

# Algorithmic Hunger



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# INTRODUCTION

Algorithmic Hunger is a conceptual fashion film exploring how social media algorithms amplify eating disorders. Originating from my dieting experiences and friends' struggles with binge eating, the project reveals how desire and shame are shaped by algorithmic feedback loops.

A self-experiment on Xiaohongshu showed that once I followed binge-eating content, the system quickly pushed more extreme videos. Structured in three acts—Craving, Control, Collapse—the film uses color, UI overlays, and bodily performance to visualize the invisible logic of algorithmic training



# research question

1. How does repetition in digital interaction design evoke emotional responses such as shame, craving, and regret associated with binge eating?

2. How does exposure to idealized body content on social media platforms influence emotional relationships with food among young women?

3. In what ways does binge eating function as an emotional regulation strategy under body-image-related stress?

# RESEARCH



**What emotions does the audience feel? Viewers may experience a mixture of:**

1. Envy or aspiration  
-I wish I had that body
2. Guilt or shame  
-Why can't I control myself like they do?
3. Addictive curiosity  
-I shouldn't watch this, but I can't stop
4. Emotional regulation  
-soothing their own anxiety by consuming others' control narratives



# RESEARCH

**How does idealized and optimized body content, through the circulation of platform dynamics, reproduce/ manifest in the user's body? In what ways does this desire function as an emotional regulation strategy.**

Through reinforcement learning, platforms learn what content keeps users engaged emotionally especially content that triggers aspiration, guilt, or craving.

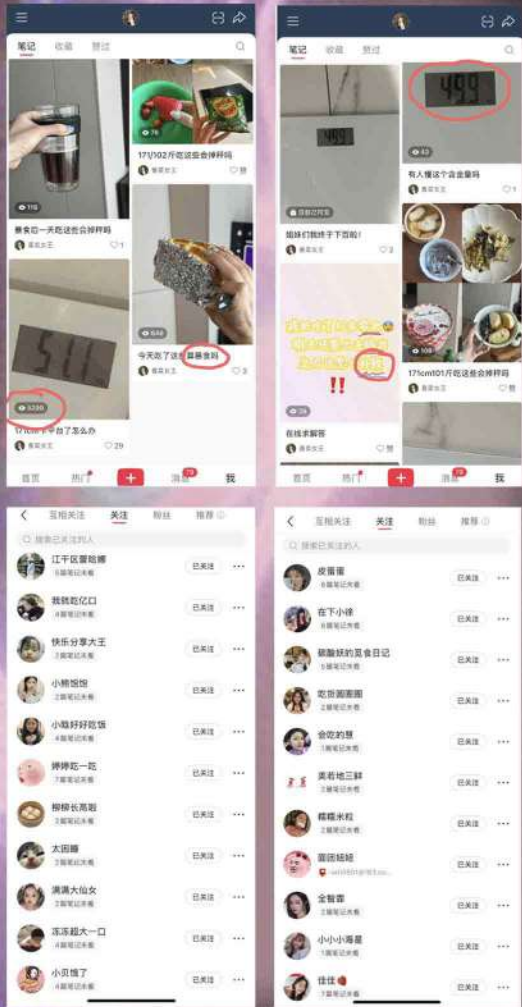
Idealized and optimized body content (thinness, clean eating, control aesthetics)

becomes a reward loop:

1. Users crave what they see
2. They consume more of it
3. The platform gives them more
4. Over time, users start feeling through the platform, regulating emotion via visual consumption
5. Eventually, this loop becomes embodied -manifesting in eating restriction, bingeing, or obsessive self-comparison



# RESEARCH



## Why do food bloggers like to share on social media?

For individuals with eating disorders, sharing binge-purge cycles or idealized body images can serve multiple psychological functions:

1. Validation seeking: receiving likes or views offers a sense of worth or attention.
2. Control: the act of sharing becomes a ritual of control over shame or secrecy.
3. Displacement: making private pain public displaces guilt into performance.
4. Aestheticization: suffering is repackaged into beautiful, curated content-blurring pain and aesthetics.



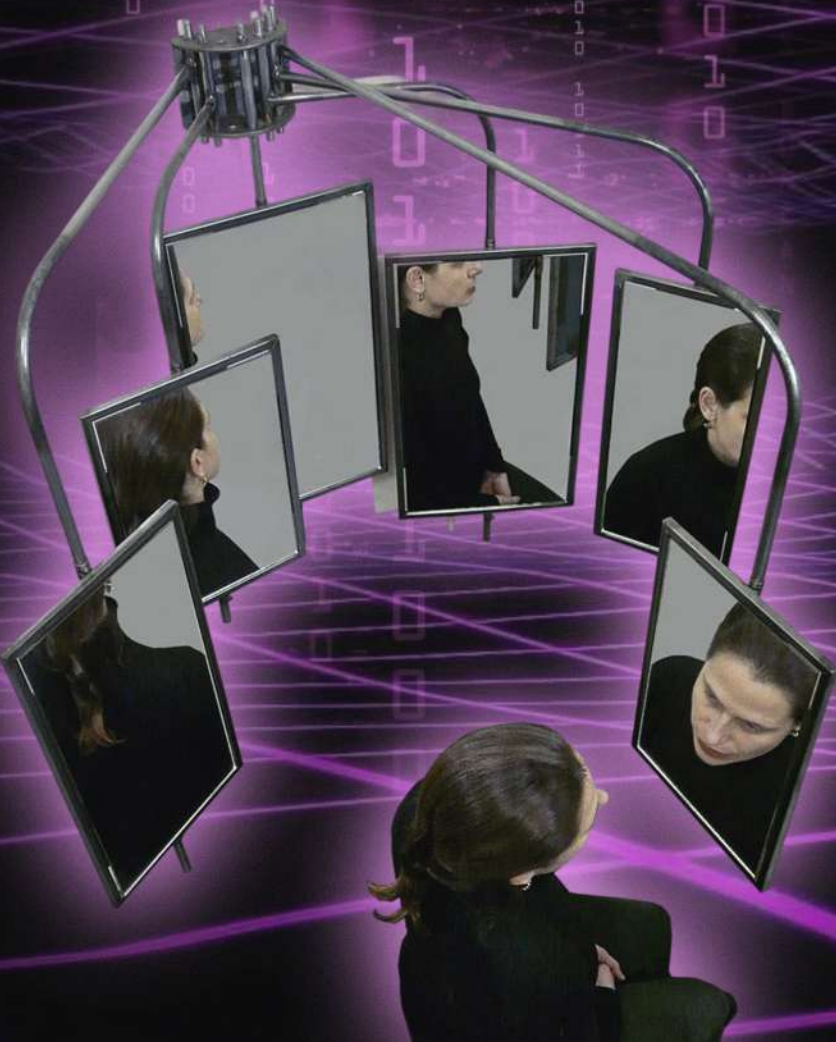
A self-experiment on Xiaohongshu showed that once I followed binge-eating content, the system quickly pushed more extreme videos.

# RESEARCH

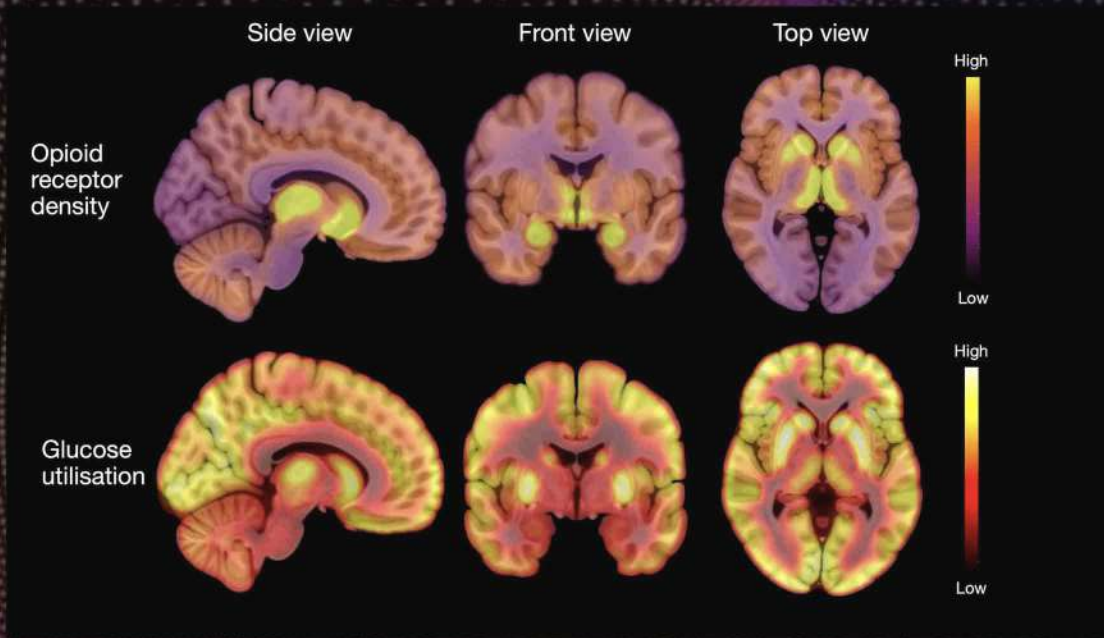
The binge-purge aesthetic on social media is not just a symptom - it is a system.

One where emotional needs are converted into visual behaviors, and bodies become mediums for algorithmic feedback.

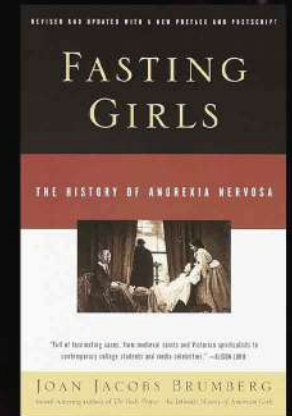
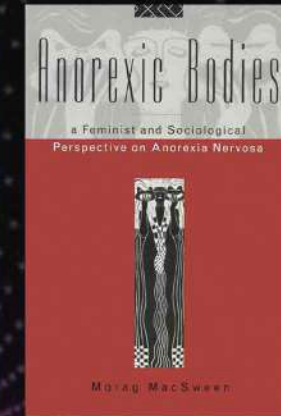
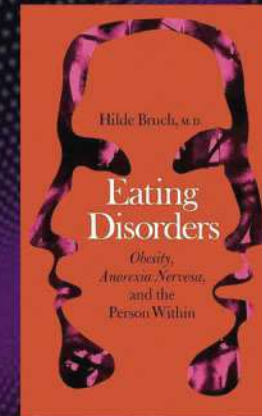
Desire becomes a tool of governance, mediated through recommendation systems that teach users to regulate themselves by what they see.



# RESEARCH



The number of opioid receptors in the brain (top row) and sugar intake (bottom row) in people with anorexia nervosa. Source: Turku PET Center



Binge eating or feeling out of control while consuming large amounts of food in discrete periods of time are symptoms of several eating disorders. Most notable of all are bulimia nervosa (BN) and binge eating disorder (BED). Binge eating is sometimes followed by compensatory behaviors such as self-induced vomiting (BN). These behaviors can be associated with overweight and obesity (BED), which is often distressing and difficult to treat.

About 1.5% of adults may have BN, and about 3.0% of adults may have BED at some point in their lives. There are many factors that contribute to binge eating behavior: psychosocial aspects including stress and lifestyle, genetics and biology including gender and hormonal influences, anxiety and depression, etc.

# Feedback Loop Diagram

**Pushed by Algorithm**



**Craving**

High-calorie foods, ideal bodies, mukbangs, Before-After transformations

**Engagement**

Likes, Views, Increased Watch Time

**Algorithm Learning**

recommends similar content again

**Control**

Dieting, Calorie Tracking, Body Sculpting  
Platform implies "reward"

**Collapse**

Bingeing, Shame, Emotional Break-down, vomiting



**Platform restarts the loop by recommending again**

# source of inspiration



Michaela Stark

Michaela Stark's artistic practice extends far beyond fashion design. At its core, it embodies a charged negotiation of bodily sovereignty, authenticity, and visibility. Her work forcefully questions the hegemonic aesthetic of the "perfect body," and through a brutal self-presentation, it thrusts the often-hidden "real" body into the foreground, rendering it impossible to ignore. This core theme resonates deeply with me.

## Theme 1: Rebellion against the "Disciplinary Gaze" and the Re-visibility of the "Real Body"

Stark's thematic concept: Stark's work subverts the traditional "gaze." In mainstream visual culture, the body (especially female and non-standardized bodies) is a passive object, scrutinized and disciplined. By actively displaying the squeeze of fat, the wrinkles of skin, and the body's natural form, she transforms the body from an aesthetically pleasing "object" into a "subject" imbued with subjectivity, presence, and physical reality. She doesn't ask for acceptance, but rather declares her presence—an unfiltered, unadulterated, and authentic bodily presence.

# source of inspiration

## Inspiration for "Algorithm Hunger":

- My project reveals how algorithms have become a new, more insidious form of "disciplinary gaze." Through recommendation systems, they constantly define what is "desirable" (food), what is "needs to be controlled" (body shape), and what is "shameful" (breakdown).

- Stark's inspiration lies in the fact that my images can become a visual rebellion against this algorithmic gaze. In the cycle of "desire-control-collapse", the camera should not be a cold spectator or complicit, but should be transformed into an internal, experiential perspective.

- Specific thinking: During the "breakdown" phase, avoid presenting it as a "gaffe" or "ugliness" from the perspective of others. Instead, draw on Stark's logic of "revisibility" and use extreme close-ups and slow shots to capture the swallowing of the throat, the trembling of the fingertips, and the sweat beads on the skin due to discomfort.

- This is not to evoke disgust in the viewer, but to make an extreme real bodily experience, exploited and amplified by the algorithm, become extremely clear and tangible. Let the audience feel not only the behavior, but also the emotional weight and physical sensation behind it, thereby countering the algorithm's simplification of "breakdown" as a consumable visual spectacle.



*Michaela Stark's Lingerie Challenges Theories of the 'Grotesque Body'*

# Scene Language

## The Importance of Scenario: As a Translator of Algorithmic Power

**Scenario's importance lies in its successful translation of invisible algorithmic power into a tangible, visual form. Specifically,**

- Making the invisible visible: Algorithms themselves are abstract, invisible codes. Through this visual language, the scene transforms their operating mechanisms—such as circular push (through circular displays or infinite reflections), tagging (through keyword-based light and shadow projected on bodies), and personalized recommendations (through responsive design that changes with performers' behavior)—into powerful visual metaphors, making them perceptible and open to critique.

Shaping and externalizing emotional logic: The three phases of the project, **"Desire-Control-Breakdown,"** are not only behavioral stages but also emotional states. The shifts in scenarios directly drive and externalize this emotional evolution.

**The “desire” stage:** *The scene might be alluring and fruitful (but perhaps made of plastic or reflective materials, suggesting its falsity), with warm but voyeuristic lighting, mimicking the initial allure of the algorithm’s recommendation.*

**The “Control” stage:** *The space becomes minimalist, cold, and full of geometric constraints. The light is as precise and ruthless as a surgical light, reflecting the extreme self-discipline and the cruelty of self-tracking.*

**The “collapse” stage:** *The space may take on a chaotic, overflowing texture, with the previously orderly structure of light and shadow destroyed, symbolizing the dual loss of control of the system and the body and mind. At this point, the chaotic scene is the landscape of inner collapse.*

# Scene Language

## The Scene Language of "Algorithmic Hunger": Visual Space as a Critical Tool

In the conceptual video "Algorithmic Hunger," the scene, far from being a passive backdrop, assumes an active narrative and critical function. Its visual language is meticulously crafted to embody and spatialize the abstract "algorithmic logic," rendering it a presence directly experiential through the viewer's senses. Here, the scene becomes a battlefield for the interplay between algorithm and body, its importance reflected in its role as a visible framework for the operation of power and a device for amplifying emotional experience.



Constructing a critical aesthetic experience: The scenes are not intended for visual pleasure. The intentionally created discomfort (such as cramped spaces, harsh lighting, and distorted reflections) forces the viewer to break from their passive viewing, thereby defamiliarizing the smooth interaction with algorithms in daily life. This discomfort is the project's core critical weapon, refusing to sugarcoat the problem but rather allowing the viewer to physically experience the physical and psychological oppression brought on by algorithmic loops.

# Scene Language

## scene visual elements

**1. Reflective materials (such as mirrors, polished metals, and LCD screens):** used to create reflected and distorted images, symbolizing algorithmic surveillance, self-surveillance, and the fragmentation and alienation of identity in digital space.

**2. Unnatural Light and Digital Lighting:** The light does not come from natural sources, but rather from points, bars, and grids, like those emitted by scanners, screens, or surveillance cameras. This light cuts the body into data points, vividly expressing the process of the body being analyzed, quantified, and categorized by algorithms.

**3. Frames and Confinement:** The numerous visual elements in the scene, such as door frames, window frames, and lens apertures, reinforce a sense of being observed and confined. This directly echoes Michaela Stark's challenge to the "disciplinary gaze," where the gaze is mediated by the algorithmic visual logic.



# Aesthetic Strategy



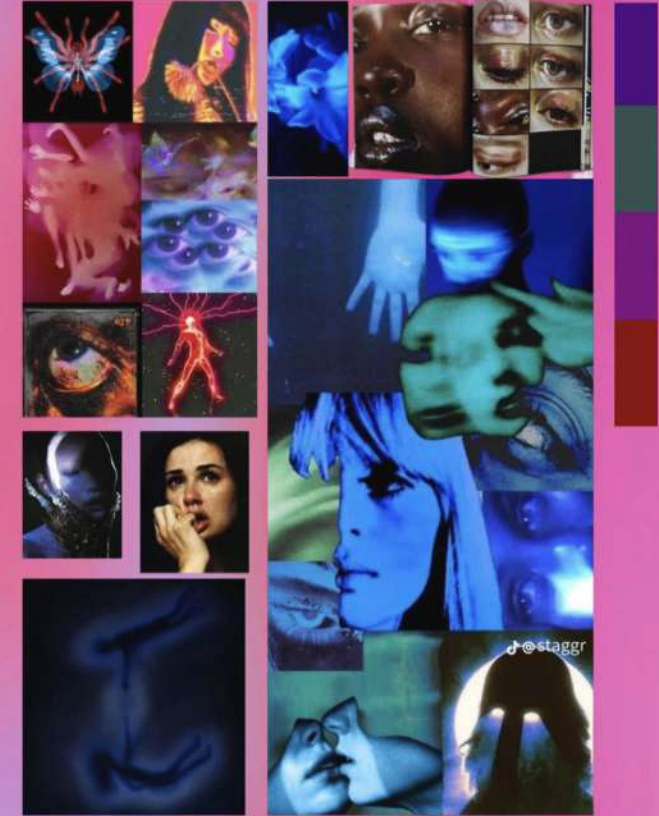
**Color:** Vivid red, orange, bright yellow, -candy pink tones

**Emotions:** Sensory stimulation, impulsive desire, over-saturated temptation



**Color:** Pale gray, icy blue, misty lavender, polished white

**Emotions:** Self-disciplint, internalized regulation, the body as a system endpoint



**Collapse**

**Color:** Dark red, deep purple, indigo, ashen black

**Emotions:** Shame, breakdown, emotional overflow, the relapse into craving

# Visual Reference

## 《Blade Runner》

Film Color Analysis | Friends and collaborators, Denis Villeneuve and Roger Deakins achieved something special with Blade Runner 2049. The film is such a visual and auditory feast that filmmakers have continued to dismantle and replicate its techniques for years.

Whether employing colors to evoke emotions or simply understanding how the viewer's eye moves, these filmmakers undoubtedly brought a fresh approach to dystopian science fiction.

**Pink and purple** are often associated with luxury, ambiguity, innocence, romance, and generally...

harmlessness. It's fitting that Villeneuve uses these colors to represent K's romantic feelings (even if that romantic aspect is clearly manufactured by the world around him). These hues offer an almost ethereal break from the horrors of the events unfolding against him.

Only near the film's end does K realize his true purpose or mission. This use of color can be seen as a way to minimize the gap between the orange hues of Las Vegas, the harsh blues of the future, and white.

# Visual Reference



Villeneuve uses **the color green** almost every time K's robot companion, Joi, appears, and when we see Wallace's work. Green often represents life and vitality, a concept explored in the Blade Runner films.



Throughout the film, K finds himself engulfed in a monotonous white environment, one in which he seems to blend in. Whether it's the police office, the snow, or the film's opening, this use of **white** frames K as a being in almost disguise, navigating a world that doesn't want to know him.

# Visual Reference

**Glitch art** is the practice of using digital or physical manipulation to create aesthetically pleasing displays of digital or physical artifacts. Glitch art is used in visual art, for example, in Len Lye's film *A Color Box* (1935), Nam June Paik's video sculpture *TV Magnet* (1965), and in more contemporary works, such as Cory Arcangel's *Panasonic Plasma Screen Burn* (2007).

Many believe that glitch art primarily expresses a desire for destruction. The truth is, quite the opposite: it helps us escape the despair of technological dystopia and regain the motivation to engage with reality. In a world plagued by widespread "digital depression," studying glitch art holds significant practical significance.

According to Sean Cubitt's classic definition, a glitch is an electronic disturbance in the transmission of information that is visible or audible to the senses. Cubitt argues that glitches "interrupt communication and distract the viewer without (completely) destroying the system in which they occur."

In reality, the sources of failures are extremely diverse and cannot be neatly categorized into these two clear-cut categories. Failures can arise from issues within the computer system, from user actions, or even involve political and ideological influences. Therefore, any emphasis on a single source can lead to a biased understanding of failures.



Rosa Monkman's glitch art



Juan Gris: Man in the Cafe

# Visual Reference

**Programs will no longer be written by humans, but rather by algorithms operating autonomously based on human questions or instructions.**

When we issue instructions, the potential for failure is rewritten and transformed in an opaque loop. Failures will no longer be brief interruptions in a system or process, because systems in this new sense are no longer linear. They will become a composite woven from disparate loops, so failures will extend, leave traces, dissipate, and reappear randomly when the system receives the next instruction.

The algorithm for achieving glitch-style rendering in screen space relies on four key aspects:

**Noise function selection:** The noise function is the source of various interference signals.

**UV dithering method selection:** After applying the noise function to the screen-space UV, sampling is performed based on the new UV to produce the dithered glitch effect.

**Sampling channel selection:** Sampling RGB separately or selecting specific channels for sampling allows for a variety of glitch effects.

**Color space conversion:** Utilizing conversions between YUV, CMY, HSV, YIQ, YCbCr, and YC1C2 spaces and RGB space allows for a variety of glitch effects.



«Ghost in the Shell»



«Blade Runner 2049»

# Visual Reference

## Character modeling Between reality and virtuality

The relationship between the virtual girlfriend and the replicant is mutually reinforcing, yet also polar opposites. One is real, the other virtual, leaving humanity's future uncertain.

When Joy first "appears," raindrops hit her, creating a blur between physical and virtual form. Does this symbolize the blurred line between replicants and humans?

The film uses the dualistic relationship between existence and consciousness to briefly summarize the philosophical question of "identity" raised in the first film, but then uses the concept of "collective/individual consciousness" to explore the future of humanity.

K, who knows the truth, hears Wallace's advertisement about Joey again. The picture is filled with blue light, showing the character's sadness and loneliness. When he looks up at Joey, his face is hit by purple light. Joey himself is virtual, and the dreamy purple shows that the protagonist has recognized the falsity of the world.



# Production

## Act 1 Craving Stage

This stage is all about the start of desire.

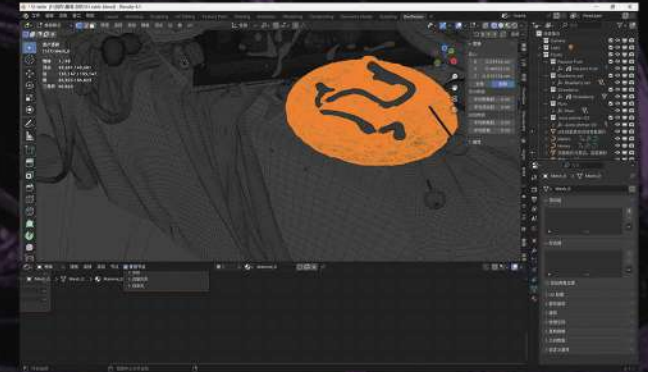
The protagonist is constantly being pushed by social media algorithms—things that look good, food that looks amazing—so she gradually becomes visually hooked.



Block-out/Gray-box



Low-Ploy Model



High-Ploy Model



Baking&Texturing



Lighting



Scene after adding models

# Production

## Act 1 Craving character



She's not actually eating at this point. She's just watching, imitating, and getting more and more addicted. Visually, I'm using highly saturated colours like candy red, pink and orange.

The pacing is fast, and there's a sense of constant information overload-kind of like TikTok or Xiaohongshu's sliding interface. There are also UI bubbles popping up all the time, like "You may also like..."-creating this feeling of never-ending temptation.

# Production

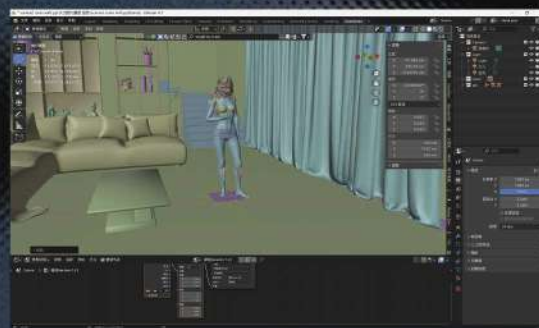
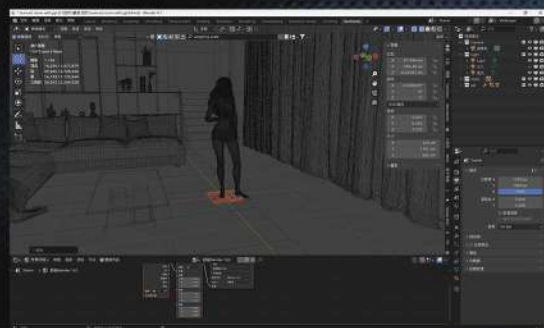
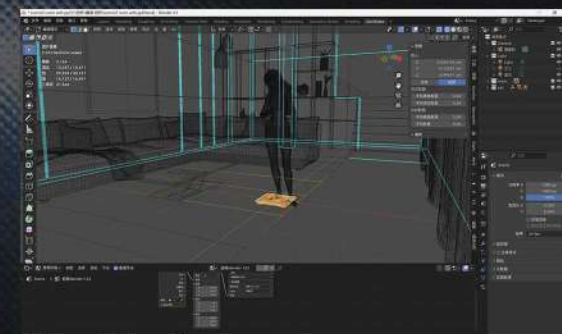
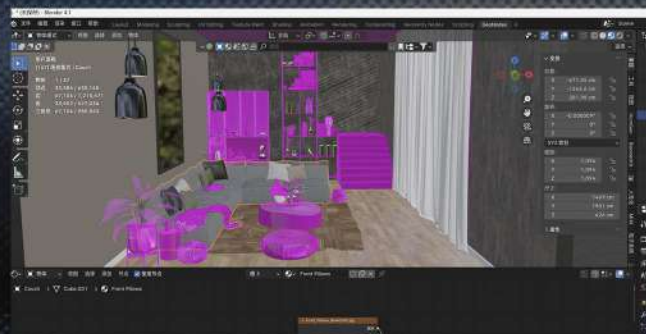
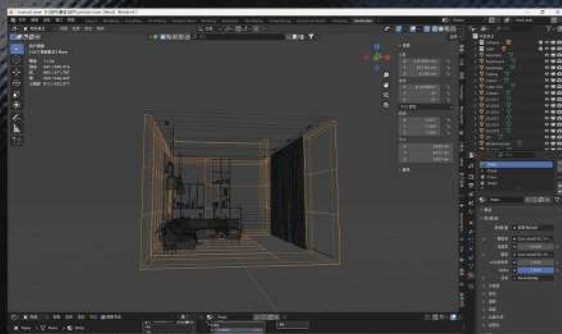
## Act 2 Control Stage

### Modeling scene construction process

Then we shift into the control phase.

Here, the algorithm's role changes. Instead of just tempting her, it now starts to act like a "virtual health coach."

She begins to track her weight, count calories, and follow platform-led routines like daily workout check-ins.



Visually, I've moved into cooler tones-icy blue, misty white, soft purples.

The space feels very clean and clinical, like a fitness studio or a surveillance room.

Her body basically becomes a data terminal-every movement links back to digital feedback.

On the surface, it looks like she's in control and self-disciplined, but actually, the pressure is quietly building inside.

# Production

## Act 2 Control character

**Narrative Focus:** The phase of self-discipline. Influenced by platform suggestions, the protagonist enters a state of calorie tracking and body management -with the algorithm acting as a friendly "fitness coach."



### What She Does:

Performs repetitive workouts in a sterile white room

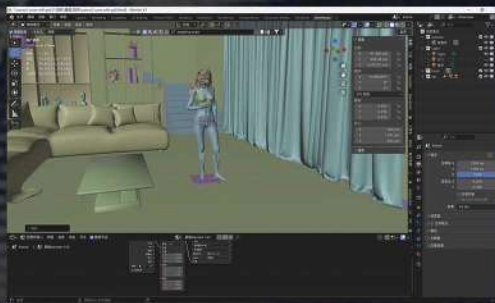
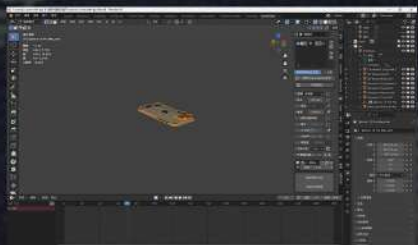
Logs body weight, calorie counts, goals

Uses slimming filters in selfies but never posts them

Mimics reward-based systems: task complete-algorithm praises her

# Production

## Act 2 Control visual interpretation



### Visual Tone:

Cool tones: icy blue, mist white, pale lavender

Orderly space, glossy and clinical like a gym surveillance room

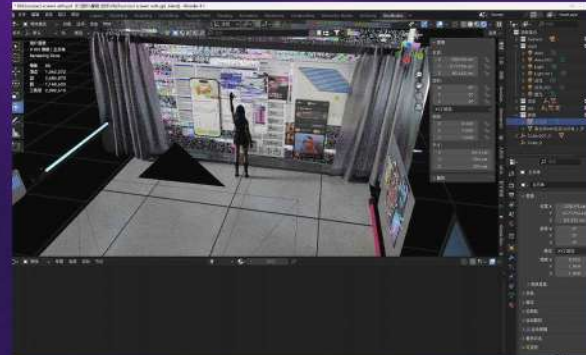
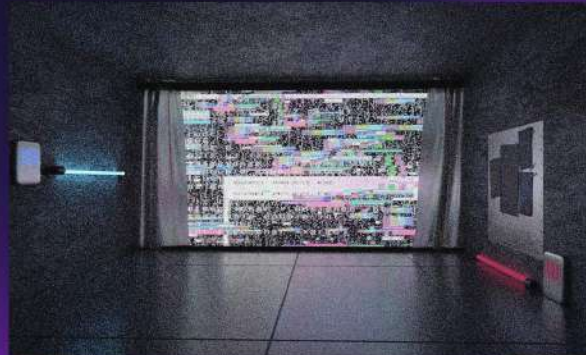
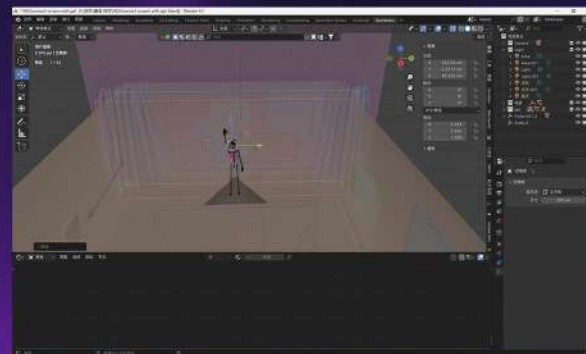
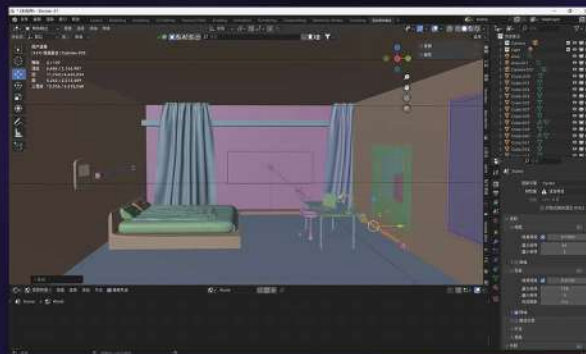
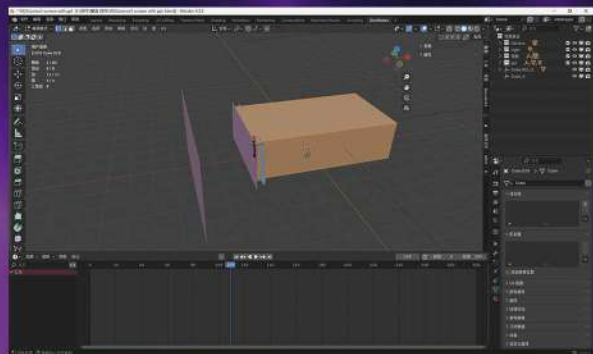
Minimal UI: progress bars, badges, calorie dashboards

Emotional Arc: Reinforced control-Physical restraint-Hidden internal tension

Keywords: Diet apps, digitized body, self-discipline, silent compliance

# Production

## Act 3 Collapse stage

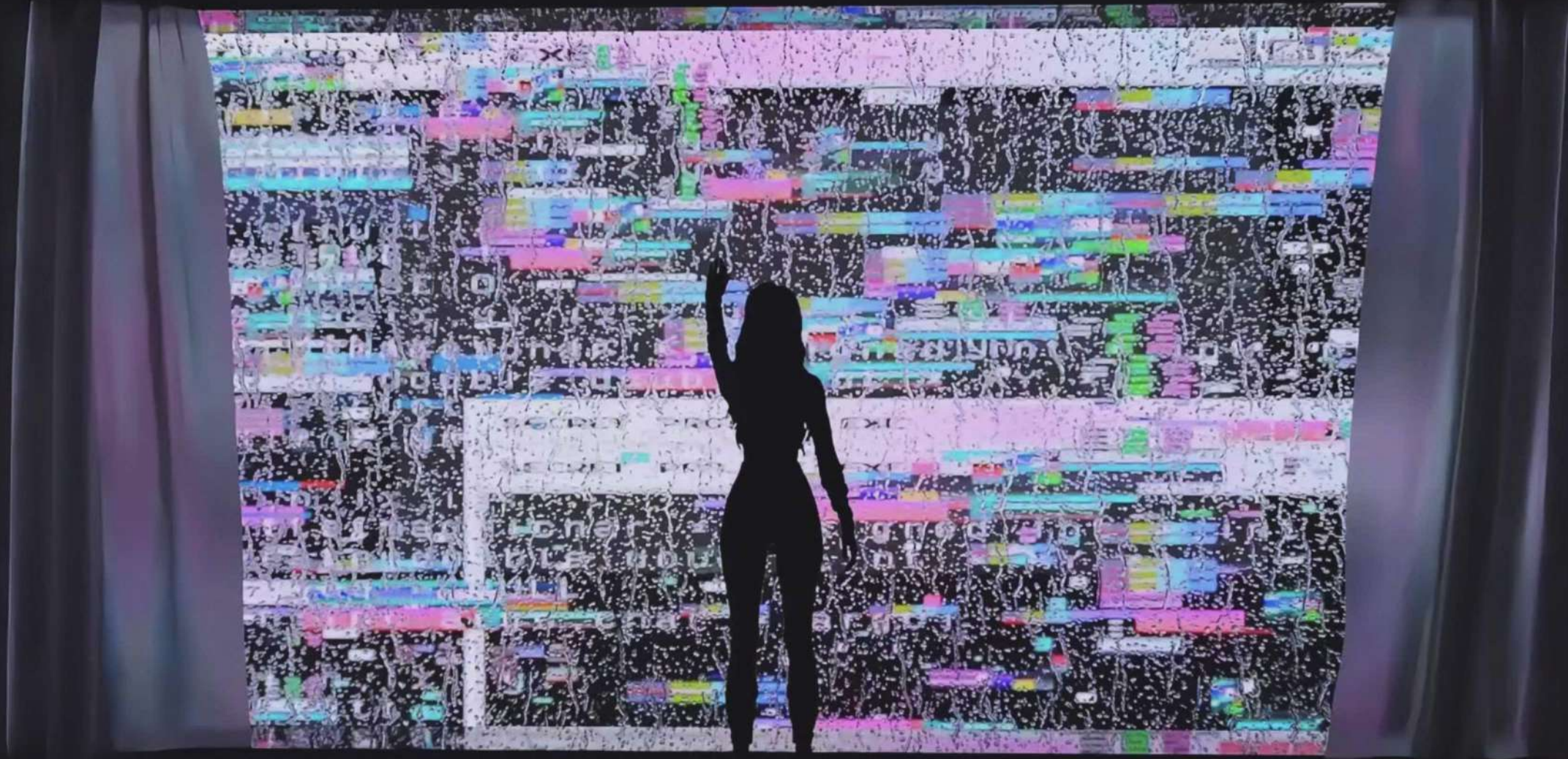


### Narrative Focus:

The backlash of body and mind. Unable to sustain control, the protagonist falls into a loop of bingeing, shame, and emotional crash- pushed deeper by the algorithm.

### Visual Tone:

Distorted mix of deep purples, dirty pinks, and smoky greys Unstable camera work, glitch edits, UI break-downs

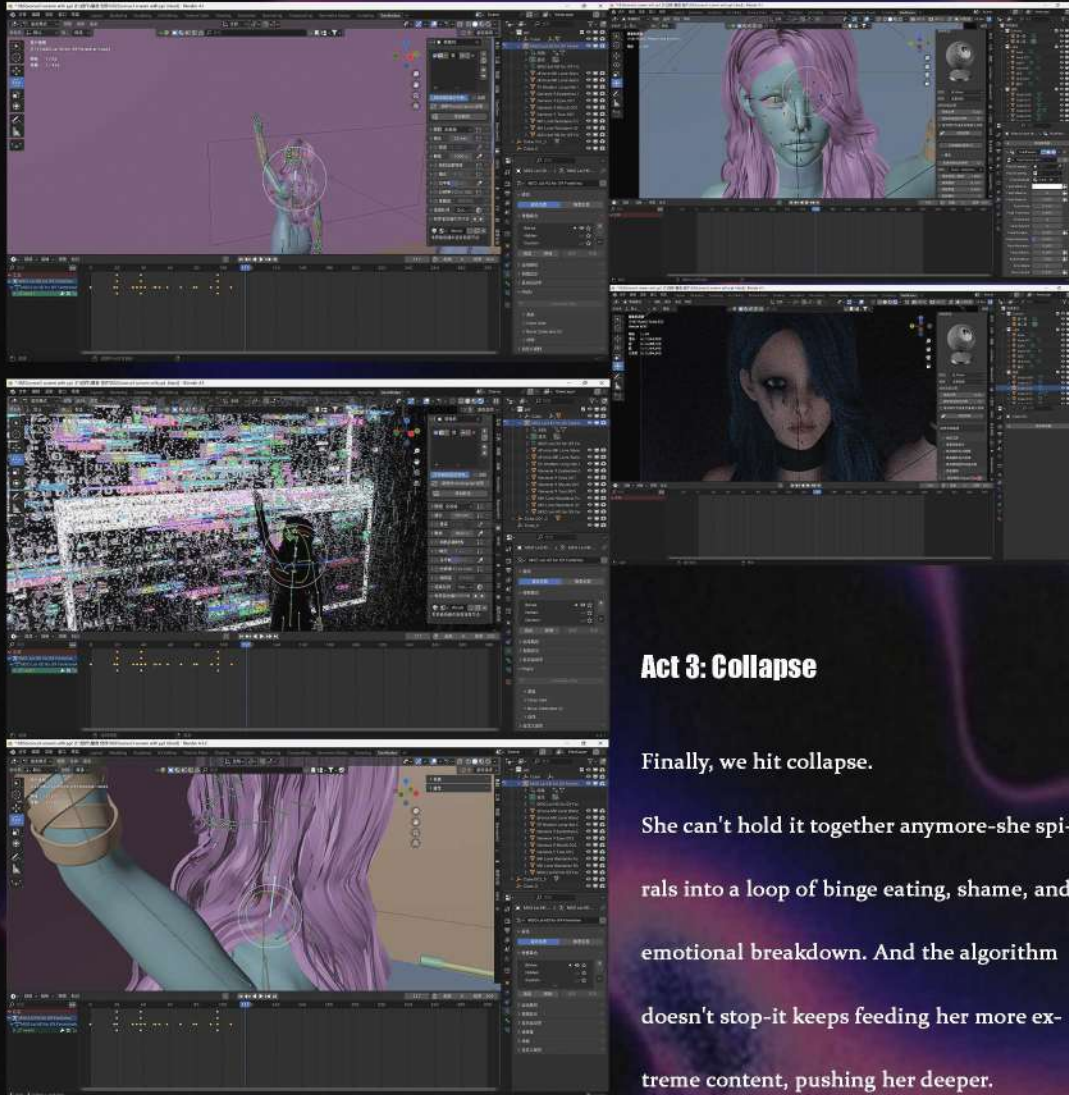


***Act 3 Collapse stage-UI breakdowns 1***

# Production

## Act 3 Collapse visual interpretation

*Character interpretation process - touching the faulty UI to show the inner struggle process*



She starts endlessly scrolling, deleting selfies, crying in front of the mirror-everything's falling apart.

Visually, this act is chaotic and fragmented: deep purples, dirty pinks, blacks and greys mixed together. The camera starts shaking, editing becomes glitchy, UI flickers-as if the system itself is breaking down too.

And by the end, the whole cycle is ready to start all over again.

### Act 3: Collapse

Finally, we hit collapse.

She can't hold it together anymore-she spirals into a loop of binge eating, shame, and emotional breakdown. And the algorithm doesn't stop-it keeps feeding her more extreme content, pushing her deeper.



*Final rendering visual*



Act 3 Collapse stage-UI breakdowns 2