

UN/FRAMING THE QUEER MEDIA BODY: A VIRTUAL REALITY EXPERIMENTATION

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Abstract: The article explores and discusses the doctoral research's creative, digital, and visual representation through the "RADICANT 003" virtual reality experience. Grounded in visual methods and the arts sciences, the article outlines its overall structure and contextualizes it within the broader research that in/forms it. It introduces Guma Joana, the Brazilian artist at the centre of this phase of the project. The article articulates theory and practice, ethnography and data presentation. And it is the experience we offer of the work of the artist and of our own view of her that accounts for this dual operation. The paper details two digital mechanisms designed to engage users within the virtual reality environment: one mechanism deconstructs Instagram posts, while the other immerses the user in 360° videos.

Keywords: 360° ; Body ; Images ; Queer ; Virtual Reality.

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1. Introduction

This article presents and discusses a creative, digital and visual approach to the restitution of academic research through the "RADICANT 003" virtual reality experience. The latter is deeply rooted in the doctoral research that in/forms it, particularly focusing on the work of Brazilian transvestite artist Guma Joana (Emery, 2024). This research explores the critical potential of contemporary queer corporealities within a neoliberal context, examining the intersections of gender, body, and the socio-political dynamics in contemporary Brazil. Here, for reasons of time and means, the proposal is a prototype that takes as its starting point our ethnographies with Guma Joana – it should be specified that this is a restitution initiated without any relationship with the artist. However, we met her at the end of August 2024, and she tried it out twice with a friend. For lack of time, however, the proposal discussed remains an analysis in progress, and no evaluation of the reception could be carried out within the time-frame of this research project; a collaborative version with her is planned shortly. We would nevertheless stress that such a study is necessary and even essential for the future.

The growing interest in digital methodologies among scientists reflects the evolving legitimacy of these approaches within academic research (Emery, 2021; Ibanez-Bueno & Marín, 2021; Emery & Marín, 2024; Le Coarer, 2024). Digital technologies are no longer viewed merely as tools but are increasingly recognized as environments, representations, and instruments that shape how research is both conducted and disseminated. These technologies provide new avenues for exploring complex social issues, particularly in the realm of gender and sexuality studies. As Bourdeloie (2021) notes, digital tools offer a unique opportunity for the political mobilization of sexual and gender minorities, enabling them to challenge dominant narratives and assert their agency within public discourse. For instance, smartphones have become a "strategic lens" (Lebovici, 2021, p. 146), enabling marginalized groups to construct "critical gazes" (hooks, 1992, p. 115) on the objectification of their bodies by various institutions—scientific, police, religious, and media alike. This critical engagement with digital technologies allows for the re-appropriation of one's image and identity, fostering a form of resistance against the oppressive structures that seek to regulate and define these bodies. However, while there has been significant exploration of how these technologies can be utilized for advocacy and resistance, less attention has been given to how academics themselves use digital tools to investigate and present their research.

The RADICANT 003 project addresses this gap by exploring how immersive digital devices can offer new ways of presenting research outcomes. The article proposes two mechanisms within the virtual reality experience, such as the decomposition of Instagram publications and the immersive 360° video environments, which encourage users to engage with the research material. These mechanisms are not merely technical features, they represent a methodological shift in how we conceive of and interact with research data. This article thus integrates concepts from the art sciences and film studies in a heuristic and interdisciplinary manner, allowing for a deeper analysis of images and their interactions while also considering the role and place of bodies within digital experimentation. Moreover, it situates itself within the broader field of visual methods, which encompass all research methodologies in the humanities and social sciences that extend beyond traditional written forms of scientific argumentation (Boulloires et al., 2017). This approach allows for a more expansive understanding of how research can be conducted, presented, and experienced, pushing the boundaries of conventional academic discourse. By engaging with new hypermedia languages for research dissemination, the RADICANT 003 project offers a glimpse into the future of academic research, where digital tools not only facilitate investigation but also become integral to the process of knowledge creation and dissemination (Emery & Ibanez-Bueno, 2024).

2. Context of the Research: A Feminist Ethnographic Study

1. *Guma Joana : A Transvestite Artist*

Guma Joana is a transvestite artist on the contemporary scene in the city of São Paulo. Since 2019, she has been performing in clubs at night, in the city's underground parties, where she performs acts that dialogue with electronic music. Her performances are part of a *queer povera* praxis and aesthetic (Preciado, 2001, p. 16) - a reference to Arte Povera, an art form described as poor because of the precariousness of the materials used and the lack of interest in technical complexity. A self-taught seamstress, Guma Joana also offers a collection of clothes every six months at the Casa de Criadores designer fashion event. This is an opportunity for her to express her experience of transvestism, while at the same time attempting to parade only trans/transvestite models. The artist evolves in a context, which she supports and recalls as much as possible, where Brazil is the first country in the world, for the 14^e consecutive year (Antra, 2022), to see the most trans/transvestite people murdered.



Figure 1: Screenshot of the *RADICANT 003* main area

2. *A Queer Corporeity Studied Offline and Online*

The term “queer” is a way of describing not only those who practice non-normative sexualities, but also what appears generally “oblique” or “outside the norm” (Ahmed, 2006: 161). Queer allows a perspective on gender, the body and, more broadly, the social order. Our research collaboration with the artist leads us to consider how marginalized queer artists can re/challenge the neo-liberal hegemonic logics that force them to exist; in a system that values commercial visibility as a condition of existence. They are forced to adapt to this dynamic, particularly through how their bodies are exhibited in mediated and commodified trends. In this complex context, queer bodies are developing alternative aesthetics while at the same time being integrated into the commercial dynamics of the creative fashion industry. A semiotic study of Guma Joana's Instagram profile and an ethnographic approach to two fashion shows and two of her performances in São Paulo reveal these issues and constitute our research materials.

Because of this aesthetic-identitarian interest, our approach is “ethnographic” (Fassin *et al.*, 2020). In other words, it assumes and relies on a text-image relationship in the observation and analysis as well as in the presentation of the research. In the field, we use a video recording device consisting of a smartphone and a 360° camera, also known as an omnidirectional camera. The choice of 360° technology was initially a practical decision. Like a technological *Janus*, it records through two 180° lenses, each pointing in opposite directions inside the same electronic and computer housing. As a result, it enables us to capture a wider range of data as part of an investigative method that sees us, in the tradition of “patchwork ethnography” (Günel *et al.*, 2020), making short field visits: a temporary way of inhabiting, as a researcher, the situations designed and experienced by the Guma Joana. As our interest is the body, and in particular is aesthetic play in space, 360° also makes it easier to highlight “[...] the spaces and objects through which people experience themselves so that the different forms of identity reported (verbally) and shown (visually) are fully understood and immersed in the settings/spaces in which they occur” (Reavey, 2021, p. 10). But then, what can we do differently in the exercise of academic presentation so that the images we analyse and sometimes produce achieve a distinct potentiality, making a step aside from the neo-liberal hypocrisy?

3. *The Paradox of Individuation and Semio-capitalism*

According to Axel Honneth (2006), the neoliberal ideal of self-fulfilment, marked by the quest for autonomy and social recognition, is paradoxical. On the one hand, it is seen as a liberation from traditional constraints and an opportunity to develop one's unique talents. On the other hand, it encourages self-exploitation and also leads to a loss of control over one's environment by exacerbating social competition, which requires conformity to pre-established standards of success (Honneth, 2006, pp. 305-323). In this ‘network capitalism’ (Honneth, 2006, p. 294), freedom in the conduct of one's own life, the ideal of modern individualism, has been transformed into its opposite: the valorization and exploitation of subjective skills, the blurring of boundaries between private life and the public sphere, the mobilization for professional purposes of emotional and communicational resources, as well as informal skills specific to the lived world (Honneth, 2006, pp. 290-291).

Similarly, contemporary visibility operates within a specific ‘iconomy’ (Mondzain, 2001, p. 15), ‘that is, a principle of management and administration of visibilities’ (Mondzain, 2001, p. 15), which digital devices/social media condition. Unlike the model of mass production that was the cultural industry (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1974), Instagram, like the rest of social media, embodies a completely different model, writes Yves Jeanneret (2014, p. 51). These are effectively indifferent to the content produced, and rely instead on their ability to make their mediation the obligatory passageway to socialization and visibility (Jeanneret, 2014, p. 51). This is what the author calls ‘requisition’, i.e. the obligation to appear in these spaces (Jeanneret, 2014, p. 54). It is in this way that Instagram has become an indispensable medium (Chen, 2017), in particular for trying to make a living from one's artistic expression (Pieve, 2023).

The platform is a paroxysmal expression of a social space in which self-exposure, the entrepreneurship of one's existence and personal branding (Banet-Weiser, 2012) are valued: ‘an individual's life experience has been elevated to the rank of editorial content’ (Ben Amor and Granjet, 2011). The techno-semiotic features of Instagram are, for this reason, emblematic of the neo-liberal ideal of self-realization: they encourage the egocentric perspective of a quest for the self, a deformation of the principle of individuation according to Honneth (pp. 308-310), and promote ‘the aesthetic highlighting of a shifting identity’ (Honneth, p. 317).

4. *The Aims of a Visual and Digital Presentation of the Research*

As an act of presentation, this experimentation remains an integral part of our activity of ethno-graphic description, which is never a simple exercise in transcription and decoding, as

we recall with François Laplantine (1997, p. 54): It is “an activity of construction and translation, in the course of which the researcher *produces* more than he *reproduces*”; above all, this presentation consists of “‘making connections visible’ [...] it is an activity of transforming the visible” (Laplantine, 1997, p. 54).

In this way, the restitution seeks to open up beyond academic circles only, with a production that attracts the attention of a wider audience. In a feminist research approach, Vinciane Despret and Isabelle Stengers (2011, p. 200) invite us to “learn to make stories [and] to relay the stories that others make”. Yet, as Kenneth Gergen and Mary Gergen (2010, p. 84) point out, while the main target audience for research output in the form of a scientific text is scientists, it is the emerging forms of research output in the social sciences that offer “new possibilities for constructing the world and for establishing relationships within and outside knowledge-producing communities” (Gergen & Gergen, 2010, p. 87). In the visual methodologies in particular, “an emerging movement for new interactive writing” (Ibanez-Bueno & Marin, 2021) has been emerging for some years now. Thus, digital tools provide us with suitable perspectives for thinking about and producing such a reconstruction, based in particular on our 360° recordings and specific work with pixels.

Finally, it is an opportunity to respond to the call of Benedikte Zitouni, who writes that after conducting an investigation, “[...] from this call and this connection, we must generate shifted versions and worlds less ordered by the axes of domination” (Zitouni, 2017, p. 4). Called RADICANT 003, our VR experience finds its direct filiation with the one produced in 2019 for our Master's research work. *RADICANT* (2019) and its updated version, *RADICANT 002* (2022) offered the presentation of a short ethnographic study of a burlesque and queer cabaret in Brussels (Emery, 2021). Here we will detail the general architecture of the experiment we are proposing, as well as two of its particular functions. The first is the re-framing of the images studied - particularly those published on Instagram by Guma Joana - and the second is the enfolding of the user within the 360° recordings of the recorded situations. As we shall see, these elements constitute the “strategy of visual and auditory perception” (Maillot, 2000, p. 53) that we put in place in order to digitally immerse the user in an ethno-graphic research experience.

2. Overall VR Architecture

The experience we are proposing is a multi-sensory one. Following in the footsteps of the filmmaker and anthropologist Lucien Castaing-Taylor (2013), we strongly value the documentary component of our research and therefore consider, as he proposes, a certain disengagement with narrative and discursive clarity: “Generally speaking, documentaries either consist of a loose form of *cinéma vérité* that mindlessly repeats the innovations of the 60s and 70s, or they apply the forms of television journalism: disembodied voice-overs, expert testimony, interviews, additional music, etc. They always tend to favor narrative and discursive clarity to the detriment of the affinities that documentaries can have with novels or poetry (Castaing-Taylor, 2013)”.

This subsection aims to set out the general architecture of our project, in which the use of images recorded on-site, others gathered online, and the use of 3D imagery of our creation invites the user to establish links between them: “In this sense, the work of editing is closely akin to the writing phase, when the researcher organizes his ideas and presents to his reader, with varying degrees of rhetoric and artefacts, the features of reality that he deems relevant as a basis for his analysis, in other words, his vision of the world” (Le Gall, 2021). These involve us as subjects of the situations constructed by the artists. It is therefore a restitution that involves our experiential and sensory bodies as researchers (Müller, 2015).

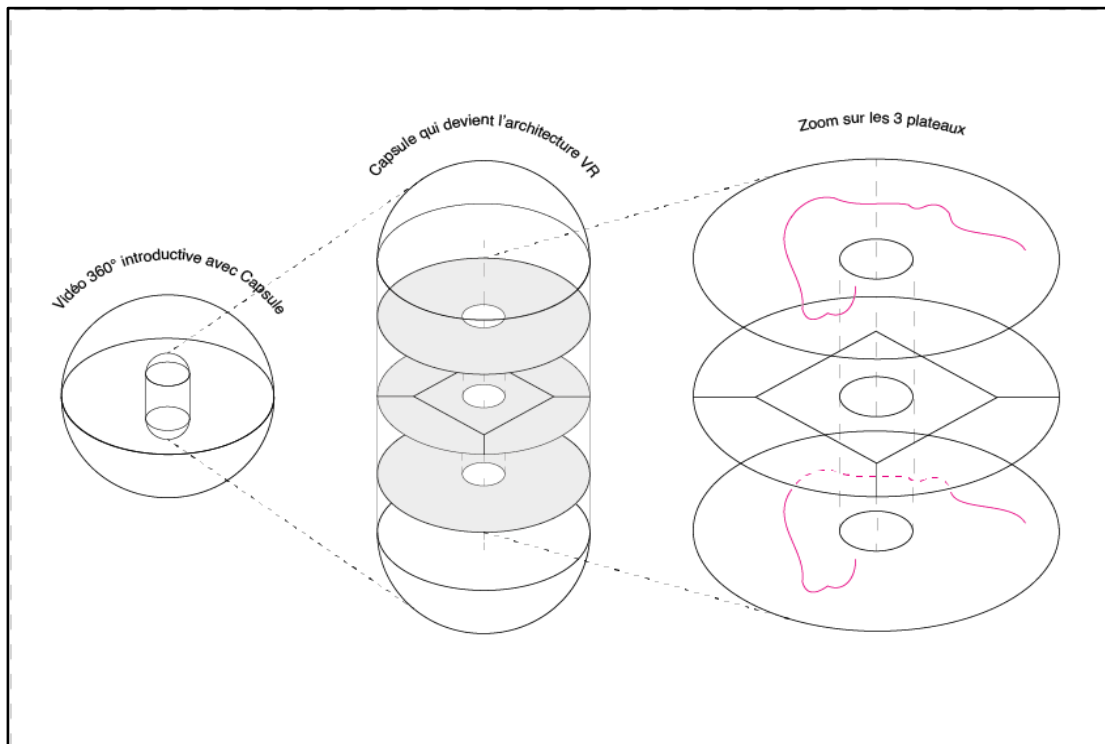


Figure 2: *Diagram of the virtual architecture of the VR experimental environment*

1. *Two Intertwined Realities*

The virtual experience is created using Unity, the game engine. This is a software package that provides the necessary tools and infrastructure (graphics, 2D and 3D modelling, virtual physics, audio, animation and scripting via the C# language) to create video games as well as immersive and interactive experiences (VR, AR, and XR). We also use Maxon Cinema 4D software for more advanced 3D modeling. The user enjoys the experience through a stand-alone virtual reality headset, the Meta Quest 2.

This VR headset is one of the main elements of the experience, since it is the headset that enables immersion in the virtual environment. It features an LCD screen for each eye with a resolution of 1832 x 1920 pixels, creating a perception of depth via a stereoscopic effect. The virtual immersion is accompanied by spatialized sound delivered by integrated speakers. Two joysticks allow users to interact with the digital environment by manipulating objects and moving around in virtual space. More generally, visual navigation within the experiment is achieved by operating the joysticks, because moving the body in tangible space does not lead to the user moving in virtual space. The movements of the head and the rotation of the body, on the other hand, allow the user to discover the virtual environment in a panoramic way.

2. *Libido Sciendi and Embedded Vision*

Once the headset is on, the user is introduced to the VR experience inside a capsule that is itself integrated into a sphere (figure 3). The sphere is a 360° video that literally sets the scene. The user sees us from above, with our voice saying: “Anh! You're floating... You're immobilized inside a capsule, but don't worry, once this introduction is over you'll be able to move around with the joysticks. You're entering an immersive research experience. It is the culmination of ethnographic work carried out in Brazil and France with queer artists on the critical potential of their corporeality in the constitution of a political counter-space. These helmets put you at the crossroads of various situations created by these artists and my own

sensitive, bodily state as a researcher. What do we bring back and share from such an experience? The architecture of the experience that takes shape around you is likely to evolve as you move through it, and you're sure to find out...”.



Figure 3: *From the user's perspective as he/she enters the experience*

Our perspective as a researcher is directly re/presented by the formalism of this 360° sphere. This formalization of the scientific *libido sciendi* gives an account of the responsibility of the point of view that we adopt on this experience and the recordings that are shown. A configuration that traps the user by mirroring his/her own *libido sciendi*. This introduction in the form of an eyepiece is a reference to the big eye that the audience becomes in the cinema, according to the poet Jules Supervielle (1925); and it seems to be the same when the user begins the experience by placing the helmet over his eyes.

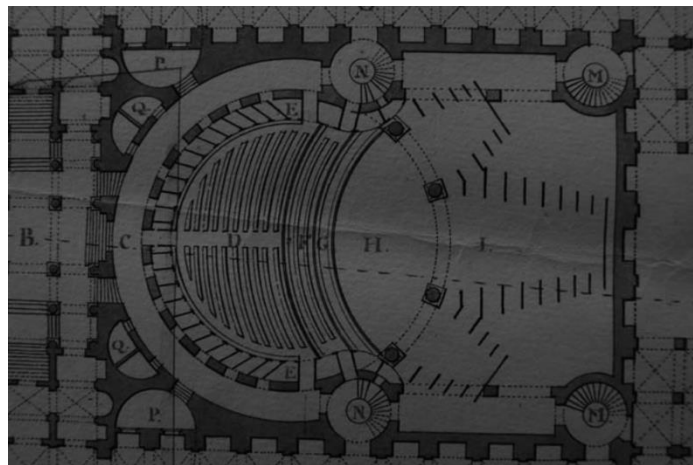


Figure 4: *Plan of the design by Charles de Wailly & Marie-Joseph Peyre for the Odéon (1770)*

Pannill Camp reminds us that the “profoundly phenomenological attitude” (2008, p. 140.) of artistic experiences about vision is far from insignificant. It can be found in the oval or round opening in a wall or dome that has been called an Oculus since Antiquity. In pre-modern architecture (the Odéon theatre as designed by Charles de Wailly and Marie-Joseph Peyre in 1770, for example) and in contemporary display devices such as the virtual reality system from the American firm Oculus VR.

Once the 360° sphere has been introduced, it becomes opaque and the capsule containing the user expands to form the general architecture of the experience, divided into 3 platforms

(figure 2). We intend to inscribe the user on the side of the ethnographic device and our anthropological approach, and not on the side of a single anthropomorphic gaze.

3. *Space-time Capsule of Collected Data*

A miniaturized replica of the capsule sits at the centre of the space (figure 2). Both formally and conceptually, this capsule is a combination of four references. Firstly, the travel pods are used in science fiction films. We're thinking, for example, of Superman's capsule in the DC Comics universe, the one that allows him to leave his planet for Earth. Or the cryogenic pods used in several films in this genre. In our experience, it formalizes the user's journey through the headset between tangible and virtual space - the two being intertwined. It is also a reference to the architectural cells of the artist Absalon, such as *Cell No. 5* (1992). A distant echo of the cosmonaut's capsule (Bernard, 2022), his cells are elementary and nomadic living spaces, made to the proportions of the artist's body. To be able to inhabit these 'spaces of fiction and retreat [...] [which] float in an indeterminate space-time' (Bernard, 2022) you have to rethink your usual bodily choreographies, and this happens by the very fact of occupying them.

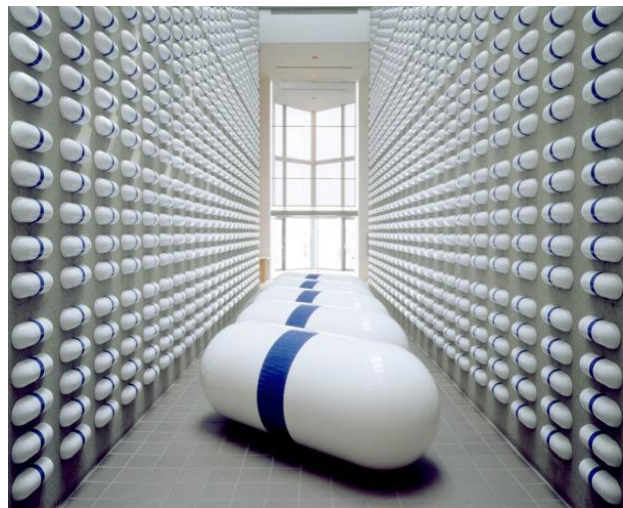


Figure 5: *General Idea, One Year of AZT (1991) and One Day of AZT (1991)*



Figure 6: *Absalon, Cell no. 5 (1992)*

This de/doing is similar to the bodily and spatial processes observed and analyzed with Guma Joana - presented in the experiment: leaving an established frame of reference to enter

another. AZT pills are also evoked, the anti-HIV drug used by the artists' trio General Idea in *One Day of AZT* (1991) and *One Year of AZT* (1991). A more general reference to the administration of biochemical substances with a view to the effects they can produce on the body (capable, like a drug, of altering one or more neuronal activities or, like a molecule, of blocking the multiplication of a virus). Lastly, it's a clear reference to the “techno-cocoon” that Alain Damasio talks about in his essays and fiction, an analogy of our lives caught up in the filter bubbles concocted from our data by digital and media technologies: “[t]he techno-cocoon is the horizon territory of this dream world of techno-capitalism. [...] Movement must generate traces, not freedom. Communication must feed data” (Damasio, 2024, p. 54).

4. *Tree Sets of Speeds*

The user moves on an orthogonal grid, with only the horizontal axis visible. This grid refers initially to the Western phenomenological tradition and its system of seeing: the perspective grid, an optical invention of the Quattrocento that marked the beginning of the alliance between representation and narrative in the West. This plane is placed between two others (figure 2). In both the top and bottom shots, 3D-modelled bodies dance to the rhythm of the electronic vibrations of a club that can be heard through headphones. The user is not caught between these two spaces but rather falls into a gap that we want to suggest to him or her: that of our ethnographic device.

As he moves through the virtual space, the user sees two trails drawn respectively on the two sections of grids that frame him (figure 1). These lines, which appear above and below him/her, evoke his/her interstitial and ghostly presence between the dancing bodies, as well as capturing his/her presence in the experiment. As Damasio and so many others have noted, identity has now given way to traceability and to what Paul Virilio has called “trajectography” (2018). In other words, what we are concerned with here, is digital devices guide “digital wandering” (Chabert, 2015, p. 102). Online, by gathering information through consensual spying on our digital activities - in exchange for cookies, for example - “centralized algorithmic pairings” (Simioni & Steiner, 2022) in/form our journeys within their system, which individualizes our experiences as much as possible - they shape the paths we take. In this way, our experience also reflects the traceability we experience as researchers during our online ethnographies.

5. *The Radicant Instead of the Network*

What we are trying to do in this reconstruction is to use immersive mechanics, i.e. virtual action and interaction. To demonstrate the intersubjective pathway that has been built up in the situations observed and filmed by an alliance of artists/researchers/devices. This path is similar to Nicolas Bourriaud's description of the contemporary subject as the object of negotiation, which he calls the ‘radicant’ (Bourriaud, 2009, pp. 50-68). One of its characteristics is ‘inhabiting existing structures: accepting to become the tenant of present forms, even if it means modifying them to a greater or lesser extent’ (Bourriaud, p. 64). Like the queer body we are studying, which poaches and (tinkers with) the epistemology of gender difference.

It is the presence of the subject, removed by Deleuze and Guattari in their conception of the rhizome, that interests us here. In their desire to go beyond Cartesian dualism and its particularly hierarchical tree structure, subject and object have, according to Bourriaud, been ousted. The author thus continues the botanical metaphor of the two intellectuals and proposes an analogy with the radicant - derived from the botanical term radical - a climbing plant that plants its roots as it advances over the territory: “The radicant thus differs from the rhizome in

the emphasis it places on the itinerary, the journey, as a dialogical, or intersubjective, narrative between the subject and the surfaces it traverses [...] The radican subject is thus presented as a construction, a montage: in other words, a work, born of infinite negotiation” (Bourriaud, 2009, p. 63).

Unlike the rhizome, the radican opens up to the subject from the outset by taking the form of a trajectory, in other words, the path of a singular subject. Bourriaud does not, of course, remove the need for multiplicity and plurality that is the richness of the metaphor of ramifications, but articulates the movement of each of these parts in a dynamic of the subject's wandering (Bourriaud, p. 50-68): the identity of the subject, far from being static, can thus be grasped through a dynamic process.

The user experiences this process not only sensorially, but also plastically through the evolving capsule described above, and through the entity that inhabits it (figure 1). This entity, which we call the Root Entity, gathers fragments of images from the surfaces crossed by the user and deploys them between its nodes. What is then challenged for the user is a shared subjectivity, exhibited like a virtual work of art - the result of the user's journey through the virtual spaces. The entity evolves as the user moves through it, and the capsule that houses it mutates to become the exhibition space for this digitally shared subjectivity. This question of mutation becomes essential to understanding how RADICANT 003 allows the user to put on a tangible suit (the VR headset) to enter the in/tangible space (the VR experience). This protocol invites the user to take (his/her) place in an inhabitable space (the capsule) that allows him/her to travel. A meta-morphosis of the ‘I’ of the user towards the Other through queer spaces of re/presentation, to consider political counter-spaces.

2. The First act: Re-framing Images and Body

1. A Virtual De/composition

In the virtual space, the user is surrounded by Guma Joana's Instagram publications. One of the first benefits of our settings is that when the user passes through an image, he or she activates a decomposition of it (previously set by us; figures 7 & 8) into a certain number of meaningful elements (also previously selected by us). This decomposition suggests to the user that each body and each image presented to him/her is a set of signifying elements.

As we have been able to study in a dedicated study (Emery, 2024), her participation in fashion shows fits into the usual patterns and conventions of the system. Despite the difficulty of integrating such trans/transvestite corporealities, this system of representation and exploitation of trends is not affected by it. As intermediary bodies between the production and consumption processes, their mannequins, like all the others, undergo a semiotic reduction: they become sign-bearers. Thus, Instagram is used as a ‘brand-tool’ (Jeanneret, 2014, p. 43) to re/present oneself as a brand and a work tool: ‘[...] it is a very particular brand, in that it embodies a medium, a type of tool, a mode of communication and a meeting place all at once’ (Jeanneret, 2014, p.43).

When any kind of decomposition takes place in the VR experimentation, the elements detached from the initial image support are connected to other elements by the creation of new links. This connection acts as a wider network for these elements, with certain signs that are similar to them in virtual space, and then with data that we have collected in the field (images, sound extracts from interviews, etc.).

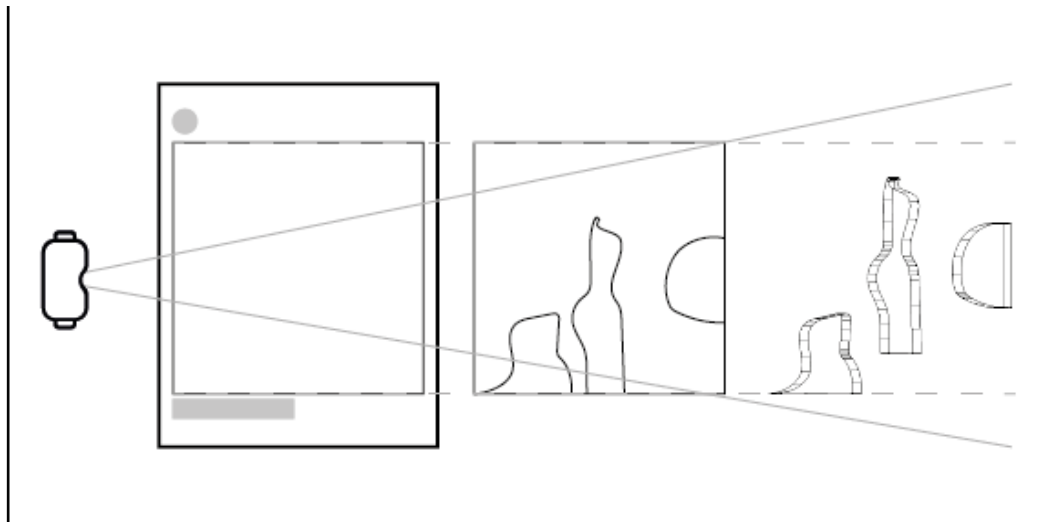


Figure 7: *Diagram of the process of image decomposition by the user*



Figure 8: *Decomposition by the user of an Instagram publication of the artist Guma Joana*

2. *To compose a non-Signifying Body*

As the user moves through this digital environment, the images become unframed. This de/composition makes each sign crossable. This pass-through triggers the migration of the sign to a see-through stela (figure 9). Over time, a headless, tailless pile (without beginning or end) forms on this support - an unreadable body that we call the *non-Signifying Body*. It opens up access to 360° recordings.

We spell it “nSB” to mark our affiliation with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1980) concept of “Body without Organs (BwO)” - a terminology they borrowed from Antonin Artaud (1945). In their conceptualization of the BwO, the two authors strip the human organ of all identity and function. It is nothing more than a framework for a possible future. It is an act of reappropriating the organ to think about its functioning in an alternative way and according to

the desired needs. In this way, the body is no longer a spatial assembly of organs that are correctly constituted and reproducible according to a design or anatomical template. It is therefore an analogy with the social body. By allowing the user to digitally de/compose such a body, we aim to enable him or her to question queer aesthetic representations and labels. To get the user to consider the possibility of signs escaping the functions assigned to them by both the binary sex-gender system and the visual industry: “This frees us from preconceived, rigid or obsolete notions, and allows us to take control of the associations between images and concepts and engage in a free play between signifiers and signifieds - a dance in which elements are pitted against each other and signifieds collapse or are displaced, activating new and unexpected meanings” (Ortiga, 2019, p. 9).

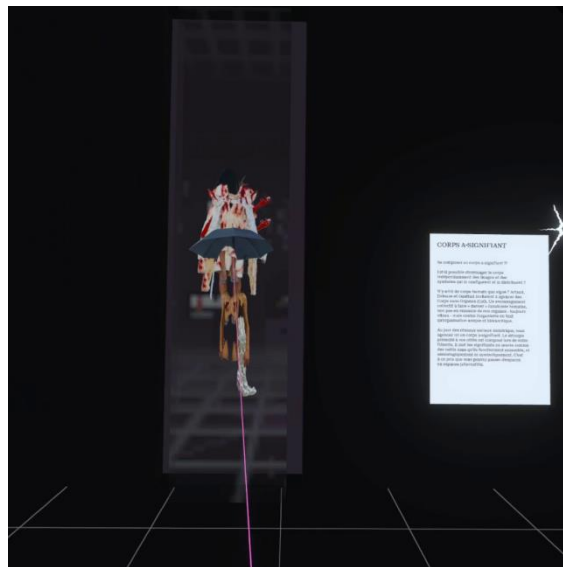


Figure 9: *Composition of the non-Signifying Body (nSB) on the stele*

The idea here is close to the cut-up technique used by Williams S. Burroughs, who cut out newspapers here and there. Burroughs, who cut up newspapers here and there. Like the user, the writing brought together various fragments of pre-existing texts to produce fragmented, unstable prose (could this be possible with AI?). The collages by two Brazilian artists, Odires Mlászho and Cintia Ribas, offer an interesting complement.

Our digital cut-up process, set in motion by the very presence and interaction of the user with the immersive mechanism, sets in motion a process of producing new images. The accumulation of pieces forms this nSB in the form of a cut, copied and pasted body. Although it is not initially a conscious and intentional assemblage - although it may become so when the user becomes aware of the accumulation - it is a production generated by the user's own journey, a poetic re/presentation of that journey.

The accumulation of fragments, in the manner of these artworks, can lead to the emergence of new images that are no longer just a collection of signs, but a presence, charged with affect, that resonates on an in/conscious level. The concept of image considered here is that of verbal, visual and mental images (Mitchell, 1986). Thus, following Baitello (2005), between the (external) world, proposed by the user's experience and the user's internal world - via the body's sensory organs - the creation of visual, mental and sound images can emerge; the connection between physical (also virtual) artefacts and mental images being precisely a dynamic process between the image, the medium(s) and the body, explains Belting (2006).

By un/framing images in this way, our experiment proposes a meta-morphosis of the framing that is Instagram, with its public and private boundaries. If identities are indeed self-produced, they are never self-referential, explains Cyril Lemieux (2020p. 128); they are part of a network of codes and signs that the user's de/composition brings to light, and within which the user (self-) composes a nSB.



Figure 10: *Odiros Mlászho, Butcher IV (2007)*

2. The Second Act: User Immersion

360° video capture is an ethnographic recording tool. Here, we will be having a closer look at these characteristics, which are correlated with virtual reality (VR) immersion in the form of a virtual bubble. With its singular point-of-view articulated around a pivot point, and its panoramic form that includes the user at its centre, VR immersion in 360° recording is capable, in our view, of opening up a sensible space. Within this space, the user is caught up in ambiguities. Particularly since virtual reality and 360° “give an essential place to aesthetics, and to the devices that have successively shaken and redefined common sensibility” (Déotte, 2010). It's also an opportunity to question the place of the user *in* and *in front* of the image.

5.1 *A Queer Peephole*

The insertion of our 360° recordings of Guma Joana's performances into the VR experience aims to immerse the user in the situations filmed: they offer both a vision of the artist's gesture and of the space surrounding it. As mentioned above, these two elements are discussed in theoretical terms by our experiential body of research. Our intervention on the 360° recordings is limited to colour correction and cuts into scenes.

The 360°, which could claim to provide a glimpse of an objective experience of the situations recorded, is immediately thrown into confusion by the aesthetics of our video footage. We are reminded, as Anne-Marie Duguet (1988) points out, that the recording device imposes its own parameters and data, thus engaging the recorded situations in a new way. In this case, we're talking first and foremost about chromatic aberrations and flicker, due to the quality of the mid-range lenses used in these cameras. This specific materiality of the image is part of the

logic of “hypermediacy” (Bolter and Grusin, 2000, p. 31) mentioned above. In other words, the quality of the images, in place of transparency that would erase the machine of vision (Virilio, 1968) as a machine, suggests itself to the user as a partial mediation of reality. Secondly, the reality of the user's virtual presence in these scenes is ambivalent. The ambiguity of this presence, which we shall discuss later, is amplified by the unfolding of the scenes and the games of bodily confusion that operate within them. These distortions of shape and form singularly nourish a diegetic potential that enriches the aesthetic and immersive experience. The formal aspect of the 360° peephole, to which we will also return more specifically, immediately invites us to support an inner affinity - that of the queer, which Muriel Plana compares to a magnifying glass or a telescope: “[...] through which we can describe, examine and interpret social, media or artistic objects, or in some cases both social, media and artistic objects, from recent, modern and postmodern eras, as well as from periods long before the concept was invented” (Plana, 2014, p. 14).

It is worth noting that when users enter the experience, they don't immediately have access to 360° video recordings. These appear according to the composition of the nSB he/she is composing. It is therefore the user's virtual becoming that opens up access to these recordings. The latter takes the shape of a sphere, enveloping the user as he/she approaches (figure 11). In other words, access to these spaces is achieved through the dis/figuration of an avatar (nSB) within a figurative environment populated by signs, since the user's path only accentuates the de/composition of the images present in the surroundings.

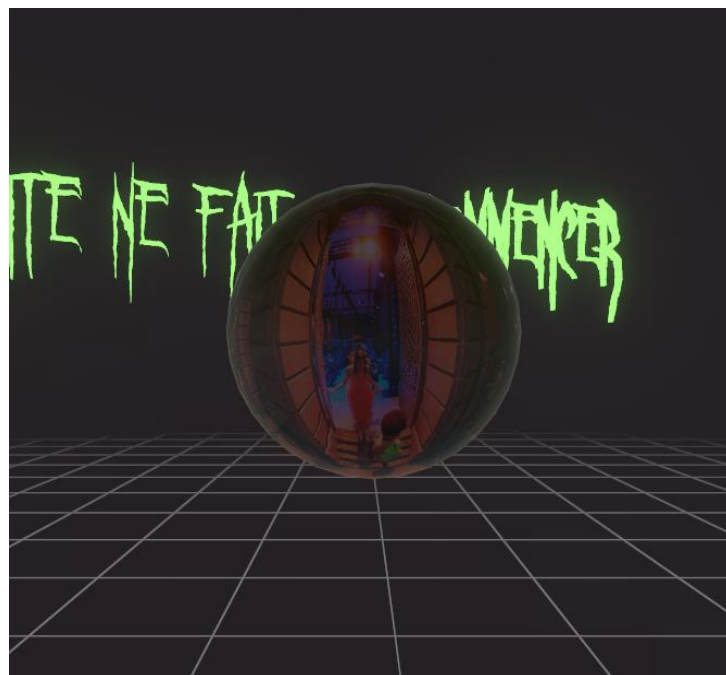


Figure 11: 360° video in the shape of a peephole bubble, before the user's immersion in it

5.2 *The Imprint of the Device and its Aesthetic Influences*

The user's immersion in our recordings is fundamental. So we're having a closer look at the user's own characteristics. Let's take a mound of terracotta called *Soffio 6* (1978). Although divergent from our context (figure 12), since Giuseppe Penone's work questions the inscription of the human body and its destiny in nature, this heap of terracotta interests us for the “in/visible” (Veyrat, 2015, p. 153) processes it manages to reveal and exalt in a subtle and rather obvious way.

Here, the artist shapes the volume of the air expelled from his mouth, forming the imprint of his body inverted by the exhalation of his breath into this clay urn. Like this sculpture, the 360° video capture appears to in/form the visible retranscription of his imprint: the shape through which the spherical video capture is seen and experienced in VR seems to result from a swelling by inspiration and digital inversion of the visible. Where Penone breathlessly excavates the visible to show its other, constitutive face, 360° metaphorically inhales the visible to produce a decalcomania on the reverse side of a sphere - perception thus becomes interior to the pixelated matter of the visible. Like the clay the artist uses, inside and outside, empty and full, are simultaneously experienced within the 360° spherization, as are shape and formlessness, figurative and figural. This digital decalcomania is that of a shared subjectivity. Shared between the situation being filmed, our own subjectivity as a researcher who places the camera in a specific spot, and the camera's computer program. It is itself composed of subjectivities, making technical and technological decisions based on the electronic components and the demands of the company marketing the camera.

This 360° landscape is thus shaped inter-subjectively, between the artist who in/forms an artistic situation and the researcher who gives it this specific existence through this mediatization. It is also shaped with the space that hosts it (which has materiality), within a transitional and articulated gap between the different spaces framed by the constructed situation. It's a world of its own (*umwelt*) within reach of the living body, offering the formation of a new re/presentation, that of a proximity-distance to the situation filmed from a technical position.



Figure 12: *Giuseppe Penone, Soffio 6 (1978)*

We should remember the experiments of the late 1780s, and in particular the panorama and cyclorama, which were popular until the early 1900s (figure 13). Both were a new genre of painting, consisting of a “[...] picture painted on a very large canvas (up to 10 or 15 meters high and 100 to 120 meters long) developed circularly on the inside wall of a rotunda lit from above and specially built to accommodate it” (Laclotte, 1979, p. 1360).

This comparison is useful for grasping the extent to which the user immersed in the centre of the VR sphere, as in a cyclorama, is facing an “immersion screen” and is not, strictly speaking, in an “immersion space”, as Stéphanie Katz (2004, p. 219) puts it. This is an essential difference, as it means that the user is never in the 360° image, but facing it: “This difference stems from the fact that, as its filiation with the painting device demonstrates, the immersion screen always remains a screen that, by definition, is a zone of articulation that simultaneously links and conceals [...] When it becomes volume, it is to better designate, by allowing us to penetrate it, the zone of emptiness and abstraction that supports the visible part of the image” (Laclotte, 1979, p. 1360).

And it is precisely this articulated zone of the 360° that both connects and conceals, as well as this zone of emptiness that is formally spared to wear it out in its spherical volume in VR, that interests us.



Figure 13: *Cyclorama de Jérusalem (1888), Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré (Canada)*

5.3 *An Optical Experience to Stare into*

The user, immersed in the 360° bubbles, is virtually placed at their centre. This orientation of the body is also an orientation of the gaze around a pivot point. According to our considerations, the user has the impression of vicarious inclusion in the scenes, of taking part in them as a witness, and has the ambiguous feeling of being present. This feeling is heightened by the helmet, and the sense of presence is accentuated by the absence of the traditional field/out-of-field, allowing a fuller apprehension of the flow of presences that frame the filmed situation: elements and actions that would have been missed with a conventional camera. It's an ambivalent inclusion since it doesn't allow him to interact with it. Furthermore, the presence of the bubbles is not on a 1:1 scale, giving the impression of atmospheric magnification. The user is thus a voyeur reduced to the size of the objects as if excused from his or her carnal presence.

The VR user thus enjoys the luxury of being able to stare without being subjected to the same protocol in return. As a result, our spherical video captures are not just bubbles, but also digital eye-cups, whose voyeuristic peep-show metaphor allows us to schematically seize this

face-to-face encounter without confrontation or camera feedback. An ambivalent principle of aesthetic and cognitive involvement can be appreciated in the history of art and cinema through specular aesthetics. We think of Parmigianino's tondo self-portrait in a convex mirror, of Escher's in a spherical mirror, or Jan van Eyck's subtle presence with the Arnolfini couple. Then Marcel Duchamp radicalized the spectator's place in the work and his questioning with *Étant donnés* 1° la chute d'eau 2° le gaz d'éclairage. (1946-1966). Pascal Krajewski reminds us that Dziga Vertov's film *L'Homme à la caméra* (1929) also employs a mirror trope. We thus assume that VR immersion in 360°-type recording provokes a certain de/subjectification through a specular trope and a dys/regulated relationship to space. In other words, it's the cognitive dimension through the senses, a loss of reference to one's own body in space in the face of the image, a shape of de/subjectification.

This ambivalent presence of the user within the recordings is a trope that cinema has played with from the start. In the manner of Georges Albert Smith's *Ce qu'on voit dans un télescope* (1900) and Ferdinand Zecca's *Par le trou de la serrure* (1901), 360° recordings make visible the boundary between bodies and re/representations. Both films use eyepieces and keyhole-shaped covers (figure 14), turning cinema audiences into voyeurisms.



Figure 14: *Par le trou de la serrure* (1901), Ferdinand Zecca

While 360° immersion does not involve closed doors, the subjectivity of a voyeuristic gaze that is not directly that of the user is formalized by the ocular biomorphism of 360° bubbles when the user is not yet immersed in them (figure 12). On entering, the user does indeed appear to be looking through a door aperture that eventually enlarges to the user's scale, enveloping him/her like a digital peephole. Christian Metz notes that, in cinema, “the voyeur stages in space the break that separates him/her forever from the object” (1993: 84). Here, it is the materiality of 360° and the emptiness of its spherization that contribute to this definition: “everything through the eyes, and nothing through the body [...]. It's not a question here of the spectator's identification with the film's characters (that's already secondary), but of his prior identification with the (invisible) seeing instance that is the film itself as discourse. As the instance that puts the story forward and gives it to be seen (Metz, p. 119).

In the final analysis, the user's place in VR is always behind the video-graphic device. In aesthetic terms, this immersion in front of the image produces a twofold vision of the user. Virtually, when the user imagines him/herself in the situation, he/she re/produces him/herself on the other side of the image (the 'I' passes through the peephole), but being unable to intervene, he/she is immediately brought back to his/her condition of the uninvolved body (the 'I' returns in front of the peephole).

In the double portrait of *Les Époux Arnolfini* (1434), the painter Jean Van Eyck and the witnesses to the couple's wedding are visible in the reflection of a convex mirror. In this composition, the artist's optic is centered and unobstructed, so that the audience virtually finds itself - thinks itself - with the witnesses facing the subjects depicted. Similarly, the mirror reflection in Diego Velázquez's *Les Ménines* (1656-1657) places the King and Queen of Spain in the public space, in other words, in front of the canvas with the painter painting the scene. Here again, the public can virtually conceive itself as involved in the event, which here is the other side of the stage.



Figure 15: *Les Époux Arnolfini* (1434), Jean Van Eyck



Figure 16: *Les Ménines* (1656-1657), Diego Velázquez

The audience's paradoxical immersion in these two paintings makes 360° immersion even more explicit. However, unlike the two paintings, immersion is not a matter of virtually “seeing” oneself in the scene with the guests or with their majesty through a painted mirror. It is of finding oneself enveloped in a scene while being excused from its carnal presence and majesty. Therefore, from its effects. Immersion in the bubbles, like the painted reflections of Van Eyck and Velázquez (figures 15-16), gives importance to the user - as if engaged in a present that is no longer one.

Of course, as Jean-Louis Déotte (2010) notes, the two paintings we are discussing, and more specifically the Velázquez painting discussed by Foucault in *Les mots et les choses* (1966). The Velázquez painting is lodged at the heart of the classical episteme, while signaling its end with the sketch of the modern episteme. The episteme of postmodernity is the one within which our images are part of “[...] the emphasis on digitization, [...] the manufacture of artificial bodies, the fragmentation of knowledge and ultimately the indetermination of so-called ‘postmodern’ humanity” (Déotte, 2010).

3. Conclusion

This article has explored the complex interplay between digital and creative methodologies in ethnographic research, particularly through the lens of the "RADICANT 003" virtual reality (VR) experience. The use of 360° video and Instagram deconstruction mechanisms were shown to be more than mere tools—they are central to our understanding of queer corporealities in a neo-liberal context. As discussed, the visual and immersive strategies employed in this research echo earlier artistic experiments, like those of Van Eyck and Velázquez, where the viewer's role is both emphasized and obscured. However, in contrast to these classical examples, the 360° immersion offers a form of engagement that envelops the user without their physical presence, challenging their perception and subjectivity.

We specified in the introduction that this first stage of production was produced without the artist. An expanded version is planned with her, as is a study of how it is used. Likewise, a dialogue with José Esteban Muñoz's concept of *dis-identification* (2009) would be fruitful for the following stage, since it introduces a nuance to what we have said in this article: queer bodies can use what is expected of them to get the best chance of appearing in media spaces. The issue is to know what is lost and what is gained ultimately.

By leveraging these innovative digital methodologies, the research opens up new avenues for understanding and presenting queer identities and experiences in a neo-liberal society. This project, which stands at the intersection of art and ethnography, invites us to rethink the spaces in which these identities are performed and perceived. As noted by scholars like Jean-Louis Déotte, the postmodern episteme within which these digital images operate reflects broader societal shifts towards digitization and the fragmentation of knowledge. Through this VR experience, we not only document but also engage in a dialogue with the shifting landscapes of gender, identity, and representation, pushing the boundaries of how research can be conducted and disseminated.

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