

Algorithmically- mediated intimacies

Group 13

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Theoretical grounding

Datafication

Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier (2013) define datafication as the transformation of various dimensions of social life into quantifiable and traceable data. Van Dijck (2013) further developed this concept within the context of platform media, arguing that users' interactions, emotional expressions, and interpersonal connections are systematically converted into data assets to be analyzed and monetized. This process has a profound impact on intimate relationships. As platforms continuously collect user data and process it through algorithms, once-private intimate interactions are drawn into a commercial logic, changing how emotional expression and relationship maintenance are understood and practiced. In this sense, intimate relationships are no longer just emotional bonds between individuals; they have become a vital source of economic value for platforms, ultimately driving the commodification of emotion.

Our visual project clearly illustrates the theory of datafication proposed by Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier (2013) and further developed by Van Dijck (2013) in the context of live streaming between streamers and audiences. In our work, we show how personal emotions, interactions, and intimate connections are transformed into quantifiable, trackable data — including viewer counts, likes, gift values, real-time heart rate, and emotion match percentages. As Van Dijck argues, platforms turn these emotional expressions into data assets for analysis and monetization, and we visualize this process by placing the streamer's heart on a phone screen, surrounded by platform interfaces, rankings, and price tags. The once-private intimacy between streamers and fans is now governed by commercial logic, becoming a source of economic value rather than just a personal bond. We also use metaphors like supermarket shelves and packaged products to show how streamers and their emotions are commodified. Through AI-generated images, we reveal how platform algorithms reshape, measure, and commercialize human intimacy in digital live-streaming culture.

Algorithmic imaginary

Bucher (2017) defines the algorithmic imaginary as ‘the way in which people imagine, perceive and experience algorithms and what these imaginations make possible’ (Bucher, 2017, p.31). It is not a false belief. It is productive. Users do not need to understand how an algorithm technically works in order to be affected by it. Through everyday encounters with platforms, people develop their own sense of what the algorithm is doing and what it wants from them. Bucher (2017) describes these moments as affective encounters, situations in which algorithms generate moods, sensations and emotional responses that give people a reason to react. Users begin adjusting their behavior to match their imagined understanding of the system, and in doing so, they inadvertently shape the algorithm itself. The relationship between people and algorithms is therefore not one-directional. It is a continuous loop in which human feeling and computational logic mutually constitute each other.

- Algorithmic imaginary with intimacy

The algorithmic imaginary offers a productive lens for understanding algorithmically-mediated intimacy. Intimacy has always depended on interpretation on how people read the signals they receive from others. In contemporary digital culture, these signals are increasingly generated by platforms and shaped by algorithms. When users interpret platform outputs such as likes, comments and shares as evidence of genuine emotional connection, intimacy is produced. It is not the signal itself that creates closeness. It is the imagination of what that signal means. This is the productive power Bucher (2017) describes. Imagining what algorithms do generates real feeling, and that feeling becomes the foundation of real relationships. The algorithmic imaginary is therefore not merely present in digital intimacy. It is the mechanism through which it comes into being.

- The Representation of Algorithmic Imagination in the Work

Our creative output visualizes these dynamics, embodying the affective and productive power of the algorithmic imaginary (Bucher, 2017). On the one hand, viewers provide data (including likes, comments and browsing history) that feeds into and constructs platform's algorithmic imaginary model of their preference. On the other hand, algorithms shape viewers' understanding of intimacy through datafication of affect and commercialization of emotional connection.

In the video, the viewer presses her hands against the glass and gazes upward at the live streamer Luna with longing. The viewer and the 'perfect match' indicator on the screen visualize a circulation of affect that appears mutually between them. The comment section reinforces this illusion: viewers send comments like 'I feel like she's talking to me' and 'No one understands me like she does', expressing their feelings not only spontaneous but also generated through algorithmic mediation. These interactions exemplify the affective power of the algorithmic imaginary. That is, viewers feel what algorithms subtly guide them to feel.

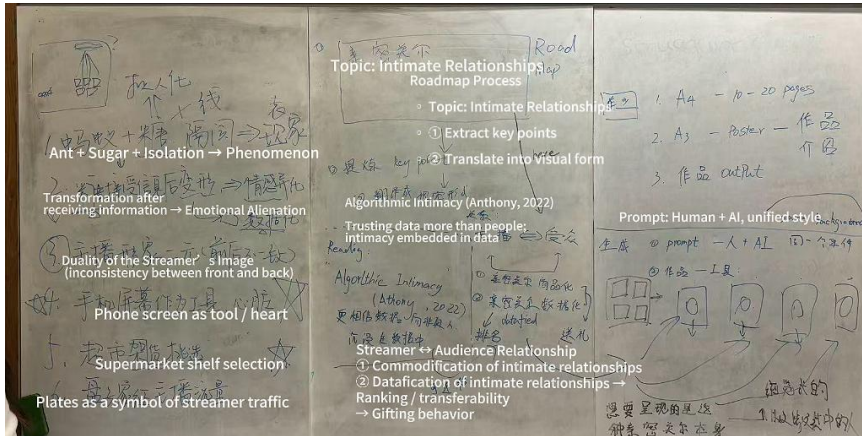
Meanwhile, live streamer Luna is behind a glass enclosure, surrounded by floating platform metrics such as '999k', '108 BPM' and 'emotion match 98%', with her heart on a mobile phone. While these numbers seem to describe an existing emotional connection, they also produce intimacy by subtly informing viewers that this intimacy is real, unique,

measurable and approachable. On the gift leaderboard, the ranking '1 sweetheart 129.4K', '2 lonely whale 83.7K' shows how viewers translate algorithmically-mediated illusions into action, competing through consumption in an attempt to be noticed and to reach Luna. Yet, the glass barrier remains and the bottom of the image reveals actual access to intimate interactions (including private calls and exclusive message) is locked behind a paywall. This reflects how algorithms shape viewers' understanding of intimacy: they get accustomed to evaluating closeness through quantified metrics and adjust their behaviors to pursue what appears to be increasing intimacy.

This work ultimately exposes the paradox of algorithmically-mediated intimacy on live streaming platforms. While platforms amplify feelings of closeness based on user preferences and live streamers' monetization potential, simultaneously, they structurally prevent this intimacy from being fulfilled, keeping the viewers in a state of affective suspension. This paradox is sustained by algorithmic imaginary, with an illusory sense of mutuality and emotional reciprocity are shaped by algorithms, encouraging them to believe intimacy is attainable and to pursue it. The heart on the screen thus symbolizes both a promise and a barrier: the most intimate thing is shaped by algorithms and being unreachable by platform design.

Meeting Records

The first group discussion



We also discussed theoretical issues at the same time and ultimately decided to focus the work on the discussion of the commercialization of emotions. A big part of the meeting focused on choosing the right AI tools. We tested several different programs, and Midjourney and ChatGPT seemed to work best for image generation. We spent quite a lot of time experimenting with it, but the process was not always smooth. Sometimes the AI misunderstood our prompts, produced images that looked too realistic, lacked atmosphere, or simply felt unnatural. Through repeated testing, we realized that getting good results depended heavily on writing detailed and carefully designed prompts. We kept adjusting keywords, styles, and tones to gradually achieve the visual effect we wanted.

We discussed the structure and main content of the work. Our initial plan was to present it as a series of images, and we designed around this format. Through discussion, we arrived at several suitable presentation concepts, including ants and sugar, a screen-replaced heart, shelves and vending machines. We ultimately settled on four potential directions for the work.

At the first group discussion, we brainstormed four presentation ideas. They are:

1. Using sugar and ants as a metaphor to illustrate the animal instinct of emotional attraction between the audience and the live-streamer.
2. Presenting the issue of emotional authenticity through the contrast of the live-streamer's image before and after.
3. Mechanizing the live-streamer's heart and presenting it on the screen to reflect the mediation of intimate relationships by the platform.
4. Taking the supermarket shelf as inspiration and placing the live-streamer on the shelf to show the commercialization of emotions.

These four directions ultimately became the practical framework for our final work

The Second group discussion

In this meeting, we mainly discussed our AI creation ideas, the creative process, the difficulties we encountered, and how we would document the project.

1. Core Creation Idea

Our project focuses on emotional mediation in live streaming culture. We discussed how the relationship between streamers and audiences is no longer direct, but filtered through mobile phones, screens, and digital platforms. We were also interested in the commodification of emotions — the idea that feelings and intimacy are packaged and displayed almost like products for consumption.

At the same time, we wanted the final work to feel artistic and slightly surreal, while still being understandable to viewers. We aimed for a balance between a stream-of-consciousness style and a clear visual message.

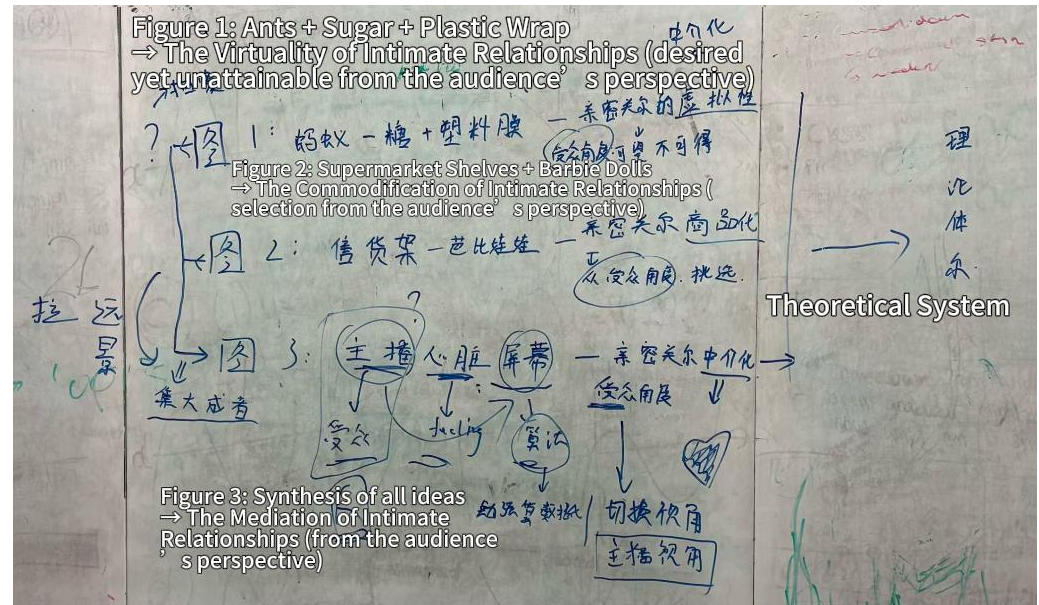
2. Creation Process & Content Experiments

During the creative process, we experimented with many different visual elements, including plastic badges, hearts appearing on screens, earphones, mobile phones, supermarket shelves filled with fruit, vegetables, or Barbie dolls, and different live-streaming scenes.

We also explored several visual styles, such as American retro aesthetics, old-film visuals, clay animation styles, realistic images, and more abstract approaches. After comparing the results, we agreed that the final project should keep a relatively unified style, leaning more toward realism but still with artistic and symbolic elements.

A large part of the process involved adjusting AI prompts. We repeatedly changed wording in both English and Chinese, uploaded reference images, and tested different descriptions for the same scene to get closer to the atmosphere we wanted. Small changes in prompts often produced very different results, so experimentation became an important part of the project itself.

We also spent time discussing perspective and storytelling. At first, we debated whether the work should focus more on streamers or audiences. In the end, we decided not to emphasize fixed roles too much, and instead place the mobile phone or screen at the center, highlighting it as the key medium shaping emotional interaction.



3. Main Challenges

One of the biggest challenges was the unpredictability of AI-generated content. The AI often produced styles or details we did not want, and some elements — especially symbolic ones like hearts — were difficult to generate in the way we imagined.

Another issue was usage limits. We frequently reached the daily generation limit while testing ideas, which slowed down the process.

We also struggled with style consistency. Since different AI outputs sometimes looked completely different from one another, we had to spend a lot of time revising prompts and refining images to create a more coherent visual style.

4. Work Division & Documentation

For the group work, each member was mainly responsible for generating one image, but everyone also participated in discussing and improving the outputs together.

At the same time, we created a shared document to record the entire creative process. This included prompts, successful and unsuccessful generated images, visual references, and our reflections on each experiment. We organized everything by theme and production stage so that we could clearly trace how our ideas developed over time.

5. Final Goal

Our final goal is to produce a visual project with a consistent style, including posters and images, alongside a reflective booklet documenting the process. We want the final work to clearly present ideas of emotional mediation and commodification in digital culture, while also connecting these ideas to relevant theories and showing the full development of our creative process.

Creative Documentation

First, we attempted the idea 1: Ants and sugar.

Our main idea developed from discussions about how modern relationships are increasingly shaped by digital platforms. The pursuit of intimacy between people is one of humanity's most primal instincts, but We noticed that online intimacy is often obstructed by platforms and algorithms, which reduced to numbers such as likes, gifts, and follower counts, turning emotional connections into something commercialized and performative, rather than something genuine and authentic, especially between streamers and their audiences.

To express this visually, we came up with several simple symbols to represent this longing and construct a metaphor:

1. Ants represent the most primitive and essential side of humans as animals. Ants chasing sugar represent people's instinctive desire for genuine emotional connection.
2. Sugar symbolizes real and sincere intimacy. Though seemingly within reach, is separated by a thin plastic film, one can apparently feel its texture, smell its fragrance, and even taste its sweetness, yet can never fully obtain it.

We divided into several groups to attempt generation separately.

In order to explore the content styles of different platforms, we used different platforms during the generation process.

Plan 1 (ChatGPT) : Based on our understanding of the project, combined the intended content and the planned aesthetic and cinematic style into a prompt, and fed it into a generative AI (ChatGPT) to generate the output.

Prompt: Please generate an image with strong American retro colors. The scene shows a group of ants climbing up a candy that has human facial features. There is a layer of plastic film between the candy and the ants. Some ants crawl on the candy through the film, while the rest swarm toward it. The style should be like old retro movies such as *The Love Witch*.



Figure 1 (By ChatGPT)

We use ants to stand for the audience, candy for the live stream host, and plastic wrap for the distance online. It shows that live stream content is sweet and tempting, and the close connection between hosts and audiences feels close yet hard to reach.

But these pictures was made at the very beginning. Initially, we wanted to incorporate surreal and grotesque elements to enrich our visual experience, but through further discussion we felt this approach was too vague to fully convey the theories and ideas we wanted to express(and it would genuinely make some people uncomfortable). As we discussed more and adjusted our ideas, it no longer matched our theme.

Plan 2 (Claude, Midjourney): We referenced established AI-generated artwork prompts found online, adapted them to our theme, and fed them into an AI content generation tool (Claude), which helped us generate standardized prompts following the template. We then input these prompts into Midjourney to attempt image generation.

Prompt (By Claude): A vibrant dream core surreal photograph, consciousness flow. The scene is split by a translucent, wrinkled plastic film barrier stretching across the center. On the left side, a standing human-shaped figure made entirely of colorful, rough rock sugar and candy pieces (pink, blue, yellow) is suspended and pulled by countless glowing, colorful puppet strings and wires descending

from a hazy, glowing ceiling. The candy figure is delicate, glowing with internal light, and surrounded by blurred neon confectionery. On the right side, a massive swarm of thousands of detailed black and brown ants is frantically attacking, scratching, and trying to tear through the clear plastic film to reach the sugar figure. The ants create a chaotic, dark, moving mass against the dark soil background. The plastic barrier is scratched and warped by

the ants. The background is a psychedelic wash of vivid neon lights, grain, bokeh, and abstract dream patterns. High contrast, highly detailed, filmic, surreal atmosphere, intense saturation, F1.4 lens, cinematic lighting, dramatic shadows, analog film grain, chaotic energy. --ar 16:9 --stylize 250 --v 6.0



Figure 2 (By Midjourney)

We felt that this outcome was too abstract and barely reflected any of our original vision, failing to effectively convey the message we intended to communicate. Therefore, we decided to abandon it.

Later, we attempted to modify the prompt through **Claude** in the hope of achieving a better result. However, when we input the prompt into Midjourney, we received a completely unrelated image (next page).

In response to this phenomenon, we believe that perhaps it is because the learning cost of AI is very low, and sometimes it can generate content without even seriously considering it, thus losing control over the content it produces.

Plan 1 Extension (Claude, Midjourney): We made slight modifications to the original prompt from Plan 1 and fed it into a Claude conversation that retained memory of the Plan 2 prompt format, asking it to revise the content based on the original prompt while following the prompt structure.

Base prompt: Help me generate an image with rich American retro colors. The content of the image is a group of ants crawling onto a piece of candy that has grown a human silhouette (similar to the Cthulhu style we just discussed). There is a layer of plastic film between the candy and the ants — some ants are crawling on the candy through the plastic film, while the rest are swarming toward this piece of candy. The style should resemble old films like *The Love Witch*.

Refined prompt (By Claude):

Vintage American Technicolor film still, macro product photography aesthetic. A large translucent sugar crystal loaf, its silhouette unmistakably shaped like a vague reclining human figure massive, ancient, ambiguous the contours of a torso, a swollen head, limbs dissolving into crystalline formations, suggestive rather than literal. The sugar glows from within with warm amber and pale gold light, its facets catching the light like stained

glass. Wrapped tightly in a crinkled, slightly fogged clear plastic film that distorts and warps the sugar's surface beneath. A colony of dozens of large black and brown ants swarms toward the figure some pressing their bodies flat against the plastic membrane, legs splayed, mandibles working against the barrier, their forms flattened and silhouetted through the film; others crawling in frantic trails across the ground toward it, forming converging dark rivers. Close-up shot, slightly elevated angle, the sugar figure centered and monumental. Color palette: deep saturated reds, warm burnt oranges, honey yellows, dusty greens rich over-saturated Technicolor palette as seen in 1940s Hollywood fantasy films like *I Married a Witch* or *Blithe Spirit*. Soft halo lighting, slight chromatic aberration, visible film grain, matte painting background quality, theatrical shadow play, retro illustration influence.

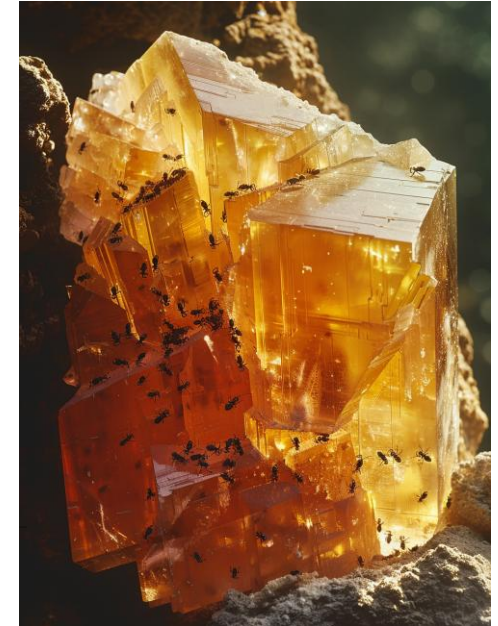


Figure 3
(By Midjourney)

However, the final generated image (Figure 3) turned out to be largely unrelated to the prompt. We determined that this was caused by an overload of input prompts, combined with Midjourney's inability to effectively filter and distill the key concepts, which led to the unexpected result.

Second, we turned to idea 2:

However, after detailed discussion, we felt that this idea presented relatively limited standalone content. The theme of individual duality in the context platformization of felt less like an independent idea and more like a recurring perspective that runs through every part of our discussion. Therefore, we decided to incorporate it into the exploration of each other idea rather than treating it as a standalone one (as reflected in the discussion of Idea 3 that follows).

Then, we attempted the idea 3:

We drew inspiration from a finished artwork (Figure 4), hoping to incorporate mechanical replacements for certain body parts in order to



Figure 4

visually materialize what we perceive as the state of Algorithmically-mediated intimacies— where emotional expression is participated in and presented to others through algorithms, platforms, and data (represented by screens), and is equally received through the intervention and mediation of platforms and algorithms.

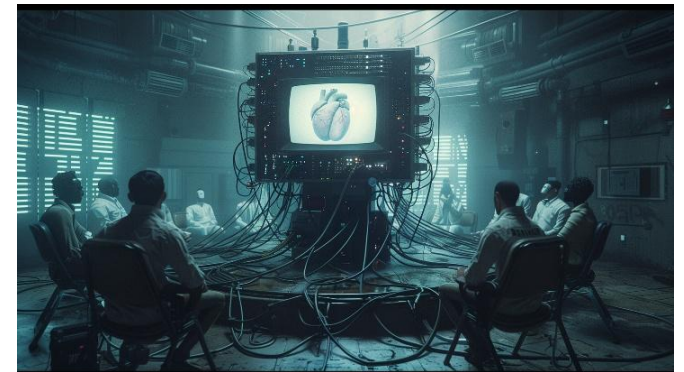


Figure 5 (By Midjourney)



Figure 6 (By Midjourney)

Plan (Claude, Midjourney): Following this direction, we attempted to write our own understanding into a prompt and handed it to Claude to refine it into one that better fits the template format.

Base prompt: Please generate an image where the center is a giant computer, with countless data cables extending outward, connecting to the heart position of every person around the table. But the heart position is not a real heart — instead, it is a heart-shaped form presented at the heart's location (similar to the ear shape in Figure 1). The overall style is leaning towards realism. We want to use Midjourney to generate this image, but the description is not very clear — please help improve the description.

Refined prompt (By Claude): A cinematic, hyper-realistic photograph. A massive, monolithic vintage computer tower sits at the center of a round table, its surface covered in blinking lights and ventilation grilles. Dozens of thick black data cables and wires radiate outward from the computer like veins, snaking across the table surface and connecting to the chests of multiple people seated around the table. At each person's chest, their shirt or skin is replaced by a small glowing screen embedded flush into their body — the screen displays a close-up photorealistic image of a human heart, pulsing with light, like a live medical monitor. The screens glow with a cold blue-white light. The people sit still, expressionless, formally dressed. Overhead lighting is clinical and harsh. The overall mood is eerie, corporate, and dystopian. Shot with a wide-angle lens, shallow depth of field, analog film grain, cinematic color grading, muted tones with glowing screen accents. --ar 16:9 --stylize 300 --v 6.0

(Figure 5, see previous page)

Obviously, this did not meet our expected outcome. Therefore, we used **Claude** to modify the instructions for the second time and generated the image:

Second Refined prompt (By Claude): Cinematic hyper-realistic photography, ov99er-the-shoulder shot from behind a seated viewer, slightly low angle looking toward the head of a windowless conference room. A bulky vintage CRT computer tower sits at the center of a round table, its old monitor displaying a grid of multiple livestream windows — each window shows a different yet uncannily similar human face, smiling or emoting with hollow performative expression, like mass-produced influencers. Thick dark data cables and wires radiate outward from the machine like exposed veins, snaking across the table and connecting to the chests of each person seated around the table. At every chest, the clothing and skin are replaced by a flush-mounted glowing screen showing a close-up photorealistic beating human heart, pulsing with warm amber light. The people sit in varied poses but share the same vacant, glassy stare directed at the monitor. The room is a real, mundane corporate meeting space — no windows, drop ceiling, fluorescent overheads mixed with warm screen glow. Color palette is desaturated warm realism accented by the cold-warm glow of the screens. Kitsch aesthetic influences: ornate over-sentimentality, artificial warmth, mass-produced beauty, Thomas Kinkadee meets Black Mirror. Analog film grain, cinematic color grading, shallow depth of field, 35mm lens. --ar 16:9 --stylize 350 --v 6.0

(Figure 6, see previous page)

This picture also failed to meet our requirements in directly conveying the effect of electronic screens replacing the real heart, or presenting screens as intermediaries. We felt that the AI had somewhat misunderstood the scene, so we attempted to use more exaggerated descriptions to better highlight our concept. Therefore, we revised the prompt and fed it back into **Claude**, and made a third attempt by **Midjourney**.

Base prompt: We did not want a serious boardroom atmosphere. Instead, something more relaxed, like a casual discussion setting. For the figures, we wanted to avoid overly realistic human representations, and instead use a partial or symbolic form to suggest the human presence, for example, a figure with a heart-shaped head

Refined prompt (By Claude): Cinematic surrealist photography with kitsch aesthetic. A warm, dimly lit casual gathering space — mismatched sofas and low chairs arranged loosely around a central round table, like a late-night talk show set or an informal salon. No windows. Warm practical lighting mixed with screen glow. At the center of the table sits a bulky vintage CRT computer, its monitor displaying a grid of multiple livestream windows, each showing a different yet uncannily similar smiling face. Thick dark cables radiate outward from the machine-like exposed veins, connecting to the figures seated around it. The figures are surreal and symbolic — human bodies in casual everyday clothing, but where each head should be, there is instead a glowing embedded screen showing a close-up photorealistic image of a beating human heart, warm amber and red, pulsing softly. The heart-screens face toward the central monitor. One figure seen from behind in the foreground, over-the-shoulder composition, their heart-head silhouetted against the glow. The atmosphere is relaxed but uncanny — like a cozy nightmare. Kitsch warmth, ornate over-sentimentality, artificial intimacy. Analog film grain, 35mm lens, shallow depth of field, cinematic warm-muted color grading. --ar 16:9 --stylize 350 --v 6.0



Figure 7 (By Midjourney)

However, the third attempt was still unsatisfactory: the overall style was too dark to see clearly, and it failed to effectively convey our idea of replacing the real heart with a screen. The result was poor. We analyzed that this was likely due to an overload of content being presented within a single concept, combined with Midjourney's inability to effectively interpret abstract ideas, which prevented the AI from generating images that matched our vision.

We decided to simplify our approach, aiming for each image to convey less content but with greater precision.

This brought us to Idea 4.

As AI tools has been unable to present the effect we desire, we have decided to try Idea 4, using supermarket shelves (or vending machines) as a metaphor for the Commodification of emotion — the situation of streamers on platforms resembles that of products on a shelf.

And we have decided to shift our primary focus to a different AI software (ChatGPT).

Plan 1 (ChatGPT)

Step 1- Prompt: Generate a vintage and odd style image, which is surreal. Abstract live streamers into commodities on the shelves in a store, with labels showing specific categories of them and datafication of their popularity. Also, there is a separate column showing information like ranks and amounts of gifts of the live streaming. This image depicts commodified intimacy in live streaming. The visual style refers to the movie *The Love Witch*.

Step 2- Prompt: Do not commodify it to such a large degree (like showing the price of per minute). Meanwhile, discard such gendered relation in the image. The words in this image is in English.

Step 3- Prompt: Please create a picture with strong retro colors. There is a store shelf full of Barbie dolls, giving a slightly weird and eerie vibe. The style is just like the old retro movie *The Love Witch*.



Step 2



Step 3

Figure 8 (By ChatGPT)

This picture tries to show that live stream hosts are mass-produced and turned into commodities, but the meaning doesn't come across clearly, so we didn't use it.

Plan 2 (ChatGPT)

Step 1- Prompt: Generate an image. The scene shows a shelf with items neatly arranged. The camera focuses directly on these products.

Step 2- Prompt: Try a comic-style version instead ,and add various rich elements to showcase the prices of the goods. This is the key point

Step 3- Prompt: A version that conforms to the national cultural background of the United Kingdom

Prompt: Based on this, all the products on this platform should be transformed into actual individual "streamers", including male streamers and female streamers, with various types such as entertainment streamers, funny streamers, product promotion streamers, and streamers with good appearance. The "low prize" section next to it showcases a certain streamer who quickly became the most popular streamer within a week, giving off a sense of commodification and consumerism similar to this.



Step 1



Step 2



Step 3

Figure 9 (By ChatGPT)

The first three steps established a basic framework, forming the core of our idea — a rough prototype of the vending machine concept. After replacing the contents with human figures, the concept became much clearer. Through this process, we were able to identify the essential elements needed to realize this idea, laying the groundwork for our subsequent development.



Figure 10 (By ChatGPT)

Plan 3 (Claude, Midjourney)

Base prompt: A straight-on shot of a supermarket shelf with items arranged in an orderly manner, all items are dolls. Add rich pricing elements and commercial labels throughout, this is the key focus. All text in English. Replace the products with individual streamers, male and female, of diverse types such as entertainment, comedy, and appearance-focused streamers. In the 'Low Price' section, feature a streamer who has gone viral and become the most-watched of the week, conveying a sense of commodification. Please ensure racial diversity and avoid all-white figure.

Refined prompt (By Claude): Cinematic surrealist product photography. A retail store shelf shot straight-on, eye-level, clean and symmetrical. The shelves are stocked with

human-sized marionette puppets displayed in clear plastic packaging like boxed toys or action figures — each puppet represents a different type of live streamer. The puppets are diverse in race and gender: a Black female beauty streamer with ring light halo accessory, an East Asian male gaming streamer holding a tiny controller, a South Asian female lifestyle vlogger posed, a white male reaction streamer with open-mouth pose. Each box has bold graphic price tags, discount stickers, and retail labels in English: "TRENDING NOW", "LIMITED STOCK", "BEST VALUE CREATOR", "NEW DROP", "VIRAL GUARANTEED. One box has a bright red explosive starburst label: "🔥 THIS WEEK'S #1 STREAMER — ROSE TO TOP IN 7 DAYS — WAS UNKNOWN — NOW: SOLD OUT". Shelf labels show follower counts as prices: "4.2M followers — \$--", "999K —

CLEARANCE". The packaging design mimics real toy box aesthetics — colorful, glossy, with category labels like "ENTERTAINMENT SERIES", "BEAUTY EDITION", "COMEDY PACK". Puppet aesthetic throughout — visible strings above each figure, wooden jointed limbs, frozen performative expressions. Kitsch maximalism, bright saturated retail lighting, slight fisheye lens distortion, analog film grain, hyper-detailed product photography. --ar 16:9 --stylize 350 --v 6.0

Creation Actions

More Options

Vary

Subtle¹

Strong

Remix

Subtle

Strong



After obtaining the generated images from Midjourney, we used the built-in tools within the Midjourney system to make minor adjustments to the content (see above)

Figure 11 (By Midjourney)

Plan 3 (Claude, Midjourney)

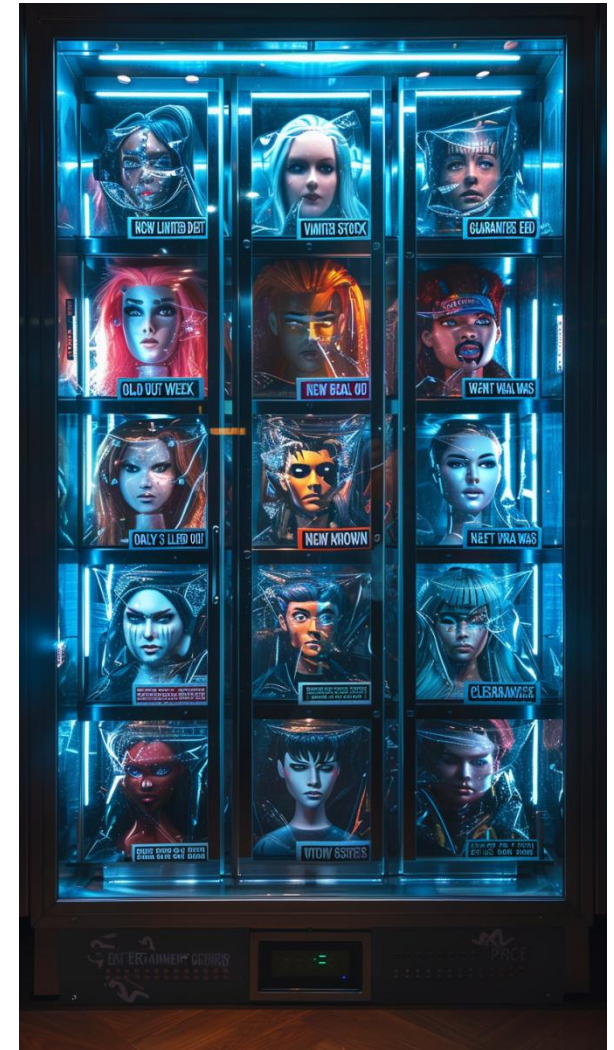
After obtaining the image above, we felt that the vending machine characteristics were not prominently highlighted, so we issued a new prompt requesting an image that fully captures the overall appearance of a vending machine (Figure 12).

Base prompt: A full view of the vending machine.

Refined prompt (By Claude):

Cinematic surrealist product photography. A full-view frontal shot of a massive floor-to-ceiling vending machine, centered and symmetrical, shot straight-on at eye level. The machine has a large glass front panel revealing multiple rows of compartments, each containing a boxed marionette puppet sealed in clear plastic packaging — like action figures or toy dolls — representing different types of live streamers. The puppets are racially and gender diverse: a Black female beauty streamer with a miniature ring light accessory, an East Asian male gaming streamer holding a tiny controller, a South Asian female lifestyle vlogger frozen mid-laugh, a Latino male comedy streamer with an exaggerated open expression, a Middle Eastern female fashion streamer in a styled outfit, a white male reaction streamer with a wide open-mouth pose. Each compartment has bold backlit

price labels and sticker overlays in English: "TRENDING NOW", "LIMITED STOCK", "BEST VALUE CREATOR", "NEW DROP", "VIRAL GUARANTEED". One compartment is empty and with a bright red starburst explosion graphic. Follower counts displayed as prices on illuminated shelf tags: "4.2M FOLLOWERS — \$--", "999K — CLEARANCE PRICE". The packaging mimics toy box graphic design — glossy, oversaturated, with series labels: "ENTERTAINMENT SERIES", "BEAUTY EDITION", "COMEDY PACK". Visible puppet strings dangle inside each box. The vending machine exterior is metallic and slightly worn, with a coin slot, numeric keypad, and a product retrieval tray at the bottom. Interior compartment lighting is cold fluorescent white against the warm ambient room. Kitsch maximalism, neon retail glow, slight fisheye lens distortion, analog film grain, hyper-detailed product photography, dramatic vending machine interior backlight. --ar 9:16 --stylize 350 --v 6.0



However, the generated result no longer conveyed the sense of a streamer as originally intended

Figure 12 (By Midjourney) 19

The final work

We are not very satisfied with the effect presented by the above-mentioned plan. It is not intuitive to see the theme we want to express. Therefore, after the third group discussion, we made further adjustments to the approaches of each of the previous ideas through discussion. The adjusted plan this time is also the final outcome of our work that we present.

In generating our final work, we fully integrated all of our previous concepts. We extracted the core elements from Idea 3 and Idea 4 (the heart represented by a screen; the shelf or vending machine) each corresponding to one of our two central arguments: the mediation of intimacy and the commodification of intimacy. At the same time, we considered how to incorporate the emotional performance aspect from Idea 2 (the contrast between private and public emotions) by adding an element that captures the streamer in their depicted alone. Additionally, we retained the slightly grotesque visual style carried over from Idea 1.

This piece can be said to be the culmination of everything we set out to express.

tool selection

We found that ChatGPT demonstrated stronger comprehension, more effectively receiving our ideas and generating images that aligned with our vision based on our instructions, while Midjourney produced output of higher visual quality. Therefore, we attempted to use ChatGPT to generate the base content, and then refine it further in Midjourney, including animating it into video.

Process

To begin with, we fed the AI the reference photo previously used in Idea 3 (Figure 4)

This is the reference picture:



Figure 13 (By ChatGPT)

Step 1- Prompt:

Please generate a retro movie-style bizarre picture for me. The content should be of one person with a heart displayed on a phone screen at the position of their heart, and another person holding a microphone pointed at the heart on the phone screen. The presentation style should be similar to the picture I sent you. (The result was Figure 13)

Another image based on the draft generated in Plan4 (Figure 11).



Step 2- Prompt:

Please adjust the picture you just generated according to the style of the picture I sent you. The specific requirements remain the same; only the style needs to be adjusted (The result was Figure 14)



This image largely matched our vision. However, the figure on the right appeared more like an interviewer than an audience member, which became the direction for our next round of refinements.

Figure 14 (By ChatGPT)

Step 3- Prompt:

Please make some modifications to this picture. The audience is gazing upwards with intense enthusiasm. The position of the mobile phone remains unchanged, but it should be supported by a phone stand instead

(The result was Figure 15)



Figure 15 (By ChatGPT)

Step 4- Prompt:

Please generate an image with a more platform context for me, such as "LIVE", "RECOMMENDED FOR YOU", "TOP VIEWER", "999K WATCHING", "MATCHED EMOTION 98%" and other data information floating on the glass, with countless blurred reflections of the audience in the background. (The result was Figure 16)

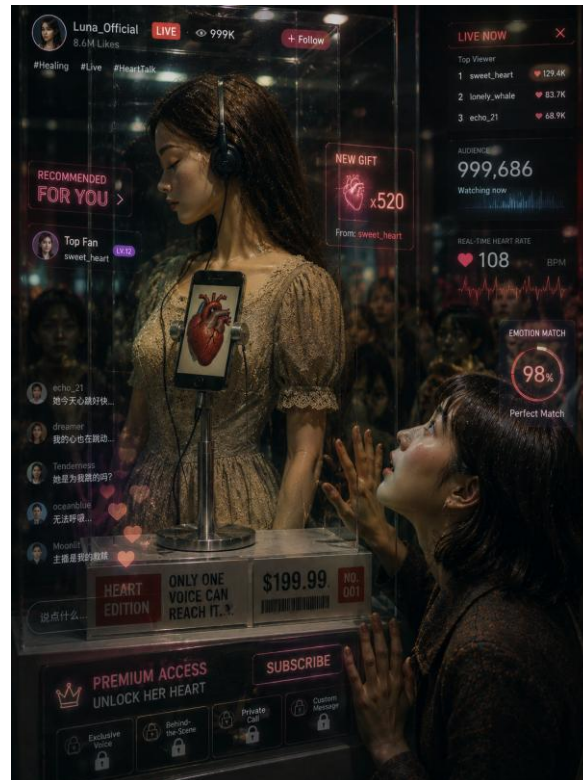


Figure 16 (By ChatGPT)

Step 5- Prompt:

Now please make a slight modification. Change the audience comment section on the left side of the picture to English, that is, all the text in this photo should be in English form. Additionally, add the effect of a faint red light on A's chest, or the reflection of the phone interface in the audience's pupils, and a headphone cable hanging around their neck. Also, add the effect of the host's body being entangled with a headphone cable. Do not make any other changes. (The result was Figure 17)

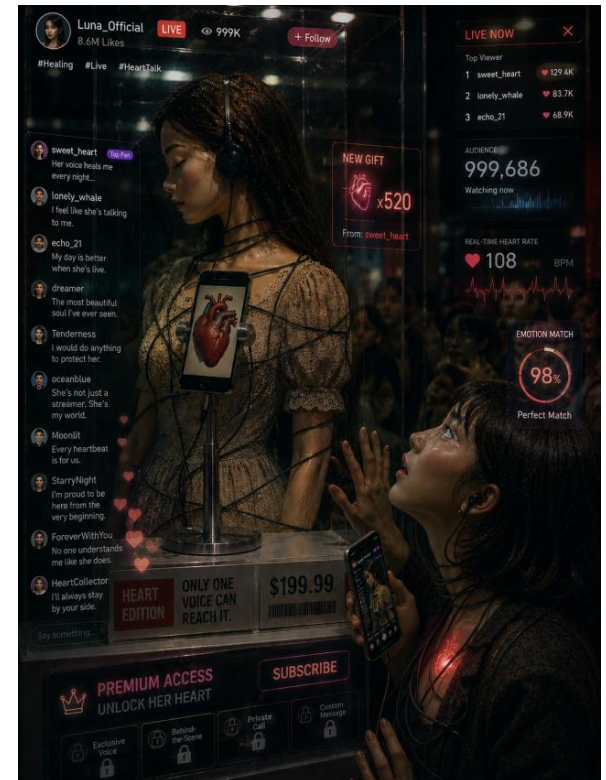


Figure 17 (By ChatGPT)

Step 6- Prompt :

Don't change anything else in this picture. Remove the black line wrapped around the left character's body (but don't remove the headphone wire), and at the same time, remove the right character's hand holding the mobile phone.

(The result was Figure 18)

After repeated adjustments and tests, the final version of this work is in line with our expected ideas. Therefore, we have decided to use this photo as the basis for video generation.

In our initial vision, we had planned to present a series of images, but we found ourselves limited by both technical capability and the expressive range of AI. Therefore, we decided to utilize Midjourney's video generation feature to produce a video, allowing us to convey more content through the moving image.

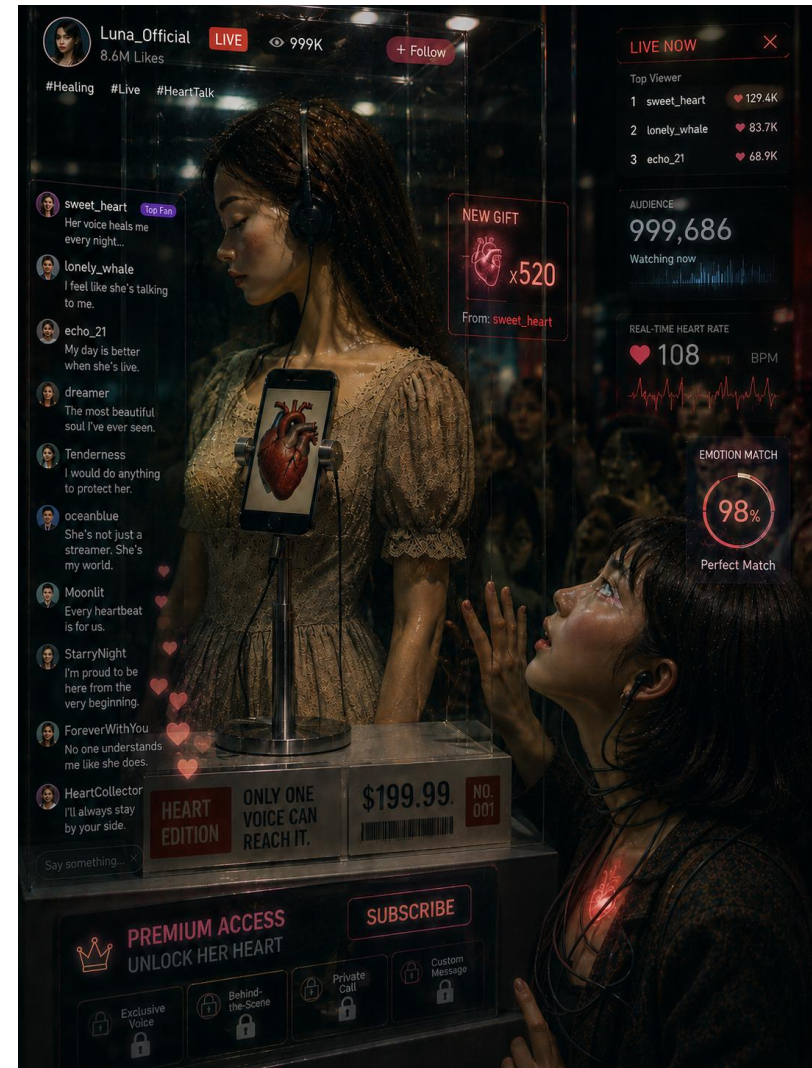


Figure 18 (By ChatGPT)

We first fed the image content into Midjourney's video generation feature to see what effects it could produce. In the process, we obtained a number of unexpected results, which continuously reshaped our plans for content generation.

1. Corner Shot

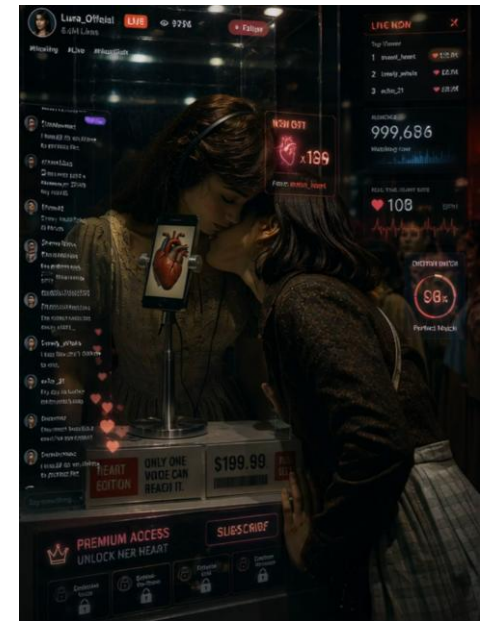


2. Misaligned Gazes



The misalignment of eye contact (intimate interaction) gives us a more intuitive sense that the relationship between streamers and their audiences is a unusual intimacy.

3. The Kiss



This video was accidentally generated while exploring Midjourney. We discovered that Midjourney's video feature was capable of producing such dramatic shifts in visual composition, and this structural transformation inspired us to consider a multi-shot narrative approach — could we harness these visual transitions to enrich our expression, with each shot carrying its own distinct content and message? This discovery led us to the concept of a three-act structure.



This was entirely unexpected on our part, but it also made us realize that we could appropriately incorporate interactive elements (excluding kissing) to more intuitively convey the message we intended to express.

Once the three-act structure was confirmed, we continuously prompted Midjourney to generate content based on our vision

- First Act Prompt:** **Step1:** Keep the text content in the image unchanged, focus only on the interaction between the figures.
To enhance the sense of interaction, we attempted to incorporate a ‘finger heart’ gesture , a common action seen in live streams. However, the AI was unable to understand it. (Despite prompt:Slowly raises both hands to chest level, forming a symmetrical heart shape in front of her body - eight fingers pressed together forming the two upper curves of the heart, both thumbs joined at the bottom forming the lower point - holding it toward the camera.) So, we changed our approach.
Step2: The female streamer inside the glass display case makes direct eye contact with the viewer kneeling in the foreground below her, holding her gaze with a quiet, sincere expression. She then slowly lowers her head in a subtle, gentle bow toward the viewer. Cinematic, shallow depth of field, low motion, warm ambient light.
- Second Act Prompt:** Camera arcs 90 degrees around the transparent display case, moving from the front-facing angle to the left side profile angle at a steady pace, maintaining the same distance and framing throughout. The subject remains completely still in a fixed position. Camera settles into a static lock-off shot once it reaches the full left side profile. Cinematic, shallow depth of field.
- Third Act Prompt:** The glass reflections gradually fade away, the image slowly sharpens and clarifies, focus pulling in toward the streamer's face. The female streamer stares directly into the lens with a hollow, emotionless expression, completely still. Static camera, cinematic close-up, shallow depth of field, warm dark ambient lighting.

Reflection

During the creative process, we gradually realized that AI-generated content is much harder to control than we originally expected. Because generative AI can quickly produce complete images with very little effort, it sometimes creates the illusion that the creator no longer needs to fully engage with the process. However, this also means we can easily lose control over the final output. In several cases, the AI completely misunderstood our prompts and generated images unrelated to our original ideas. This made us reflect on the risks of relying too heavily on AI systems and reminded us that AI outputs cannot simply be trusted as accurate translations of human intention.

We also found that AI image generation does not follow the same creative logic as human artistic practice. Instead of gradually building an idea step by step, the AI directly generates a “finished” image. Because of this, it often struggles with highly detailed prompts or images containing too many symbolic elements at once. As a result, we learned that simplifying visual ideas and focusing on fewer but clearer concepts often produced stronger and more controllable outcomes.

Another important reflection involved bias within AI systems. Across multiple experiments, AI repeatedly generated livestream hosts as women, even when gender diversity was not specified (The identification of gender here is based on masculinity and femininity informed by gender scripts. The designation of the 'male viewer' and 'female streams' reflect algorithms reproduce gender scripts, rather than defining the sex or gender of these people). Some generated images also reproduced stereotypical gender roles, such as presenting men as active viewers and women as passive objects of attention. We realized that these outputs reflect existing cultural assumptions embedded within AI training data, including gender bias and heteronormative ideas about intimacy. In this sense, AI does not simply create neutral images, but actively reproduces dominant cultural scripts.

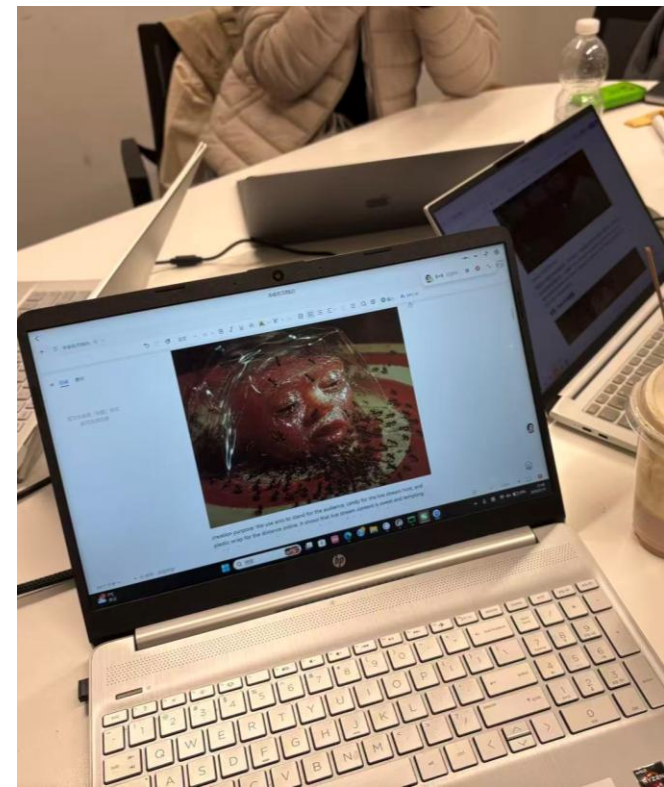
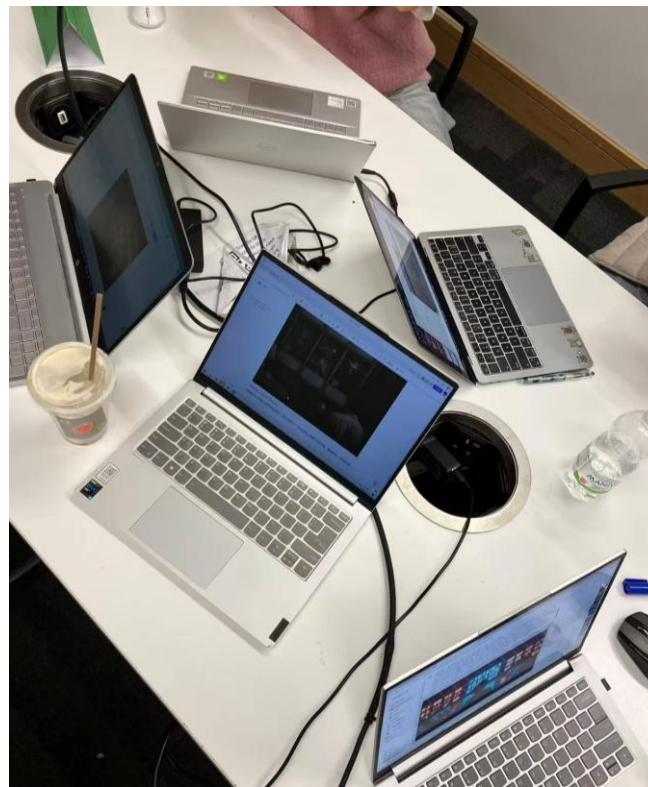
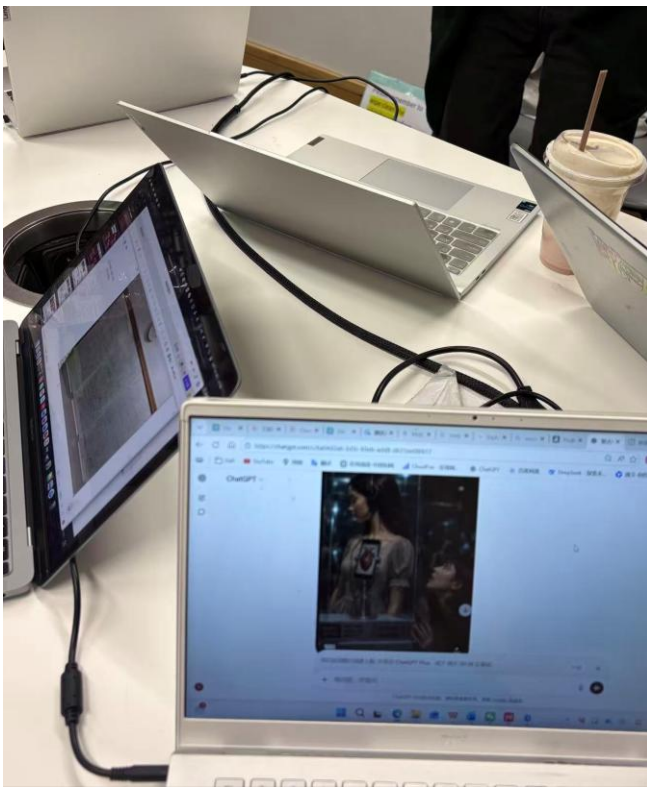
At the same time, we noticed that we ourselves were being shaped by the algorithm during the creation process. In order to get the “correct” results, we constantly adjusted our language and prompts into forms that AI systems could better recognize. For example, we had to explicitly request racial diversity or avoid stereotypical representations. This made us reflect on how users gradually adapt their thinking and expression to fit algorithmic systems. The more we tried to correct AI bias, the more we were also influenced by the logic of the algorithm itself. This reflects the recursive relationship between humans and AI systems.

We also reflected on our own perspective as researchers. In our early ideas, we focused heavily on how audiences commodify streamers, but paid less attention to the role of platforms and their underlying power structures. Looking back, this may reveal how easily researchers themselves can become influenced by platform logic and commercial ways of thinking. We began questioning whether we had overlooked the existence of genuine emotional investment within livestream culture or unconsciously adopted the audience’s perspective as our starting point.

Another key reflection came from our experiments with symbolic gestures and visual metaphors. AI often failed to understand culturally familiar actions, such as making a heart gesture with hands or expressing emotional intimacy through subtle visual cues. This showed us that many cultural meanings humans consider obvious are not naturally understandable to AI systems and instead need to be translated into simplified, abstract descriptions.

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Appendix (Meeting Documentation)