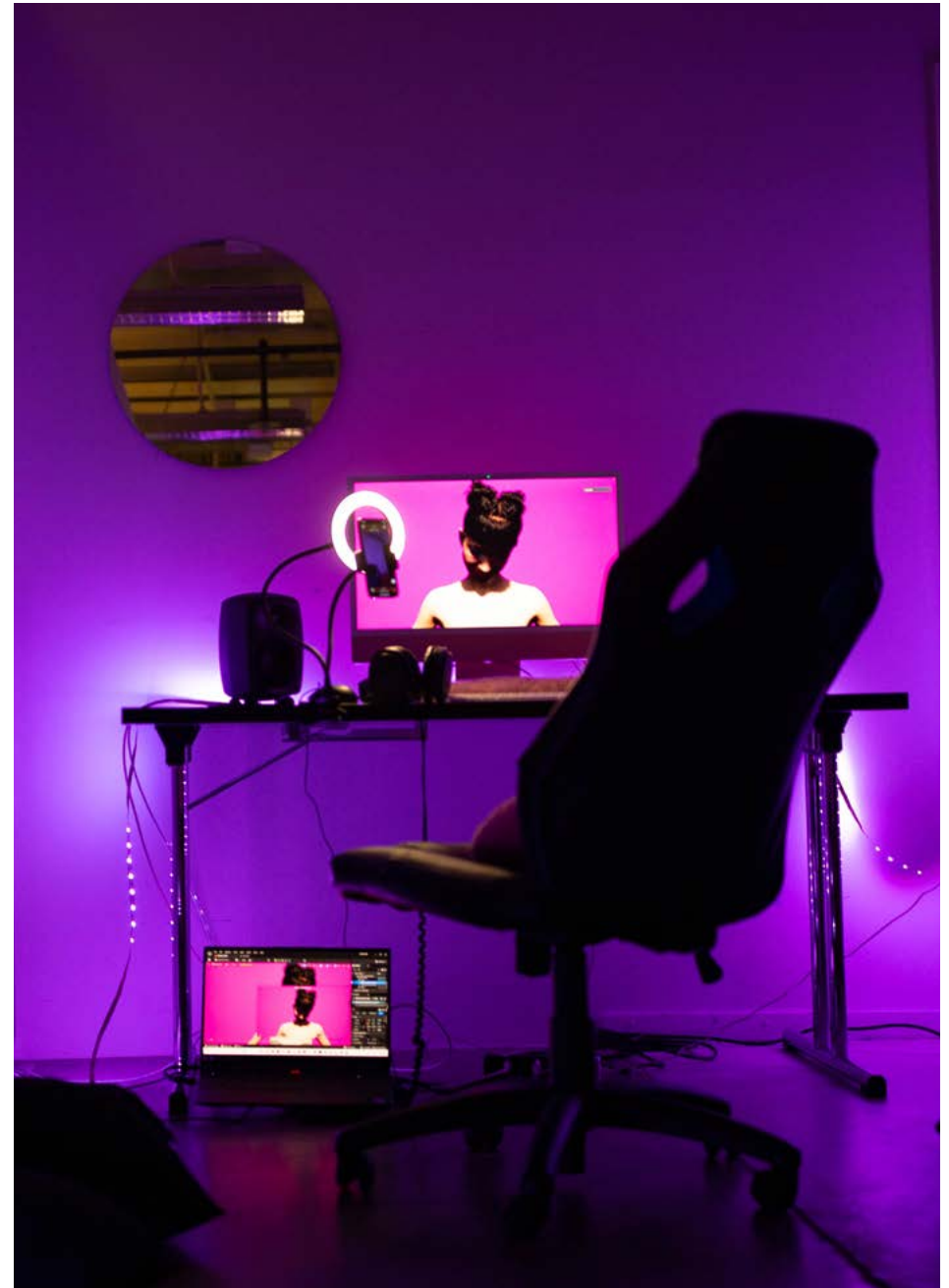
The first installation prototype was done before the start of the collaboration with Xi Cuan and the collective of sex workers. However, it was still relevant to realize how to proceed with the project. The Installation explored the immersion of the audience in the speculative cyber-sex workstation of the creator @Syntia_CAM. Visual ethnography had been used to reproduce the workstation of a cam model. A dark space had been chosen in order to immerse the visitor in a sensual and erotic dark space. To further enhance this aspect, pink led lights had been chosen to lighten the space. The second light - the round light often used by digital content creators to work - was instead placed to track the face of the visitor and apply the avatar of Syntia. Thanks to a plugin for Unreal Engine, the avatar of Syntia was taking control of the webcam and transmitting it into a Skype call. People outside the room could enter the call and look at what happened inside the room. All the interactions with the webcam were recorded. The aim of the installation was to immerse the visitor in another world and let them experience and physically embody a cyber camgirl, in order to create an empathetic connection between the users and sex work.

Once entering the room several questions arised “*Am I recorded?*” “*what should I do?*” “*Is someone watching?*” “*Should I perform?*”. Most of the people entering the space were curious and suspicious, they needed more instructions on what to do. Some people sat down on the chair, touched the objects and played with the avatar of Syntia. What did they take out?

Since the first prototype was done before the co-design process, it proved to be lacking in sex workers' experiences and involvement. The experience of embodying an avatar/sex worker, while not being a sex worker could be quite critical and unethical. However, as the example of the theatre of the oppressed shows, it could work in a theatre context where the viewer can become



Fig. 19 @fucktransia going in live stream on TikTok, 2023. ph L.Galleani d'Agliano



● Fig. 20 @ Cyber-sexworkstation. Prototype Installation, December 2022 (ZHdK)
credits L.Galleani d'Agliano

a participant and wear a mask but the context needs to be very well explained and well set.

Audio-visual Installation

The final artefact consists in an audio-visual installation that examines the ways in which sex workers negotiate and perform their identities online through the medium of digital performance.

1. The spaces for the performances have been conceptualized by the participants with the help Midjourney,³⁵ and created in Blender and Unreal Engine by the digital artists Hanh-Dung and Janik Schönbeck. The idea was to create the space as close as possible as the participants imagined (fig 1-2-3).
2. The clothes have been also created with the instructions given by the participants during the workshop and created by me and Lana Zaitseva with Marvelous Designer, a 3D tool that allows you to create realistic cloth for 3d meshes. The created meshes have been then rigged and weight painted by me in Blender and imported on the engine ready to be animated. (fig)

The prerecorded motion capture animation has been corrected and control rigged in Unreal engine and then exported from it. then, With Adobe Premiere the recording have been post-produced and linked to the individuals' voiceovers. The final video consists of a series of pre-recorded performances running in a loop on a vertical screen/TV in the exhibition setting. The visitors will be immersed in the syntia_cam world with headphones and will be able to hear the stories of the performers.



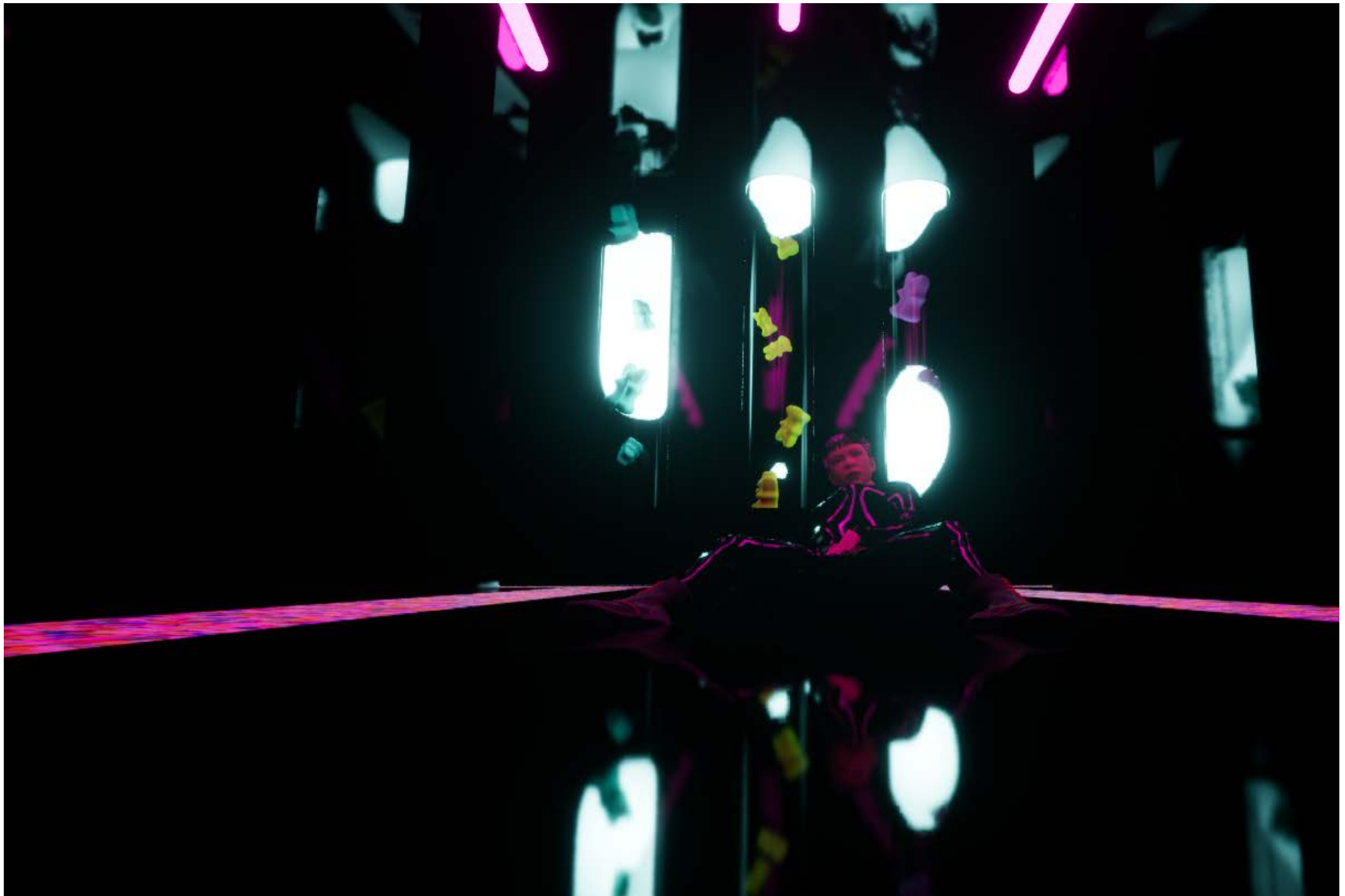
Once upon a time, in a dimly lit café, mistress andrea met with her client. As soon as they locked eyes, she knew it was going to be a wild ride. He was charming, handsome, and well-mannered. They spent hours talking over coffee, their laughter filling the room as they exchanged stories and experiences. The chemistry between them was palpable, and she could feel her heart racing with anticipation.

Eventually, they made their way to a hotel room, eager to continue their rendez-vous. She pulled out all the stops, serving him with the utmost care and attention. They were lost in a world of pleasure and delight, completely absorbed in each other's company. But as the night came to a close, a sudden twist of fate brought their idyllic fantasy crashing down. The man, who had been so polite and gentle before, suddenly claimed that he had forgotten his money. At first, he tried to deny that it was a paid session, but the girl saw right through his facade. She knew she had been swindled, and her heart sank as she realized the man was nothing more than a cheap trickster.

Despite her disappointment, the girl remained composed, her eyes steely with determination. She demanded that the man pay up, and after a few moments of hesitation, he finally conceded. With a heavy heart, the girl watched as the man disappeared into the night, leaving her alone with nothing but the bitter taste of betrayal on her tongue

(andrea)

● Fig. 21-22 Still final artwork, @andrea in the Candy Dungeon, Unreal Engine.
Credits: @Andrea, Galleani d'Agliano L., Nguyen H-D.,





Hello world.

I am a Jamaican black transgender woman.

I am sex positive.

I am body positive.

I am queer and I am here.

I love me some masculine, hot, sexy man.

I want to open my pearly gates and let you have a world of pleasure.

Come here boy,

come here to your master.

Come in my room.

My pleasureful room.

My pink Barbie fur bed is waiting for you

(Fucktransia).

● Fig. 23-24 Still final artwork, @fucktransia in the pink beach, Unreal Engine. Credits: @FuckTransia, L. Galleani d'Agliano, Nguyen H-D., Schönbeck J.







“How do I love myself, and make the whole world fall in love with me?” Everybody deserves to be celebrated regardless of size, race and gender. She dances like there is no one watching, when she feels anxious about her body, she slows down.. It is okay to be slow. Slow is sexy.

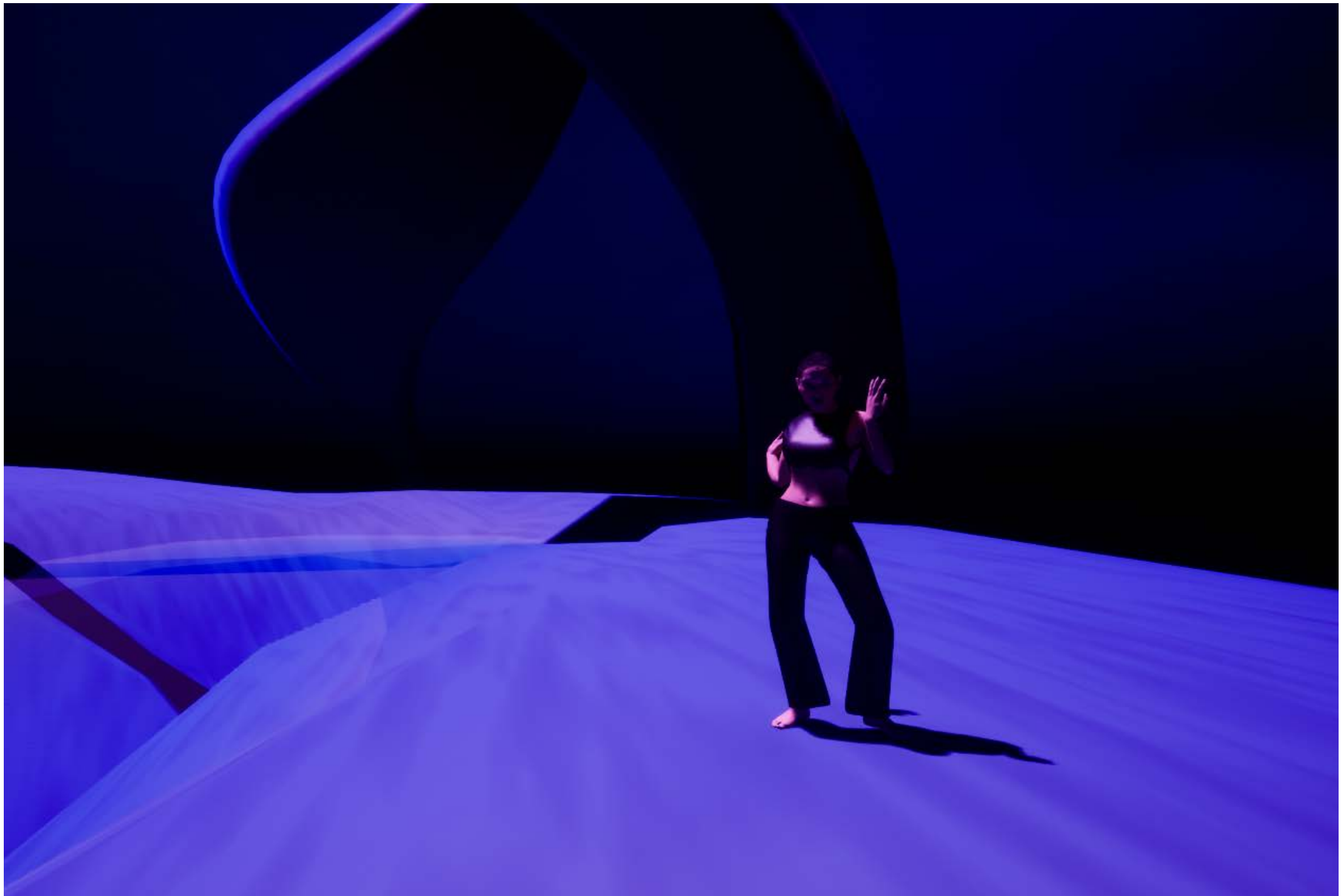
She is here to figure things out. This is a place for magic to happen. You see, she tried doctors, priests, therapists, and so many remedies, but nothing could help her. And so one day she heard that the answer could lie in dark spaces, fluid spaces where there are no rules, no rules for meeting and no rules for fixing.

The girls who come here for answers walk away eventually, but whether the smile they wore on their faces were genuine is another question. She came here to understand people, to love, mingle and awaken. Maybe if temples and hospitals couldn't accept who she was, maybe the woods and waters will understand, and maybe the frogs, leeches and wolves will not get to her with sharpness and soul-sucking emptiness.

(SmellyBirds)

● Fig. 25-26 Still final artwork, @smellybirds in the Space of decompression, Unreal Engine. Credits @SmellyBirds, Galleani d'Agliano L., Nguyen H-D.,





Appendix

Conclusions and further steps 6.0

In conclusion, the research “*Syntia_CAM: Re-imagining Sex Work through Digital Storytelling*,” has examined the transformative potential of the avatar and digital storytelling in reshaping the narratives and perceptions surrounding sex work. By engaging in a collaborative and inclusive process, this research has explored the complex realities, experiences, and agency of sex workers, while challenging stigmatizing representations.

Throughout the thesis, several key findings have emerged. Firstly, Sex workers have proven to have been and continue to be active actors within digital technologies, designing strategies to overcome oppressive internet structures. In this context, the conceptualization of the avatar shows to be a subversive tool for sex workers to thrive/ survive in the digital space, but also to have fun to explore the digital world and their own needs. Through the use of avatars, sex workers are able to reclaim control over their own representation and challenge dominant power structures.

On the other hand storytelling has provided a powerful space for sex workers to reclaim their narratives and rethink their identities. By sharing their stories through digital and creative mediums, sex workers have been able to challenge stereotypes, highlight their diversity, and assert their humanity. The process of digital storytelling has allowed the amplification of voices that have historically been marginalized, enabling sex workers to reshape public discourse and foster understanding. Furthermore, this research has highlighted the potential of digital storytelling as a means of empowerment and community building within the sex work community. Through collective storytelling efforts, sex workers have found spaces for connection, support, and solidarity. The act of sharing stories has fostered a sense of belonging and agency, empowering individuals to reclaim their narratives and challenge the societal stigma associated with their work.

While recognizing the potential of digital storytelling, it is important to acknowledge the limitations and ethical considerations inherent in this process. Privacy concerns, consent, and the risk of retraumatization must be carefully navigated to ensure the well-being and agency of the storytellers. Additionally, the broader social, legal, and structural challenges faced by sex workers must be addressed beyond the realm of storytelling alone. Looking ahead, this thesis calls for continued exploration and application of storytelling in re-imagining sex work. Future design research should focus on amplifying marginalized voices, centering intersectional experiences, and examining the long-term impact of digital storytelling interventions. Collaborations between sex workers, activists, scholars, and technologists are essential in ensuring that these narratives are ethically produced, widely disseminated, and effectively challenge existing power structures.

It was a journey of sensitivity, hunger, growth, emotions and discovery of a world, people and experiences that are on the margins of society, but should not be. *Syntia_CAM* has the potential to become a collective project of creative workshops and digital performance in continuous expansion. Sex workers from different places around the globe and backgrounds will be able to co-create, connect and experiment in the digital realm, to have fun and get their voices and experiences amplified in different contexts. *Syntia_CAM* as a social art project will aim to receive some cultural funding in order to be kept alive, continue to hack the internet in the future, with the hope that it could be a little step forwards the recognition and destigmatization of sex work.

Syntia_Cam is now (a)live!

I would like to thank all the amazing people I got to know and get the chance to collaborate with through my research and project Syntia_CAM. First and foremost a big thanks goes to Ci Xuan Lin, which I was so lucky to meet and start a collaboration, without whom I wouldn't have been able to achieve what we did. Moreover, all my gratitude goes to @Smellybirds, @fuckTransia, @Andrea and @Goddessatea, for being part of this crazy journey, allowing me to be part of their sharing space, and for trusting the project and me.

I would like also to thank my mentor, Dr. Joelle Bitton (ZHdK), for supporting me and believing in the potential of my ideas, and Stella Speziali for the great support on digital avatars and Unreal engine, that nobody seems to use. My big gratitude also goes to Hanhn Dung, who made it possible to create 3d digital spaces great by doing an amazing work, and to Zahra Bukhari who gave me great input and advice on how to create a digital online workshop with a community. A huge thanks also go to Francesca for helping me layouting the thesis and to my sister Elena for proof-reading it; to Nils and Caroline for helping me with the performances, to Armin with the neon light and to Claudio with the sound of the video.

I would like to thank also Angela Jones and Mia Osaki, for the great advice and input about online sex work and collaboration design, and to my former mentors prof. Bitten Stetter and Dr Phil. Francis Müller for pushing me to go on with the topic of sex work and giving me great input about ethnographic and trend research.

Finally, my heartfelt gratitude to my parents for their great support and to all my fellow master students for their emotional support, great ideas, and above anything, for all the fun we had in these years. Thank you so much

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SPEAKERS

Angela Jones, Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Thank you for meeting me. And so I read, you're a professor of sociology and you are specialising in sex work, feminist theory, queer methodologies and porn studies. And I wanted first to ask, when is your interest started in sex work? Like in the sex work online topic? When did it start?

Angela Jones

Specific to online sex work with visa vie my students. So, as a matter of fact, in the preface of the book, I talk a little bit about a student named Melissa, who had come to see me, who had been, you know, in a lot of shoes, it taken a number of classes with me, she was one of my most engaged students, you know, kind of very, vocal feminists in my classes. And then one day stopped attending class. And so given that I had a report with her, I kind of followed up with her and I said, you know, just check it in, you know, are you okay? Um, and she said that she was wonderful, but that she was kind of, you know, pausing with school for a moment because she had started web-camming. And was making a lot of money. Um, and it's sort of making me think more about this new online industry, and maybe how it differed specifically from other genres of sex work, other specific industries, and then specifically my own experiences in sex work. And so I think, my

interest in sex work, you know, it's intellectual, it's political, it's personal. It's, it's all of it. But I mean, I think the online sex work in particular, that interest really came from my students, right, and the number of students who, over the years have been kind of disclosing, that they were working in these industries, and in addition to them being somewhat lucrative, them also describing them as spaces where they felt high levels of job satisfaction, or otherwise, you know, had more enjoyable experiences of work than say, when they were working at the gap or fill in whatever retail store.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

You were also interested in sex work because of your own experience, but also, you didn't really research before on the online sex work?

Angela Jones

Was more recent yes. But again, I'm going back to 2000, I was just trying to think of a date. You know this is back in 2012. Around there. That I started hearing more about what was going on online, especially in relation to camming. But I mean, I think I had, I was pretty well versed in sex work literature before that. And before that, it was just this new online component, that

seemed interesting.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Okay. My research started from my interested interest in post-cyber-feminism. I didn't know if you had heard about it. And while writing your book camming? Did you refer in this phenomenon?

Angela Jones

I mean, it's not a particular theoretical kind of frame that I drew from. I mean, I think that broadly, I'm interested in the democratization of spaces online, and especially sexual spaces online. So specifically, you know, kind of broadly, I'm interested in pornographic industries more broadly. Thinking about the development of more feminist, queer, trans porn, in particular, in the kind of diversification of these spaces in ways that when pornography was primarily only produced in studios. Porn is still racist, still sexist, and it's still all of those things, right? But more people seem to have more access to these spaces now in ways that they didn't think for

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

You also wrote about it how you follow your research from an intersectional perspective, a feminist perspective. How it's possible to be fair and respectful of every different experiences. You wrote also something that I really liked that sex work is fluid. And that refer a lot to different factors, such as gender, race, ethnicity, and so how did you deal with that new research?

Angela Jones

That's a great question. It was very important to me. Um, so I think that, to my answer this in two ways. So I think as far as applying an intersectional frame, I think that it's important that first and foremost we, whether if you're interviewing people, for example, and I don't know, we can talk a little bit about

your methods and what you're doing. But I think that it's really important to gather a wide range of demographic information from people. So whether that precedes the interview, right, whatever stage right, and that, and I generally do it at the beginning of the interview, I just asked him a bunch of screening questions. And I'll ask them, you know, kind of using open ended questions. Tell me about your gender. Tell me what pronouns you use. Tell me how you define for yourself, your sexuality, because I think, again, speaking to that fluidity, I think what you're gonna, at least what I found, especially with sex workers, is that it's often more than one kind of label, right? So people will tell me that they are a romantic, polyamorous, and so is important to give people the space to identify themselves as they fit. And increasingly, even more now about disability. So just making sure that we're asking people about all of these different categories of identity in ways assuming that they feel comfortable doing so. So as you said, gender, race, sexuality, nationality, age, ability, right? Asking them all those things. When we're talking in the course of the actual research itself, I'll be sure to ask people to reflect on how they think aspects of their identity are influencing their experiences, um, and all you know, and I try to give people the space to talk about different aspects of their identity. Right. So and try not to make and that's why I think it's important to ask, because we don't want to make any assumptions about how people identify, if we're talking about disabilities, these sorts of things that can be invisible to us and require disclosure. So yeah, and so and then asking people to reflect on those experiences themselves, right? How do you think these things are shaping your experiences, and then just being sure that when I'm actually analyzing the data and actually writing, that I'm being really attentive to how, for example sex workers portray themselves in ways that are very reflexive. For example in my most recent project very often trans folks who were white, were very reflexive, in their communication with me about like, recognizing, look, you know, I'm pretty sis passing, right, or, you know, my whiteness also privileged to

me in these ways. So I think some folks, especially with sex workers, I think, are very mindful of these things already and don't need a lot of costume. I often talk a little bit about what is called the Whorearchy right and think about the kind of different and then lateral phobias, thinking about how the industry is structured, full service providers and models, Doms etc.. and I try to not get too lost in trying to break things.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Do you think that sex workers online are very high in the whorearchy?

Angela Jones

Um, I think it's complicated. I get this question a lot specifically about cam models being kind of privileged. Perhaps, but we're making an assumption. So many of these industries are networked, right? I've talked to lots of folks who do camming, do also full service work down to the dungeon. This assumption that if you're a cam model, that's all you're doing, and ergo, your privileged, you don't know that people are very often working across industries at the same time, to have multiple streams of income. So some forms of their labor might be more privileged than others. Right.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

They are in many platform at the same time.

Angela Jones

Right. So it's complicated in that way. I think it's important to parse through those differences in terms of the labor itself, not just people's own individual identities, but also what forms of labor on their doing also. And I think that sometimes it's dismissive of people's experiences online to say "oh, this is just super privileged. And iyou don't

face the dangers that offline workers do". Because it's not they don't face any dangerous, they're just different ones. There's just, there's just different drawbacks or limitations to the work.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

That's a bit also what post- cyber feminism was criticizing on the cyber feminists of the 90s. That it started from this idea of internet as a safe space for women and oppressed communities. But then, at the end, it contains the same oppressive structure as the offline space.

Angela Jones

Going back to an earlier question that, when you were initially talking about cyber and post cyber feminism. One of the arguments that I think is important to highlight is that this is not a utopian space. The industry is not an utopian space, but in some ways, there is definitely an improvement to, you know, previous offline spaces. But there's there's drawbacks, limitations to all forms of labor. And in this case, things like Doxxing, Capping and online harassment, you know, the online harassment piece is something that's very concerning to me. Yeah. Because I think that sometimes there's this tendency to say for people invested in binaries, offline and online. And sex work offline is so much riskier and so much more dangerous than sex work online. I'm not sure that that dichotomy is helping us in online spaces, Okay, so no physical violence, right, but the type of psychological harassment that some of these folks are facing is incredibly violent to me. So if somebody is stalking you and harassing you online, and talking about raping you, terrible things to you and ongoing, that's still constitutes harm,

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Do you know, there are popping up some other similar realities around the world about counseling and mental

health support for sex worker? That's also a very important topic that somehow we tend to leave out, but it's one of the most dangers for a sex worker online.

Angela Jones

Yeah, that's really important. I think it's really important for example, you know, the organization pineapple support, right that there are mental health services specific for sex workers and that they work with that they have pro bono services for people who qualify that they have sliding scales. Because I think that's the other piece to this one, you need clinicians who have competency to work with sex workers. But then you also need folks who not only have that competency, but who don't cost a fortune, right? Because I think that's one of the biggest barriers in general and mental health services, depending on where you exist in the world, right? Place like the US where this thing can be really expensive.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

There is a lot about self self-help communities online, deal with topics such as harassment online, but it's more like between sex workers.

Angela Jones

But that's why it's so important, right. I think that these community spaces are so important to what's happening in these industries, not only do sex workers organize themselves politically, right? Fighting for decrim, within political movements themselves. But sex workers are like, in my opinion, probably could teach the world a lesson on mutual aid. These are communities that are so used to being so highly stigmatized, that we constantly have to pull our pool our resources, we constantly have to come together to support one another, just so that we can survive in this world, right. And so I think those community spaces are really important,

because it's how these folks not only survive, but also thrive. You know, we're always talking about how marginalized people are surviving and how resilient they are, but they're also thriving. And part of the reason why they can thrive very often in the ways that they do, despite all of these oppressive structures, is through the work that they do together as a community.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

How do you think that internet change the sector industry? What are the most relevant shifting point? How internet is shaping the concept of pleasure?

Angela Jones

I talked a bit about the democratization of porn in particular, but I think in many ways the internet has diversified the sex work industry, such that you now have an increase of platforms. Not just like camming platforms, quick posting sites, visit me, only fans, clips for sale, my vids, so forth, and so on. Sites seeking arrangements, Sugar Babies and sugar daddies or sugar mamas. And also sites like Sniffer where you can sell panties. One of the things that the internet has done is it's also diversify the industry itself. There are all these new spaces for selling sexual services of all kinds, right? And then there's also this element of democratizing these spaces as well. And I think for somebody who's very interested in class dynamics, what I like about this shift too is that it shifted a lot of control and ownership from owners to workers. Where you used to be solely dependent on studio work if you are pornographer, now the internet means that you can cam with the right lighting and you can record yourself and post online yourself.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

I also agree that the the power shifted from from the pimps or big companies to single sex workers. It's also shifted to the platform, platform themselves are

very powerful and even if you you're an independent sex worker, you produce your own content and you can decide which content to produce, then at the end it's the platform ruling how much of your body you have to show and so on. So I'm also thinking until which point sex working online is affected, since they don't own the platform yet, maybe in the future they will be. Or there are already sex workers-owned platforms. But until there will be a sis white man owning this platforms there will be always exploitation.

Angela Jones

You're absolutely right. And this is again, goes back to this point that listen, nothing about moving online is an utopia, it's still exploitative, right? You still have platform owners, but there's a difference between somebody taking 20% off the top, and you performing an entire day for \$200 in a studio, right? So. So it seems like again, it's still an exploitative space, but there's more room for controlling one's labor, right, not just in terms of what people are making their wages, right, but also just in terms of who they shoot with, how they shoot, how they produce those scenes, right, and having more autonomy over the labor itself. And not solely just being produced by this person who wants you to perform in these ways, in ways that often don't feel good to you. So also having some control over the actual labor itself, and your schedule and your hours. And, you know all of that. One of the things that I found that I've been watching, because I just find it really exciting, is watching sex workers create platforms. So for example, there are folks who created Twitter, also created an escort advertising site called Trust. Is one of the first platforms to allow people to identify their gender however they want now. I've talked to the folks who created that platform, and they've said, Look, the bottom line is "look, when you look at platforms like arrows, and some of the biggest in the market, you know, basically the same three white sis dudes own all of these escort platforms". And so for sex workers who have the capacity, the capi-

tal, and the tech-know-how to actually build these platforms, they're not going to beat the traffic on arrows, but they can. To me, it is some kind of hopeful movement, you know, Just for fans is an alternative to only fans. I do think it's been exciting to me, you know, this is something that sex workers are thinking about, right? Like, how do we also take over, create our own platform spaces, so that we really are taking back.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Even though six worker are engaged in an amount of acting and performance, there are online-six work is still looking for authenticity, and fake realness. What do you call embodied authenticity, in which ways sex-workers could deal with this? such a need of rare realness? Can you elaborate it? Like, how do they deal with this needs of realness and how this is changing too. It's also about the fact that people need is changing from realness to fake realness. If you can look at the meta influencer.

Angela Jones

That's interesting. I think one of the things that's happened over time is that ultimately, there's this demand for authenticity, especially from the client side. Benefits of for example of interactive performances and camming, is that it's not the same kind of highly produced, highly scripted, or at least experienced in that way, right? Like the resonances are different. So that when you're the whole appeal of somebody in a camming room, that this is this a real person who turned on their camera and is performing. Now, of course, we all know that it's still highly performative. But I will say the one thing that interests me the most in terms of this question, who was most likely to be describing their experiences, as I'm just being me, and I'm just having fun, and I'm having a good time. And I think for me, it was, it was most likely for kind of young white sis women predom-

inantly from the US, UK, Canada as well. "I'm just, you know, I'm just being me. And I'm just turning my camera on. And I'm just being myself in there". And then, and then two things. I mean, I think one, especially for marginalized people. So for people of color, for trans people, for people with disabilities all changes. And so depending on who a person is, and their relationship with sexual capital and beauty, shifts. How much one feels like they're actually having to perform in ways that don't feel authentic, right. So as an example, this was something I heard a lot from trans women in particular, who made similar wages to sis women, but at the same time, were like "yeah, I have to do a lot of work that I don't always want to do, right. Because like these students, they fetishize trans women, they want me to perform in a particular way, that doesn't feel good to me, that I do just for the money, that isn't as authentic, right? Even if they don't hate it, they are just performing for that. So I think a person's identity and social location shapes this question about how people are performing.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

How normalizes is your sexuality and body. And if it's not in those categories, then you have to perform more. That's also maybe was a question later, because it's, it's where I started asking myself like we still need out in TCT we can see it from the sex work industry that people need from amateur content creation and not stage not porn from the mainstream platform, they want interaction with the with the performer, but somehow there is still this, this needs for artificial artificial fakeness like real fakeness. How if this will also influence sex work and in which way? when occurred the shift between out into like researching for authenticity and researching from fake authenticity, for like they you know that it's fake but you still want this fake weirdness?

Angela Jones

I do and I don't know how I'm gonna answer this. I mean, I think that it will say this I mean it part of one of the issues that I see it existing in a lot of the research on sex work is that there's not actually a lot of research on clients in relationship to how much exists about workers. And obviously, we know, for example, we know where my interests lie. Right? But so we make a lot of inferences about what clients are thinking and what clients want and what motivates clients based on what sex workers are saying. But there actually isn't as much research that actually talks to clients, because I think that would really be for me lately as a qualitative researcher, how to get at this question, right? And get a part of this question, right? Because it's something I've thought about too, right? Like, he's thinking specifically about a lot of the, you know, the assistants who are watching this, like, you know that this is a performance, but yet you still experience it very often in this way, where it feels authentic to you. And I want to know more about that, too, because I feel like we don't know a lot about that. I have a colleague who's studying sex robots. And then I had a reporter contact me a month or two ago about a piece about sex work in the metaverse. So I think a lot of those answers really need to come from talking to users and clients. Right? And, and talking to them about this disconnect between that this fantasy is, you know, that to a certain extent, we're playing

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

It comes from this idea of female sex robots. They are passive identities. Right. And so somehow- Do you also think that, that maybe online sex work, in the sense is changing this idea of passive sex workers, to active. They can take their own decision on the content they produce? People enjoy this, like the, the fact that they are not passive in a way anymore. You you describe sex work as a subversive practice. Sex work has always been in the frontlines of human and sexual freedom? Yeah, can you elaborate it and what? What is your up in your opin-

ion, the most of versus practices that sex worker do online? Like in which way they are subversive?

Angela Jones

I think it's less about a particular set of practices, right, like so I'm not necessarily saying that, only people who do kink or BDSM are being subversive, right? It's not about the actual sex practices themselves. I think I sex work is work, period. I get it. And as a political and rhetorical device. But I think some of what, so for example, in constantly sex work is work. But it's also qualitatively different, right? Like somebody who works in Starbucks, qualitatively, their experiences are not the same as somebody who performs fellatio for a living, qualitatively those labor experiences are different. And I think for political reasons, suggesting that sex work is the same as all other service work, misses the work, the subversive work, that sex work does, and that sex workers do. So for example, in relationship to the kind of human and sexual freedom, right, like this is first and foremost, the idea that all people should have the dignity and right to work and labor, how they choose. Right. And then one of the things that I've been writing about this more conversations with disabled sex workers, and I think that a lesson that everybody can learn from sex workers is that I think what they're also doing, that I think is subversive, is pushing back on ableist, white supremacist, notions of productivity in work, right. One that like, one of the things that I've heard from sex workers across industries has been that like, you want to know one of the reasons why I like sex work, because I also get to work less, I also get to honor my body and my humanity. This is not a popular thing to say, right? To actually say that, you know, because then you're just lazy, right? Like, you're a lazy person who does more work hard. And these folks are like, I just want to labor in ways where I have autonomy, where I have control over my labor, you know, with some of the limitations, we've been talking about platforms and you know, and, you know, socio-legal landscape

and changing Terms of Service and all of that, but standing, you know, folks who are like, I actually get to work less, you know, what, like, when, especially for workers with disabilities to say, you know, when my fibromyalgia is actually not for my IBS, or my Crohn's, is acting up, I can just not go to work that day. Right, like this work. One of the subversive things these folks are doing is what some labor of feminists, say specifically of like feminist Marxist type. Folks often talk about like kind of anti-work. And so work that kind of pushes back again on these really ablest notions of productivity, right. I think this is so subversive to say to everybody can take note or take lesson from sex workers that maybe we should all slow down, maybe we should all work a little bit less, maybe we should all want to honor our bodies when our bodies are telling us that we've had enough and enough work this week. And that sex work gets to do that. Some of this has to do with the hierarchy, the conditions of labor themselves, but people saying, there's also some some pleasure and job satisfaction to be add here in ways that I don't in vanilla work. And then I think broadly, what's subversive about it is what sex work does for thinking about sexuality, right? Like, and not to get too in the weeds here. But something that I wish there was more writing about, that I've seen, again, across my research projects. In my last interview project, not one sex worker identified a straight. And we see this across projects where folks are like, large population of bisexual folks, large population of queer folks, right, like there is a very significant correlation between LGBTQIA plus communities and sex workers. And so I think that there's also a lesson that's subversive to me about the fluidity of sexuality age that we can learn from sex workers that again, part of this movement is about saying, not only do I have the right and the dignity to work safely in any job I choose, sex work push these norms about what sexuality is, what sex in particular is where it has to happen.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

From a gender perspective, and for me sex work, it's a suit versus practice because it make pay something that is always been free.

Angela Jones

I've heard you know, feminists making that argument for quite some time, like something to the effect, this is, there are women who are doing this for free, right, or to other arrangements, through the organization of hetero patriarchal marriage, you are having sex.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

You also talk a lot about computer mediated interaction, and how to create boundaries with clients, and to make them respect them. Especially because it's a computer mediated work interaction. So how do the screen work as a boundary?

Angela Jones

In some ways, Internet, and especially if we're talking specifically about camming, right? And maybe this is one of those privileges of camming right? if somebody is being menacing, if somebody is harassing you, you can ban them, right? That's it, they're gone. I mean, in some cases, I have talked to performers who said that they have had some really restless trolls, they banned them, and then they just created a new Gmail account and got right back. And then they would keep doing that, and doing that and doing that. And they were kind of relentless, but generally, you banned them, they go away, they go in somebody else's room, they banned them, they, you know, rinse, repeat. So I think online, you have a little bit more recourse to violated a boundary, right? For folks working in offline spaces, it can be harder to navigate those boundaries. And I think for me, a lot of this answer also goes back to thinking about this question of intersectionality, so if we also bring other sex workers other than

cam models into this conversation. I was talking about this a lot with them. transects workers, and these are full service providers who were saying that like, look, you know, and especially for I was talking to a lot of like trans men, for whom they're like, look, we're a very, very niche market. Right. So I may have certain boundaries, right? So for example, I only have sex with condoms, or, you know, whatever those boundaries are, but if I have to eat this month, and I have a regular client who's you know, being whatever was being pushy about not wearing a condom, maybe they'll give in because they need the money and they feel vulnerable, right? They feel economically precarious. They feel and that's compounded by their identity, for example, as a trans person, or trans disabled people.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

In which ways platform are making the interaction with sex worker more, more personalized, in a way. So like sex workers have to deal with. With agreements, like and say, okay, can do this on request, they are the people make them directly, like, I want you to do this, for example, in the coming also company websites. Like, it's maybe you already answered it depends on the person and their background, and whether it's white or not. And that is, I believe, disabled or not, how much you go forward with your boundaries, like you say, okay, accept it, I accept to do this.

Angela Jones

right. And you initially also said, connected this to consent, which is part of what I find very kind of intellectually interesting. Thinking about the relationship to the boundaries and consent, and what that means for consent, and thinking about who feels empowered to not only set boundaries, but maintain those boundaries very forcefully. I talked to a number of camer- as, who were talking quite a bit about how saturated the market was. Espe-

cially people had been in the industry for a long time, when nobody was doing this. Making lots of money. And all I really had to do was like, turn on my camera, do you know, whatever. And now all of the administrative work and they're curating 16 different pages, and it's just become a lot more labor a lot more labor intensive. And then also in terms of how those market conditions have influenced the content of performances. A lot of other women are willing to do lots of things that other sws never had to do, and don't want to do. If somebody feels compelled to perform and offer acts or services that they're actually not comfortable with, but they feel like they need to do those things in order to remain competitive. What does that say about consent?

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Yeah, it's also about the your boundaries to respect your boundaries but somehow also you say that some people need really in that moment needs money and so they're willing to to cross their boundary. Platforms such an OnlyFans for example, made the the sex work industry very competitive and very democratic somehow. So in a way a good thing for on one side because it makes it more accessible, but it also makes the work of sex worker even harder. So you need to create your fandom you need to keep it you need to hyper-creative and create more content.

Angela Jones

I think that that the answer to that question is going to vary depending on who you are as a scholar, and how you understand your your professional identity. But I think as a qualitative social scientist or just as a social scientists, my job is not to make the value of judgments, right? So it's not. So for example, like, somebody might say, well, don't you think that what's happening here is bad? And I would say, Well, I'm never going to use the terms good or bad, because that's not

my job as a social scientist to make a judgment about whether or not I think something is good or bad. I do think, on the other hand, and this is just more of a personal choice, that I have no interest in hiding my political investments. Right. So I won't necessarily ever make moral judgments, but I will often state my personal political stakes in something.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Yeah, I'm sure you also frame the the research, right? Maybe like somehow anyway, you put your personal view on it, it cannot be completely objective. Yeah. But I also had the feeling that I really wanted any way to put my political opinion this, even if it's a research.

Angela Jones

I mean, I think doing that, depending on where one is in the world, what institutions you work for, on doing that can also come at a professional cost. we're not aiming for objectivity. But that's never going to be my aim. That's not my intellectual political investments.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

I also have the one of the last question, and it was about NFT adult content, I don't know if you, if you cross about on this topic, in your research, maybe you it was somehow a bit earlier, then the rise of NF T. But as I said, Yeah, sex worker a trendsetter in digital technology. So they actually are using NFTs more and more and, and yeah making content creation easier, somehow safer, or maybe not safer, but more autonomous.

Angela Jones

I don't, I don't really have a sense. I was pretty much done with this research in like, 2018. Even only fans, Ppeople had just started using when I was doing this

research, and only fans didn't actually even blow up until the pandemic.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Sex workers are able to create their own content, they put it in their blockchain. They were still already using tokens before mainstream paying methods.

Angela Jones

I find Twitter a really helpful space, especially for kind of engagement and sex worker communities. So like, and I bring up Twitter, particularly because I've seen so many debates on Twitter alone among sex workers about Bitcoin and like Kryptos. And like some sex workers are like, this is the future and like their clients are paying for clips paying for services in Kryptos, and others who are like, that is all ridiculous. And that is stupid. And I want cash. And here's what it is. So there have been two, there's lots of these really, and then they really polarized debates, too, that I've seen playing out online.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

how did you deal with privacy?

Angela Jones

They all pay often incentive they I was for images if they wanted to share images in the book. And so people who said, Yeah, I'd love to have my images in the book. And then I asked them, send me some of your favorite pictures from work. And then they sent them and they signed waivers, and they were all and they knew that not only would it be in the book, but sometimes if I'm giving presentations, if those photos might show up at the presentations. And I wouldn't do that without consent. I mean, but there's there's device. There are people who basically argue that anything that's posted in a public

space that people do not have the expectation or should have the right to feel the expectation of privacy. And I think as a researcher, that's unethical.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

In fact, it's the reason why I decided to work on a project where I produce my own content. I can show you. Maybe, then you can give me your opinion. I don't know. But just if you want to the west. And this is, I mean, I don't know if you see my screen. I do. Okay. Can't Yeah, took a bit of example. This is more like presentation, sincere comm which is actually I'm working on with meta humans. So creating actually avatar, which represent the sex worker in the cyberspace. And what I want to do is actually to use performers emotion. So sex worker emotion capture to embody this avatar. And, yeah, now it's the visual it's, it's also something I have to deal with. Because I want to create like fluid identity, which doesn't have they have anything to do with race or gender, like a bit in between? And yet this, it's very Asian. That's because of the program I used. Yes. And yeah, then it will be an installation, but it's just part of the project itself. And a sincere it's, then we'll be in Twitter only fans, Instagram, I put their different platform where they have to produce the content. And the idea was to take Yes, inspiration from images from sex workers, and, like, of course, with a concept behind it, but then, like, reproduce them. And I'm not sure if this will be a problem of copywriting somehow, like, I'm copying what they're doing, or the creative setting, or. Yeah, and that's mostly the idea that I'm working on now. Together with with their research. They also I thought, if would have been a typical user avatar, but also I thought it would be interesting to, like, hack this narrative on sex boats.

Angela Jones

Yeah, I mean, if they're based on somebody's actual likeness, then I would think that you should have permission

from that person to use their likeness.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

You mean face. But you know, but in this case, you can create digital, it's

Angela Jones

all computer generated, like, yes, you don't

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

the people who doesn't exist, like Yeah, that's the cool part. Yeah, that's cool. So then, that's how I tried to solve the problem of copyrights and consent. And, of course, I didn't want to show a picture of sex worker on my research like that, because I'm very visual. I really want to show what's happening, but somehow I was like, okay, but the only way to produce my own content, but I'm not a sex worker. And even if I would try, maybe I'm not there yet. Like maybe in the future. I wouldn't be. Yeah. But that's that's is it more or less. And you have a nice if you think it could be a project that works. It's valuable opinion. But I still have to do a lot of sex worker interviews, and it's very hard to reach them. Like I have to run behind the people. And sometimes it's quite hard

Angela Jones

to so yeah, I mean, well on there. I think that the ethical way. And I think the way to get people to participate is through incentives. And if you can pay people,

@FuckTransia (12/09/22)

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

met, platforms, people, videos, grindr, fuck, steal, online, discreet, zurich, identity, bdsm, problems, dress, catfishing, dominating, club, offline, sugar daddy, post, online, work, sex, fucking, dance, fuck, art, pleasure, therapy, positions, marry, independency, sexy, camming, handcuff, body, talk, feel, offline, glowy, fans, videos, tags, costume, work, porn, song, sex, teasers, hurt, twitter, hardcore rap, dominatrix, girl, naughty, love, merlin, writing, buy, stripper pole

SPEAKERS

Fucktransia., Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

What's your name and profession?

Fucktransia

Fuck Transia, She/her

Ludovica

Why did you choose this name?

Fucktransia

Fuck Transia. It's a past name when I was in Jamaica and we were on the hit strip doing our thing, the way I put the FUCK, THE FUCK make it's interesting. When they hear about fuck transia. They're wondering well "why is she named fuck transia ?" So they are curious, so it catches the viewers eyes so they want to write me and stuff like that.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

So do you think the name it's very important especially when you work online, to choose the right one.

Fucktransia

To chose the right name and the right bio and stuff to get the right people. Like for instance a sugar daddy is the one that spends good money

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

How do you define your identity online?

Fucktransia

Online I just like a focus from you see me, you see Fuck. You just have a fuck look?

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

How can you have a fuck look?

Fucktransia

It's the dress and it's very naked. A lot of Body showed, you dress slutty , the dress to catch the eyes. So when you catch the eyes, they want to hook up, or meet you in person and stuff like that.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Okay? And do you think is different from the one offline? Like in reality

Fucktransia

It's the same for me because I always dress fuckysh, okay. Like a diva? Yeah, no, that's just who I am.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Do you consider your work as art?

Fucktransia

Yes, fucking is an art and it's magical. You have to put it artistically when you're fucking because every position is special, you know? So it's basically exercise an art.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

We can talk about performance a lot with Sex-work. It is performance and how do you deal with clients, they, they seek for intimacy. How do you deal with this?

Fucktransia

Depending on the vibe I get from the person, we could have intimacy. I was seeing one of my clients, we started seeing each other regularly. Do you know? Then you get, like, more like an intimate relationship instead of just fucking for things.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

When did you start working? Why

Fucktransia

Online in 2019. It's a therapy for overcoming all the bad things, the shit bull-shit that I went through in life. It's a therapy for me when I have sex I feel brand new. So that's why it's it's empowering and it's really addictive. But I have times when I can stop myself-

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Where it's definitely at work when you mix work with pleasure as well and sometimes it's not very accepted that you can have pleasure while working in this society. The work online has many good sides, like money and independency and also you talked about the body, that like you feel more connected with your body or like with your own identity.

Fucktransia

I feel more connected. And fucking on camera is like, is like fucking in front of my mirror. It's so sexy. You should try definitely it makes you have a different relationship with your body. Have you ever done it before? I guess you can learn from this one, I think you should get some sexy laundry get some handcuff, some mask some whip, high heels, practice by yourself with a little toy. Yeah, you have to use toys. Me I don't really use toys. Because I don't have to use toys when I have a man. And he wants to fuck. It's enough.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Do you feel that if you work online, you feel more without boundaries? Like compared to offline work?

Fucktransia

Online is more secure to me because you get your payment upfront before,

so I think online is better for me. They have to don't do anything if I didn't get any money

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Have you ever done camming work?

Fucktransia

I did webcamming for two months. It was cool I want to start well "I had to in a way make when people for me you know with the weather wise when May I set up the webcam a your information may have fields as integral admin or your fears affiliated to um, you know, marry one".

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

What you like about sex work?

Fucktransia

Fucking is a hobby. Yes. And everyone has to fuck. Fucking as a hobby as I said. Everyone fuck. And fucking is arts. Why is a fucking is arts, you have to learn how to interchange your body in the positions, perfect angles. You know, perfect jester in the positions and stuff like that. So fucking is basically art and sports for me. And the filming is just a little teaser that makes it more spicy, when you're doing it. Yeah. And I think everyone should just let go and stop being so conservative with sex. Because sex is something you should be free with it. Let it flow. Relax your muscles, and enjoy pleasure. Everyone need pleasure. Pleasure is something that helps to relieve stress, helps you to lose weight, help your skin to be more shiny and glowy and soft. Sex is power. And sex is good for your mental health also. And you get vitamin S from sex. Yeah. Vitamin Sex Yeah, you get it? Definitely. But if you're not careful, you can be pregnant or ending up with a STD, sorry. Online. That's the safety of online. Online you don't catch an STD.

But offline you can't

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

What are the platforms you prefer to use?

Fucktransia

Grindr, Honks, Planet Romeo FetLife, Joy club, Hookup trans, Queep, 123 sex-date.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

What's your favorite one? And why?

Fucktransia

Joy club is my favorite because you have BDSM. I am into BDSM. So I like dominating and stuff like that. I do it offline. It's a part of me. Okay, I like to dominate, I like having slaves. Devoted slaves to their Goddess.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Do you use OnlyFans? And do you like how it works the platform?

Fucktransia

I use onlyfans for a source of income, but no, I don't really like it because they have too much restrictions, you can post a video of a Cumshot coming from your hole or piss or naughty stuff you can't. And you can't post videos that are encoded or feasting and stuff like that. But there are other other platforms, they are more sw friendly like Just for Fans and Fansly, and Pornhub that allow you to post naughty videos like that.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

How do you set your space before working online? Do you work home? Do you work somewhere else?

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

And what about identity stealing?

Fucktransia

I work home, sometimes I just from my room. I go online. And I video chat. Mostly. I have times when I go out. I meet them, we go to this BDSM place in Zurich. It's a club they have it on the weekends. I met several people there and we had fun.

Fucktransia

Yeah people steal my picture and use it and text people like it's me and it's not me. It's happened to me. People are some time with my twitter, with my porn. My porns on Twitter. I have problems sometimes people take them down, then they circulated all over social media and stuff but I don't really care.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

What's the favorite content you create? Or what you like to do?

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Why don't you care? Like would you ever go to like the police to denounce it or not?

Fucktransia

Well, the hottest one for me is when I was dominating a cc, across it rather to say and people thought it was a girl. That was the most interesting one for me.

Fucktransia

Basically what they're doing they're only making me more popular so it's publicity, it's good advertisement for me, good for business. Because when you post my Twitter videos people want to see my OnlyFans

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Are you concerned about identity recognition online? Do you ever had to deal with problems about identity? Have you ever experience catfishing?

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Why are you in many platforms at the same time?

Fucktransia

Sometimes? They mistake me for someone else or you know, it's my problem. Or yeah, I've experienced catfish. Twice. I met a hot guy online. I met a hot guy online and when the person came it wasn't the person. It was a big fat man. And I met a slim guy and when I look it was a big fat man that came. I am not into fat-shaming but they tricked me. So I was a bit disappointed.

Fucktransia

Different sources of income, different people and meeting different people and different culture. Because you know you have people in high places that likes to hook up with pretty black girls.

They like to hide behind different platforms, certain will hide behind Planet Romeo, hide behind Grindr, and they

always try to be discreet, especially when they're high and have a lot of money and reputation. But it's okay if they're discreet, you'll be discreet, the pay because then after they're even more scared that we put them out, so we make even more money.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

What probes do you have?

Fucktransia

I do some naughty ones like this. this will go on my on the OnlyFans soon.

Fucktransia

I met a guy from Austria is into trans. And this guy when I met him, he gave me \$3,000 One night and he was rich. I met another guy from St. Gallen he had a pharmacy. He gave me 1500. It took me all the way from Zurich days place. We had fun. You know, and then they give me money. And they took me back here. We started at his place. And then his wife call and then he took me back here and finished here.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

where do you buy the clothes?

Fucktransia

they are too expensive so I buy all my costume online on Wish, Aliexpress, jom. Where I get all of them.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Do you have ways to protect yourself? From content stealing, banning etc?

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

But as I as I would like to make sure of you when you make up like when you do your clothes like more than then also be nice but also to see how you set your room because you have a very interesting room also

Fucktransia

My content, they can't steal it because my name is imprinted in the videos. Yeah. With Twitter, your name and your .com, will always be at the bottom of the video, so they can't steal it. And even if when they steal it, there is still your contact on your own platform. So I'll get publicity and advertising.

Fucktransia

and you should make them teasers to you don't see I have teasers. Teasers like these. They show a little they show a little, but not too much, just to catch their attention. I like pink. Pink is a color that makes me happy. So I tried to go from pink. I have a lot of extension, a lot of costumes, a lot of looks. I like to change my look, so I shop for wigs and stuff like that. I changed my way, I change my costume.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Do you match your clothes with your light? Or does it work

Fucktransia

I did a concert on a stripper pole. That's my ex boyfriend, we're performing with him. it was his concert.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

What about how you dress and how you you make up do you do? Like do you like to change it often?

Fucktransia

I even no follow no one, just like me. These shoes are Sexy stupid. Of course I want them but sometime my feet hurts. I have a lot of costumes and naughty picks. You hatlove to love yourself. No one will love you but you. You have to love you. I love me that's why. Literally, I had to learn how to love myself. If you can't love yourself, no one really love you. That's me before I come to Switzerland, in Jamaica. I was, I was working. I worked in a bar, the guy know that. I wasn't a real girl, but he still employed me. You say you can pass, you look like a girl. So I get the job.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

But what do you mean with real girl? Do you think do you feel it's sometimes it affect zou in the work environment?

Fucktransia

it's not easy to, to like go out in public. You know, because most of the time, people harass you. And when they harass you, they can be violent, they can hurt you. You know, it's not always safe. So all the girls they tried to be, as girly as possible as they can. Or look as feminine was it like they can,

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Also being very, very feminine. So a lot about the social construct, right? It's like you feel you can tell more like about yourself when you look more feminine. That's part of the deal. Somehow, right?

Fucktransia

I'm gonna give you a glimpse. That's what my only fans looks like. I go on my Twitter? It's really nasty. Nasty adult supervision is needed.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Do you receive some censorship from your Twitter?

Fucktransia

You see I have almost 2000 followers on my twitter* Lateenadomina-trix It was Domina first and then I put Dominatrix because some people were coming on and following me just to take off my video. Even if they take it out. That's their business. I don't care. Well, I don't really know. What he don't know, don't hurt him. He just came to me and saying hey, let's make porn together. So we just did this. I do it sometime with other people out of friends. This was my sugar that sugar. That'd be I was writing a 65 year old guy. I was writing his face. That's me and him together.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

And do sometimes your client a client accept to to do video with you? And they pass them? And how what's the deal?

Fucktransia

They don't care. They don't care. They just want to help me make money. It's only some short skits. I didn't know. Well now onlyfans bought Twitter, so you can pose porn into the actual videos and no one ever asks you. You know how much porn I have here. I have a whole lot. A whole lot. Watch 14 Almost 14,000 views I get on one of my videos. because then. I have 12k views they love it. They love me. I got a new subscriber today. I have 107 subscribers on only fans I just make hot videos and post them with tags and stuff.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Do they make request?

Fucktransia

Yes. Sometimes they request what they want. What I normally do what I know they will like. I do foot fetish, cum shot, sex, sex videos, nudes.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

Have you ever received a very weird request?

Fucktransia

One guy wanted me to make a shit video. I dindnt do it. It was too much for me.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

That's maybe a good part about doing it online. What about your boundaries?

Fucktransia

Holy shit after move with I think I have to remove these videos. Because these videos are not allowed to be paused I didn't have a time there. they're not allowed to be post because I didn't put any tag there and I don't want them to block my my Only Fans. When you don't put tags they can block it, because they don't make money out of it because you don't have many views. You see what I did? It's a good thing that I'm looking I have fought and I'm so angry you know it's a good thing that I said I'm gonna look at it because I didn't tag any any any tags there and he can block my with all my money I've worked hard for my money you know, I don't want them to want to take them away from me

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

If they block your account what

happens?

Fucktransia

I can't get the money, I can't get my revenue that I work for. It goes to them because they take it. That's very unfair. That's why it's a good thing that we're here because I wouldn't realize that I didn't have any tags on it.

Ludovica Galleani d'Agliano

So tags helps you to not be banned but how so?

Fucktransia

Because they want to know if you're having sex with a kid. The tag from the person so the person you are with need to be tagged. It's a red flag. The last time I did that. They took down all of my porn and from my only fans and I lost So much fans. Fuck. I had almost 300 fans. Then I had to promote on Grindr. It happened one time and they gave me a warning that It should not happen again. It happens so often right? They they block accounts. Yeah, they follow the rules. Do you think the rules are too strict? Yeah, that's why most people don't use Only Fans. They use fansly. Or just for fans. Because I was thinking about doing a Just for Fans.I No it's not personal. I just put it in a song, the topic for me when I'm writing a song is sex because Dance hall sex sells a lot in the music industry. Yeah that's why I try to make my songs because I I perform a new song. , I don't know if you realize that. I perform a new song that I haven't recorded or anything yet. Do you record your song? You have our studio here. Yes with Merlin medulla. Merlin is my musical engineer. an opportunity to do a runway okay I'm making connections. That's my aim. I want to travel everywhere and do music and reach reach fans here reach fans their regions here. I want to reach a lot of fans. I have loyal fans that every show I have their dear they don't miss none of my show to be honest I did two shows there but I

don't see them write me more shows as yet they have to write me when they want more Show. I only sing on Instagram. And sometimes I have 10 people listening 10 Viewers listening and they don't do well. We always speak Creole my mother tongue we always tweeted when I go live because it's mostly Jamaican people I got an interview with a girl from America she wants to interview me about my music and stuff your mother yes I. it was basically about my life and what happened in the past you know?

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