

ADVANCED PROJECT

UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS LONDON
CREATIVE COMPUTING INSTITUTE

The Disciplined Mushroom

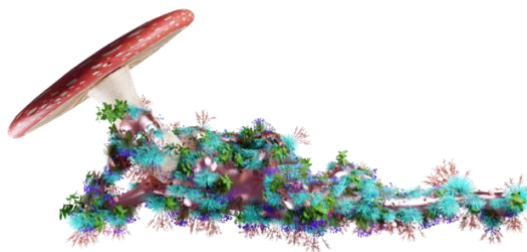
A visual interactive installation shows the woman's eating disorder problem under
patriarchal scrutiny

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November 21, 2022

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family member, especially my father, participated in helping me set up my physical environment and experience research. And thanks nearly 20 people from different ages for assisting me in conducting interview and research. And finally, thanks also goes to my supervisor Caroline, for always giving me a meeting to look forward to.

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Abstract

The Disciplined Mushroom is a visual interactive installation, which using Arduino, machine learning, unity AR and other technologies, I combined the image of mushrooms often in my own eating disorder experience and the anti-binary meaning of the mushroom itself, and used the mushroom woman to present the entanglement of food and body of women due to eating disorders. The whole work is a self-portraiture interactive art installation is based on my own experience of eating disorders and reference to related body anxiety artworks, and I hope this artwork could trigger the discussion of the disciplined women by the patriarchal gaze behind eating disorders, and convey the appeal of "body naturalness" from the standpoint of ecofeminism.

Keywords

Disciplined, Woman Body, Mushroom, Ecofeminism, Visual Interactive, Installation, Self-portraiture, Anti-binary, Body Anxiety, Naturalness

1. Introduction

Once paranoid ideas are formed, life can begin to spiral out of control. Eating disorders caused by weight loss have ruined the normal life of many girls and eating well has become a luxury. According to a Chinese survey (2021) find that eating disorders are currently the mental illness with the highest mortality rate in the world, and there may be between 90 million and 120 million people with eating disorders in China. The "beauty myth" created by the media is the driving force of girls' body control, and the symbolic meaning contained in slimness is transformed in practice, forming a set of imaginary systems in the social system. (Hawkes, 2003) When I was in high school, I was also ridiculed by the surrounding social environment and friends for my figure, and for a period of time, I paid special attention to the amount of my diet and the value on the scale, and gradually formed a mild eating disorder problem, which led to the tendency of anorexia after successful treatment. Eating disorders are not only a pathological dietary problem, but also the hidden discussion of the female body and women's rights under the patriarchal scrutiny behind it is the real source of the problem. My combination of an exhibition on body anxiety in Shanghai and some of my work discussing the relationship between the female body and food, these artworks have inspired me to create this installation.

I used a visual interactive installation to explore the health imbalance of female eating disorders from an ecofeminist standpoint, criticized the disciplined female body under the patriarchal gaze, mushrooms are a special visual image during my eating disorders time, this installation shows women's distaste for food in this process, that is, disgust for their own body, which ultimately leads to natural food waste and consumption through the bad experience of the disciplined mushroom woman, I hope to convey that society should respect the naturalness of the female body itself and the protection of natural resources, and liberating the female body and respecting the values of nature.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 The Relationship between woman body and food

Women's relationship with food is always tense. Eating disorders refer to a group of syndromes characterized by "abnormal eating behavior and excessive attention to food, weight, and body size", which are mainly divided into anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder. Some survey (2021) reported that eating disorders are currently the world's most fatal mental illness, and the symptoms of eating disorders mostly occur in the ages of 12 and 35 women. The body anxiety conveyed by social media and the discipline of social culture on women's bodies have all made most women begin to be paranoid about their figures, and hot styles often change and change, but what remains unchanged is the physical and mental pressure that women need to bear after producing aesthetic standards. The complex process of shaping the subject and construction, media technology, consumer culture, social culture, and the online carnival of all-round action have invisibly exacerbated women's negative emotions towards the body. Fundamentally, the aesthetic pressure of modern society is one of the forces that make it difficult for women to accept their physical appearance.

In fact, for historical reasons, since the ancient Greek period, people began to control their own self-control by controlling food intake, and the goal of fasting in medieval Christians was also to purify the spirit and dominate the body. In modern times, people pursue an idealized body, dieting is one of the main ways, especially women through various unhealthy ways to change their figure. Bordo (2013) think this pathologizing phenomenon is inseparable from the influence of patriarchal culture and post-industrial capitalism, and more and more women feel that they are being gazed from all corners of society, and this gaze power forces women to objectify and thus sculpt their bodies according to the various standardized images in society.

Women who "do not eat too much" are recognized by mainstream culture, while those who overeat are considered out of control, shameful, and even insane. Society's control of women's appetite becomes an effective "discipline" used to train women's bodies to cater to the aesthetics and demands of a patriarchal society. Under the pressure of this gaze, everyone will eventually introspect and thus become his own supervisor, and everyone will therefore monitor himself, becoming the object and opponent of this surveillance. Individuals will conduct self-surveillance and self-correction according to social standards, and the mass media are constantly creating, disseminating, and presenting various models of ideal bodies, so women have to compare themselves with this body and standard to shape yourself (Foucault, 1991)

In Atwood's *The Edible Woman* (2010), there are also descriptions of female eating disorders. After the protagonist subconsciously feels the danger of being absorbed and assimilated by a patriarchal society, her body begins to reject more and more food. Anorexia is a so-called disease. The underlying motivation is not entirely to keep slim, but is actually an attempt to avoid her own humanity in essence, to escape her identity as a woman and find her right position to be a woman. Disciplining and regulating women's bodies as a strategy of social control. It can be seen that the patriarchal power mechanism disciplines women's body size and appearance is almost pathological, which not only harms women's bodies but also restricts women's inner freedom. Ueno (2011) mentioned that the female body is a sexual symbol in a patriarchal society. The current situation of women is inseparable from the rights framework of the overall patriarchal society. Ueno combines pornography with asymmetrical gender relations, that is, power relations, so this process is "de-naturalization", but it can also be concluded that advocating women's rights and freedom is to deconstruct the concept of sex as "natural".

2.2 The mushroom sign and my personal experience

The reason why I choose mushrooms as the main symbol of this work is that when I was in high school, I suffered from eating disorders for a while because of the accusations of my body around me and my personal sensitivity and low self-esteem. At the beginning, I was concerned about my body and food intake, but in the end I gradually became anorexic, so my mother learned from others that traditional Chinese medicine can solve eating problems by eating mushrooms, because mushrooms can help digestion, so mushrooms accompany me throughout the adjustment of eating disorders process.

At the same time, mushrooms are a unique female image. In many literary and artistic works, artists often use mushrooms as a carrier to present female topics. Yan's *Lingzhi Girl* (2017) has a great inspiration for my mushroom woman appearance design, a theme depicting a bust of a fictional character, a mash-up of the artist herself and many women who often influence folklore, the origin story from the heroine of "Mountain and Sea": a young woman whose soul has become a mushroom, which symbolizes longevity and immortality. Her artwork concept similar to mine, advocating the body to maintain ecological longevity, which biological harmony and symbiosis.



Figure 1: *Lingzhi Girl* (Yan, 2017)

Tsing (2015) deconstructed the original dualism from the perspective of natural feminism. She used mushroom to represent the intention of feminism, she think scale

expansion promotes the modernization of capitalism. In the framework of modernization and progress, human and non-human have become resources that can be invested, and everything has been alienated; what is going on in the space is the production of a single asset, and everything else will become weeds and waste. She believes that the growth mode of fungi (mushrooms) adheres to the concept of eco-feminism, a non-competitive state coexists harmoniously with other organisms, creates a symbiotic environment, replaces the traditional dualism mode with multiple perspectives, and finally establishes an equal environment.

Therefore, no matter from the meaning of mushroom itself in literature or from my personal struggle with food in the process of experiencing eating disorders, the image of mushroom is inseparable, so I centered the entire visual interactive device on the image of disciplined mushroom woman to express the whole purpose of creation more profoundly, When a woman gradually becomes a mushroom woman who covered with mushrooms, it seems to indicate the process that women undergo to be disciplined by this patriarchal society, I hope that the image of disciplined mushroom woman can reflect more critically how women are gazed in patriarchal society.

3. Artwork and technology: a visual interactive installation



Figure 2: Visual interactive installation (Mei, 2022)

The entire visualization interactive installation is mainly divided into two parts, consisting of visualized visual video and scannable AR images. Visitors can scan the labels on the objects with their mobile phones to present machine learning videos and 3D objects; the two videos are switched by detecting the distance of the visitors, and in order to render the environment, there is also a holographic projection video showing the whole figure of the mushroom woman. I fits natural feminism and the theoretical tone of the whole work and places the whole installation in a natural plant environment, from which visitors can experience the emotional tone of disciplined women going through the whole process of eating disorders.

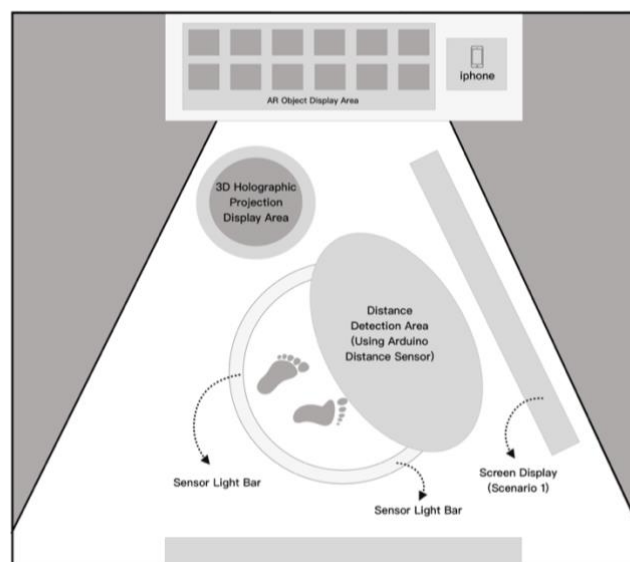


Figure 3: Installation environment layout (Mei, 2022)

3.1 Moving video and lighting changed detected by user distance

The 3D video is composed of various visual model elements and sound effects. The change of the 3D atmosphere helps the expression of the content narrative and makes the participants more attractive.

Firstly, I used holographic projection equipment to show the shape of a mushroom woman that I made with blender 3d. Secondly, I also used blender 3d to create two

videos to present a whole story about the disciplined mushroom woman who struggle with experiencing eating disorders process. The first part is that the mushroom woman is in the corner of the kitchen, unable to eat because of the eating disorder problem, and the woman is in a state of collapse. Because of the disease, the woman's body started to grow mushrooms from the original normal form. The food scattered everywhere represents the woman's resistance to food. The truncated limbs represent the part of the heart that is not satisfied with the body, and the flashing lights show the mushroom woman 's swinging emotions about food.



Figure 4: Video1, mushroom woman feel collapsed in the kitchen due to eating disorder (Mei, 2022)

The second video is about the state of the mushroom woman being treated. The new mushroom-covered appearance of the mushroom woman indicates that she has been troubled by the disease. red saltwater bottle means she needs to be constantly replenished with nourishing blood. The distorted image of the mushroom woman in the monitor shape, these all indicated that how bad her problem is.

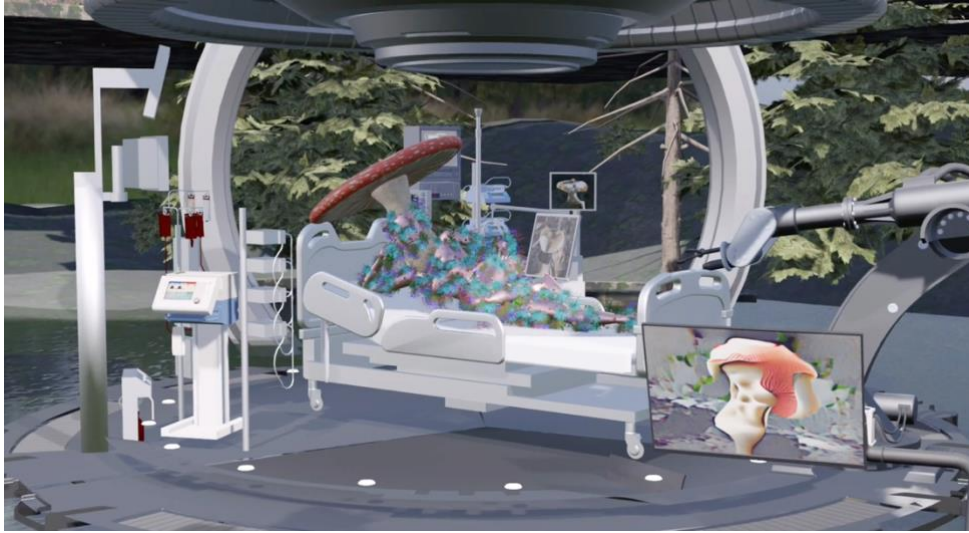


Figure 5: Video2, mushroom woman healed by medical devices in the natural environment (Mei, 2022)

The switching of these two videos is realized by the distance of the visitors. I used the distance and light sensor to connect the Arduino and processing, and achieved it by sensing the user's distance. When the audience enters this scene, the original video 2 shows the scene where the disciplined mushroom woman was being treated was switched to the real inedible historical scene of the mushroom woman in video 1, the sound and light also be changed.



Figure 6: Distance detect area (Mei, 2022)

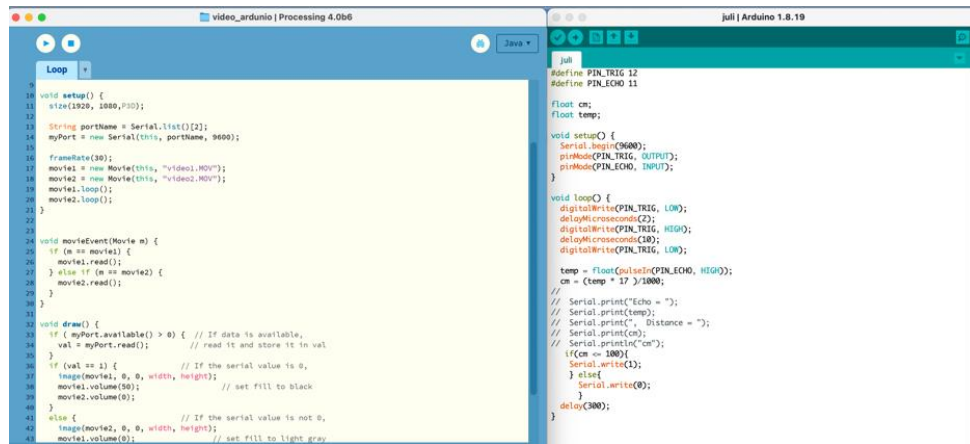


Figure 7: The coding in the Processing and Arduino (Mei, 2022)

Kearney (2002) argues that storytelling innovation depends both on the medium and the story being told, and what cues embedded in the world and physical surroundings people draw from. I use the repeated distance detection of the visitors to repeatedly switch the frequency of the two videos, from which to convey the metaphorical effect of women's entanglement with food and repeated illnesses in the whole process of eating disorders in reality.

3.2 Machine learning video scanned by AR technology

Gaver et al (2003) argue that users appear to be attracted by ambiguity, a property of the interpretive relationship between people and artifacts. I recognize that ambiguity in Human-Computer Interaction can be frustrating, but also intriguing and delightful, and that it engages users with innovative systems. The images of machine learning are vague, and give people the feeling of mysterious. Creativity as activities that involve 'making unfamiliar combinations of familiar ideas. (Boden,2004). Besides, Pereira (2008) think combinatorial creativity involves the process of generating new concepts through finding associations from the previous one.

I first created a machine-learning dynamic video about the female body combined with the mushroom image, showing the female image hidden behind the mushroom. This video was done using machine learning techniques, VQGAN +CLIP is developed by Katherine Crowson and modified by Justin John (2021). This model

uses the discriminative ability of CLIP (Radford et al., 2021) to guide the VQGAN (Esser, Rombach and Ommer, 2021) to generate the best match image to a given text. Through nifty ‘prompt engineering’, VQGAN+CLIP opens a new way to create synthetic artwork. I obtained some videos showing mushroom woman figures through mushrooms by training multiple pictures of original mushrooms and selected virtual perfect bodies.

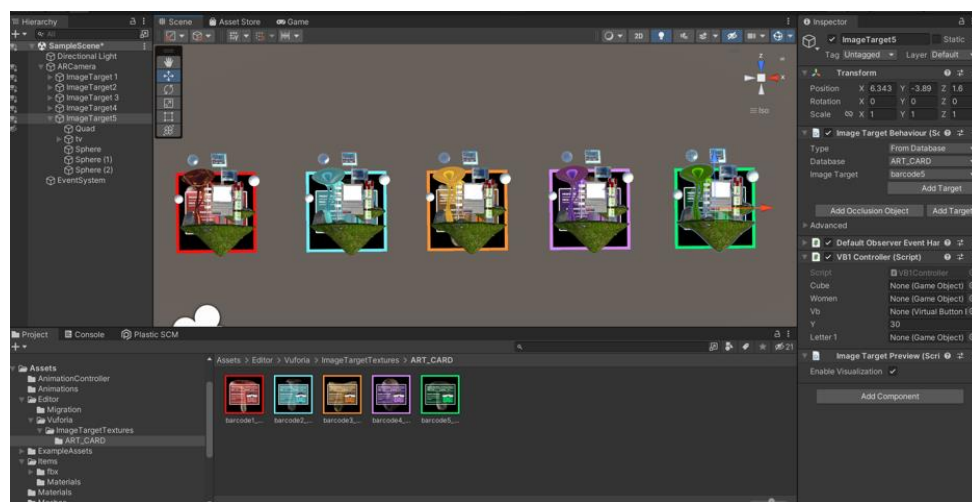


Figure 8: Product labels and 3D models in the unity (Mei, 2022)

AR technology can often reveal the most real state hidden under the surface of an object. I scan the process with AR to enable users to explore the real state of the mushroom woman. Through the Vuforia SDK equipped with unity to realize the technology of AR recognition scanning images to display 3D models, I set up five different product labels, when the user uses the camera in the mobile phone to scan different labels, the corresponding will appear different 3d model of the medical instrument screen and machine learning video of mushroom woman.

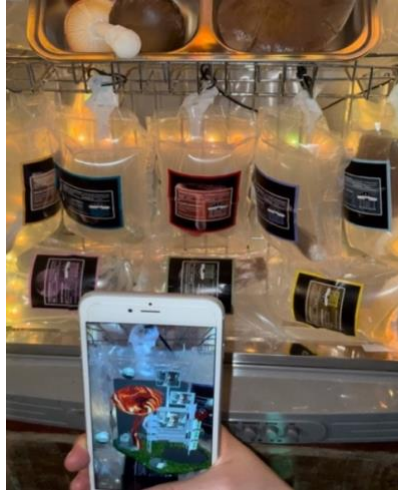


Figure 9: Using the phone scans the mushroom product label in the refrigerator (Mei, 2022)

I use plastic packaging and stickers in the form of AR scan codes to show the product nature of disciplined women under the gaze of patriarchy during the entire process of eating disorders. I placed these scannable plastic packages inside an abandoned refrigerator to connect mushroom food and product, bringing visual impact to the viewers.



Figure 10: Abandoned refrigerator contained with mushrooms and mushroom products (Mei, 2022)

4. Related artwork

As one of my design references, in addition to Yan's *Lingzhi Girl*(2017) I mentioned above as the appearance reference of my design, another inspiration comes from a Chinese first themed exhibition of *Anti Body-Shaming* that I visited in Shanghai (2021). The creator of the exhibition, Qinwen Zhang, once experienced serious eating disorders in college, and most of the exhibition team member and artists have personally experienced or witnessed people who have experienced eating disorders around them. They hope to start from their own experience and use art forms such as painting, photography, installation, and poetry to simulate the development history of dieting, overeating, and compensation behaviors caused by body anxiety, popularize scientific professional knowledge, and advocate healthy and independent self-awareness. So, the concept of the whole exhibition and some works of art also have a certain inspiration for my artwork design.



Figure 11: A view of an installation from the exhibition “Anti Body-Shaming” (Zhang, 2021)

Among them, there are several works that inspired me a lot. The first is Beibei's work "Yi", the artist designed the appearance of a colorful arm crawling out of the refrigerator. And the artist reference that princess Diana was talking about her anorexia Symptoms describe food as if reaching out with arms around her as she eats.

In my works, I also refer to the refrigerator and the food in the refrigerator as metaphors, so as to connect the entanglement relationship between women and food.



Figure 12: Yi (Bei, 2021)

Another impressive artwork is an apple made of clay, acrylic and PVC environmentally friendly plastic. The middle part was bitten off by the creator Yuyuan Li with her teeth. The repeated experience of the feeling of "tasting like chewing wax". Food is an angel to the body, but it is a devil to the mind of people with eating disorders. They are experiencing the battle between mind and body every day. This way of expressing people's resistance to food through imagery is also shown in my video. In it, I scatter all kinds of food. Even if the mushroom woman has a delicious steak in her hand, it is difficult to swallow. It can be seen that the disease has affected her feelings about food.



Figure 13: Guo (Li, 2021)

After the same exhibition, the artist Tian Liu designed the final part of works, which show the different growth states of food, slices from different angles are made into portraits, and the corresponding nutrients or taste are marked, hoping that the viewers can alleviate their fear and anxiety about food. Similarly, the presentation method is the product packaging of the AR scan of the mushroom in my work as a reference.



Figure 14: Food portraits (Liu, 2021)

For the technology reference, Chloe Karnezi's *Digitized Dysmorphia* (2020) is an interactive triptych that is a subtle critique of the shortcomings of digital technology as a means of accurately capturing our physical selves. The work uses a distance

sensor connected to Arduino to dim the light as the user approaches the work; when the user is far away from the work, the light will be turned on to show the complete work. I also use this technology as a reference for my video switching between two scenes. When the user steps into my territory, as the third person perspective to understand how the disciplined mushroom woman experienced through eating disorders process.



Figure 15: Digitized dysmorphia (Karnezi, 2020)



Figure 16: They were expected to see what stuff she was made of (Tindle, 2021)

In Katie Tindle's work *They were expected to see what stuff she was made of* (2021), the pix2pix model of the virtual dataset created by blender and three fast style transfer models trained using medical images. This production method is also a technical reference when I train my machine learning images of mushrooms and female figures.



Figure 17: Machine learning video about mushroom and woman body (Mei, 2022)

I tend to design the whole work from the perspective of patriarchal gaze, no matter from the physical interaction method or the digital presentation method.

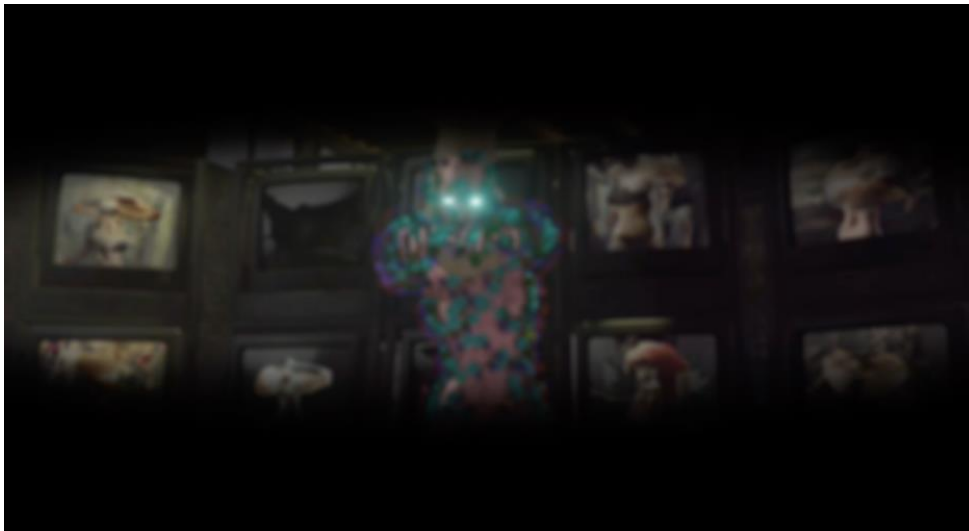


Figure 18: The blinking eye effect is set in the video of “The disciplined mushroom” (Mei, 2022)

Firstly, in the two visual videos, I added the effect of eye blinking, which means that the viewer to see the process of mushroom woman's struggle with eating disorders from a third-person perspective. Secondly, in terms of physical interaction, the whole process that visitors can scan the QR code of mushroom products with their mobile phones is also the process of the disciplined mushroom woman being gazed as a

passive consumer product. Similarly, when visitors step into the entire visual interaction work, the lit light bar and the switchable video is a metaphor of the visitor stepping into the disciplined mushroom woman 's eating disorders experience as a third person. In the movie, we also know that there is a word called "being watched", and women are a consumer product. And these two can be combined, that is, we must treat each other as something equal to ourselves (Li,2008).

5. Methodology

5.1 Research introduction

The visual interactive installation has been experienced by 20 people, and the feedbacks of different age groups are different. This experience survey is focused on participants' understanding and feelings about the installation after experienced, as well as suggestions for improvement of the installation. Due to the epidemic, the number of samples cannot be expanded, but the actual experience research of visiting users is of great help to me in the future development direction of the artwork.

5.2 Research question

- what do you think the project is about?
- what do you think the mushroom woman represents? does she represent anything?
- what didn't work well about the interactive installation?
- what emotions or feelings did you experience engaging with the interactive installation?
- what did you like about the installation? what worked well?

5.3 Results

Quantitative analysis : In this survey, I find through interviews that nearly half of the people do not know this phenomenon, and 10% of the participants had personally experienced this disease, and all of them is women.

First of all, I asked the participants who had experienced this visual interactive installation. Besides, I find that most of them could understand the topic is about women and mushroom, and 25% think it is about food poisoning, such as poisoning caused by eating mushrooms, the other 15% think the theme discussed nature and technology.

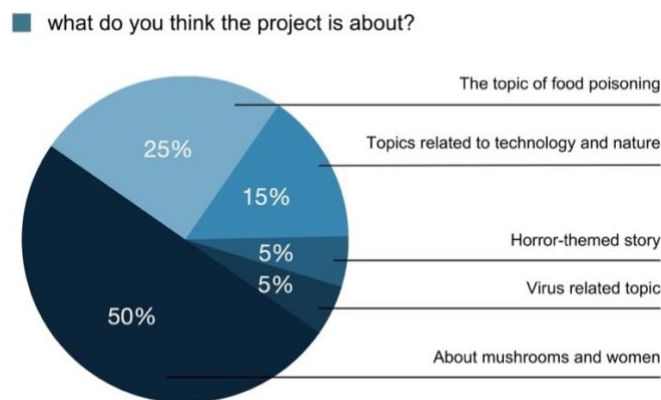


Figure 19: User research result of “The disciplined mushroom” (1) (Mei, 2022)

I also asked the participants what they think mushrooms represent, and nearly 40% could imagine the relationship between mushrooms and diet. Because the shape of the mushrooms on the women’s body in this work, 30% of them think that mushrooms are related to food poisoning in women, and a small number of people think that the relationship between people and technology is hidden behind the mushroom woman.

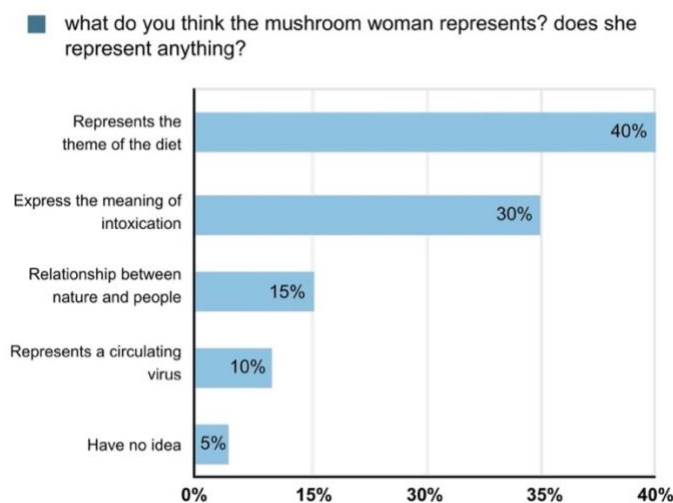


Figure 20: User research result of “The disciplined mushroom” (2) (Mei, 2022)

In addition, I find that nearly 70% of the participants feel that the whole installation give people a sense of shock and oppression and 22% think the installation have interesting interactive way, a small number of people have difficulty understanding the subject matter and feel scary.

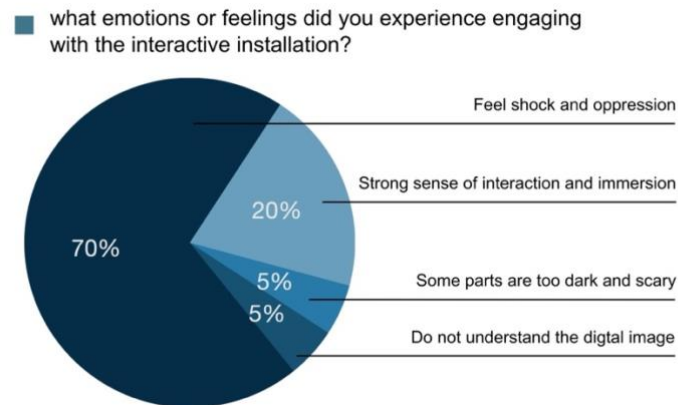


Figure 21: User research result of “The disciplined mushroom” (3) (Mei, 2022)

Although the whole installation gives people a feeling of shock and oppression, but the result showed that nearly 80% of them liked the work and think the interaction method was very novel. Around 10% of the participants liked the theme but confused about interaction way, only 5% of people do not like this work.

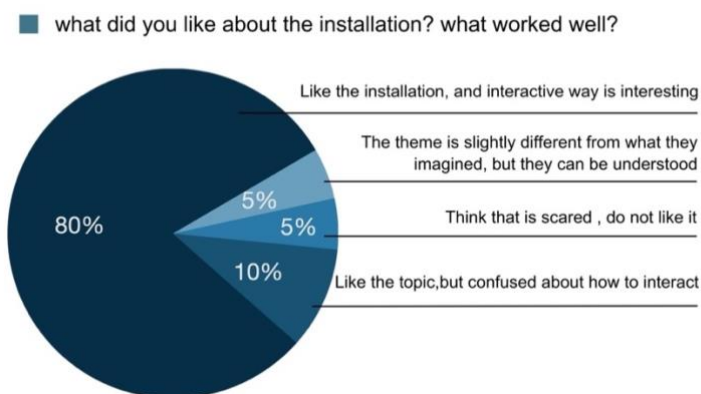


Figure 22: User research result of “The disciplined mushroom” (4) (Mei, 2022)

After the interactive installation experience ended, I asked the participants about ways to further improve the installation. Most people suggested that it can add more

interactive methods, such as projector experience props or game-like VR digital experience modes. Because some participants are children and the elderly, they advised to reduce the horror elements in the scene; nearly 15% of the people think it need have more elements related to the topic, or add personal experiences description to help participants quickly understand the topic.

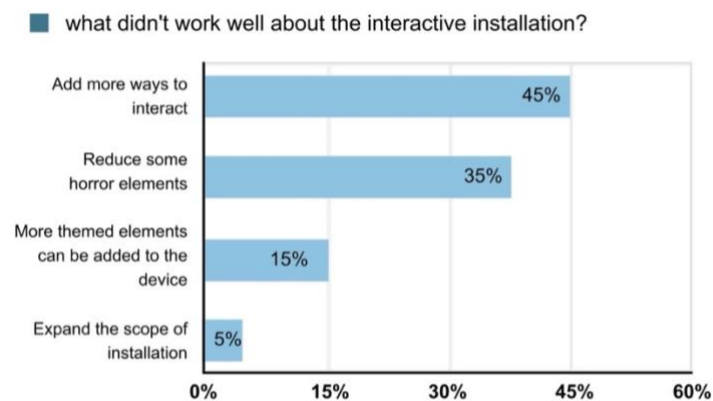


Figure 23: User research result of “The disciplined mushroom”(5) (Mei, 2022)

6. Discussion and conclusion

In this essay, I first explored the contradictory relationship between women body and food hidden behind the phenomenon of eating disorders, and from the perspective of ecofeminism, I discussed how the whole social environment gazed and disciplined women's bodies. At the same time, I also combined my own eating disorder experience, in that experience the image of mushroom that always appeared, so I used as the starting point of the whole design. I referred to different works discussing women's bodies and food, then finally I designed a visual interactive installation --- “*The Disciplined Mushroom*”. This installation using interactive digital video technology and the virtual mushroom woman image presented by AR scanning, to express the struggle process of the eating disorder experienced by the disciplined mushroom woman, so as to show the patriarchal gaze that leads to the process of women experiencing eating disorders. This showed the state of distortion and

collapse of women through my works is a kind of shout to imagine that women in the future can have the naturalness of women's bodies.

Similarly, I conducted interviews with nearly 20 participants and find that most of them could understand the food and female body involved in the theme through the experience of the entire visual interactive installation, as well as the hidden eating problems represented by the disciplined mushroom woman. Considering that this work is more related to my own personal experience of eating disorders, the whole work itself has a certain private story structure, and the viewer needs to understand the theme based on my own personal background. Through the research results, I find an interesting conclusion that some people can conceive of the poisoned state of women from the disciplined mushroom woman, and the metaphor of "poisoning" can also be combined with this theme, which shows how serious of women's eating disorders problem from another perspective.

According to our research results and the user's feedback on the visual interactive installation, there are several principled suggestions for the improvement of this device in the future:

- 1. Add more introductions about my own experience.** Considering that this work is more based on my own experience of eating disorders, more content can be included in the video or AR scans products in the installation in the future. Descriptive text is a good way to help visitors better understand the content of this topic
- 2. Considering more age groups of visitors.** Through interviews' result, it is found that nearly 35% of the visitors think that the elements of horror should be reduced, and can adjust the appropriate improvements to the sound of the installation video and the shape of the mushroom woman in the future.

3. Change and add some interaction methods. Some participants pointed out that the distance detect area is relatively small, and the sensing range and light irradiation range can be appropriately expanded, so give participants an intuitive feeling of which they could step into. At the same time, more technical equipment can be added, such as a full range of projection effects or VR equipment to replace the current display screen, allowing participants to have a more immersive audio-visual experience.

In general, through the communication with the participants, I found that this visual interactive installation has improved the participants' understanding of eating disorders problem, and triggered discussions on women's topics. I also hope that through this visual interactive installation, so as to have a dialogue with the audience, and appeal to the society for a desire to maintain the naturalness of women's bodies, and in the future, the whole society can stop the patriarchal gaze on women, and every woman can no longer paranoidly pursue the "perfection" of the body and show the natural female-specific body beauty.

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