



**Around the Window, Graduation Plan**

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## De Wallen

Rode lichtjes  
Spiegelen in de gracht  
Een eenzame klant  
Die niets meer verwacht

Hij wandelt en kijkt  
Schijnbaar onbewogen  
Bij elk raak een vrouw  
Diep in haar ogen

Een verschraalde geur  
Van bier en wiet  
Een onschuldig kind  
Dat alles beziet

In het weekend  
Is het feest op straat  
Kijken, lachen  
Maar niemand gaat

Een bijzondere buurt  
Vrij en intens  
Er wordt geleefd  
Je bent er Mens.

Mariska Majoor  
Amsterdam, 2005

This graduation plan illustrates my graduation intentions and ambitions for my master degree Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences at TU Delft. As participant of the Explore Lab Studio I will shortly explain my fascination for my chosen topic. As a resident of the Red-Light District in Amsterdam, I became interested in spaces for sex work and the working conditions. In my previous research 'Imitating the Wallen' I criticized the city plans of the construction of the Erotic Center and I will again shortly discuss how sex work is stigmatized and pushed away to the outskirts of the city. Although sex work is often declared as one of the oldest professions, I believe that there is still a lack of material and spatial attention, which is why I aim to broaden the knowledge about this topic. With my socio-spatial research, I will examine the way in which sex work originally was part of the city and how it is nowadays, in order to think of ways how they can keep being part of it in the future.



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# The Erotic Center

Interest and fascination

**“The historical city centre of Amsterdam known as ‘the Red-Light District’ or ‘the Wallen’ in Dutch, is a diverse and layered neighbourhood that has been attracting tourists for decades. Like many cities today, the Wallen faces problems due to destructive mass tourism, when in the evening, crowds of people are swarming through narrow alleys, along with the excessive use of alcohol and drugs. To relieve the city centre, the city council suggests relocating the sex workers and introducing the Erotic Centrum” (Sikkema, 2022).**

To me, the eviction of the sex workers towards the outskirts of the city into a homogenous building such as the Erotic Center, reflects a hegemonic attitude from the city council towards one of Amsterdam’s longest-established citizens, the sex workers. However, before I will discuss the arguments against the top bottom approach of the municipality, I will first explain the concept of the Erotic Center. As stated on the website of the designers, Moke Architecten, the building consists out of two towers which are embraced by slopes from top to bottom, enabling the visitor to stroll around the chambers of the women who are presenting themselves. According to them, the design will revolve around more than just prostitution alone and to offer this broader experience, the visitors will be able to wander around just like in a regular neighborhood while encountering different types of enjoyment like cinemas, restaurants and shops<sup>1</sup>. Looking at their design I think we could doubt whether this building will actually be able to offer this experience. How could they expect it to function just like a neighborhood when they only took out some parts from an urban context and rearranged them into one building? On top of a homogeneous building program, the embracement of this ‘vertical city’ by slopes will most likely create a great division between public and private. Which also means a big division between the sex workers and the neighborhood that it will be situated in. Personally, the slopes do not suggest a possibility of ‘strolling around’, but more of sliding and swiping down around the sex workers’ chambers. On top of that, when thinking about the relation between sex work and intimacy I doubt how it in terms of its scale and program, relates to this aspect. Besides the problematic design of building, the location of its constructing also raises concerns. Although it has not been officially determent, several suitable areas on the outskirts of the city have been suggested as illustrated in figure 2. Since most of these areas are protesting against it, this is now delaying the construction of the Erotic Center<sup>3</sup>. According to the mayor of Amsterdam, Femke Halsema, the construction is not getting much of support out of these area’s as a result of the ‘not in my backyard principle’<sup>3</sup>. However, considering the fact that vulnerable areas have been suggested which are known for suffering from urban decays such as the Bijlmer<sup>4</sup>, these protests and lack of support do not seem surprising to me.

Which reasons does the municipality of Amsterdam provide for the construction of the building? Besides relieving the Red-Light District, they currently emphasize on the beneficial aspects of the Erotic Centre from which the sex workers will also profit, such as the improvement of their position, prevention of human traffic and the nuisance from tourist<sup>5</sup>. Nevertheless, 93% of the prostitutes have stated having no interest in working in a different neighborhood to Red Light United<sup>6</sup> and point out arguments that contradict the ones given by the municipality such as: their feelings of safety as a result of existing social relationships in the neighborhood, the possibility to quickly go up in the mass after a working shift, or the opportunity to work on the first floor which feels less vulnerable than working on street level, and the distance the Amsterdam canals create between sex worker and client which helps reading them before letting them in<sup>7</sup>. This makes clear how all sex workers are different human beings with different needs and wishes and I argue that factors like this might be difficult to incorporate into a generic building, such as the Erotic Centre. As stated by Meaghan Morris, the architectural fascination with towers and sky scrapers displays a society that follows phallogocentric logic<sup>2</sup>. Something which I believe applies to the Erotic Centre as well, since the towers embrace masculine rather than feminine qualities, by meeting the wishes of the (male) tourist rather than the (female) sex worker’s needs. Personally, I believe that the task of designing working spaces would come with the responsibility of offering various options to answer the needs of different sex workers. This comes with the understanding that the feelings of safety are secured differently between individuals and varies between the sexes. This is



The Wallen Out of Controle, source: Trouw

a sensitivity that to me is not being reflected in the Erotic Center at all. Which why I argue that the building will not improve the position of sex workers as the municipality has claimed. Even though the arguments from the municipality get countered by the sex workers and the suggested areas are protesting against the construction of the Erotic Center, the plan is currently not being put on hold. This made me wonder about the actual reasons behind this plan. When we draw a connection between the time the plan was put in motion and the ending of Project 1012 we can observe a clear sign of neoliberal politics. This project was a failed experiment which got executed by politician Lodewijk Asscher and attempted to upgrade the Red-Light District by closing down the windows under the guise of criminality and human traffic. Social researcher at the University of Amsterdam, Laurens Buijs, described that his policy tried to achieve its goals through market forces and generated an image of the city that was dangerous and completely out of control<sup>9</sup>. Another important point he mentioned is that Project 1012 seemed to be about 'man saving women' which is why the sex workers were painted off as human traffic victims and decreasing the size of the area would help cure these problems more easily<sup>9</sup>. Which is why all of this, from my perspective, illustrates how Asscher through spatial intervention not only tries to get 'the Wallen under control' but also the 'woman under control'.

The conflict between control and regulations concerning sex work is part of an ongoing public debate that is being held for over centuries. Before sex work became legislated in the Netherlands around the 2000's, there was the concept of regulated tolerance: *"There is a tendency in the Netherlands to use this option in matters of morality and personal autonomy on which no political consensus can be reached (consensual)"* ...

1. Moke Architects. <https://www.mokearchitecten.nl/portfolio/erotisch-centrum/>. (My translation)

2. Morris, Meaghan. 1992. "Sexuality and Space". *Colomina at Princeton University*.

3. Hielkema, David. "Erotisch centrum in Amsterdam lijkt steeds verder weg: 'We zitten hier niet op te wachten'". (My translation). *Het Parool*. October 7. 2022.

4. Koops, Ruben. "Weinig draagvlak bij partijen voor nieuw erotisch centrum in Zuidoost en buitenwijken". (My translation). *Het Parool*. January 13. 2022.

5. Gemeente Amsterdam <https://www.amsterdam.nl/zorg-ondersteuning/prostitutie/erotisch-centrum/>. (My translation).

6. Red Light United <https://redlightunited.wordpress.com>. (My translation)

7. Majoor, Mariska. 2020. "De Wallen: Toekomst van ons verleden" (My translation). Amsterdam: De Wallenwinkel. page 42-48.

8. *Ibid.* page 21.

9. *Ibid.* page 19.

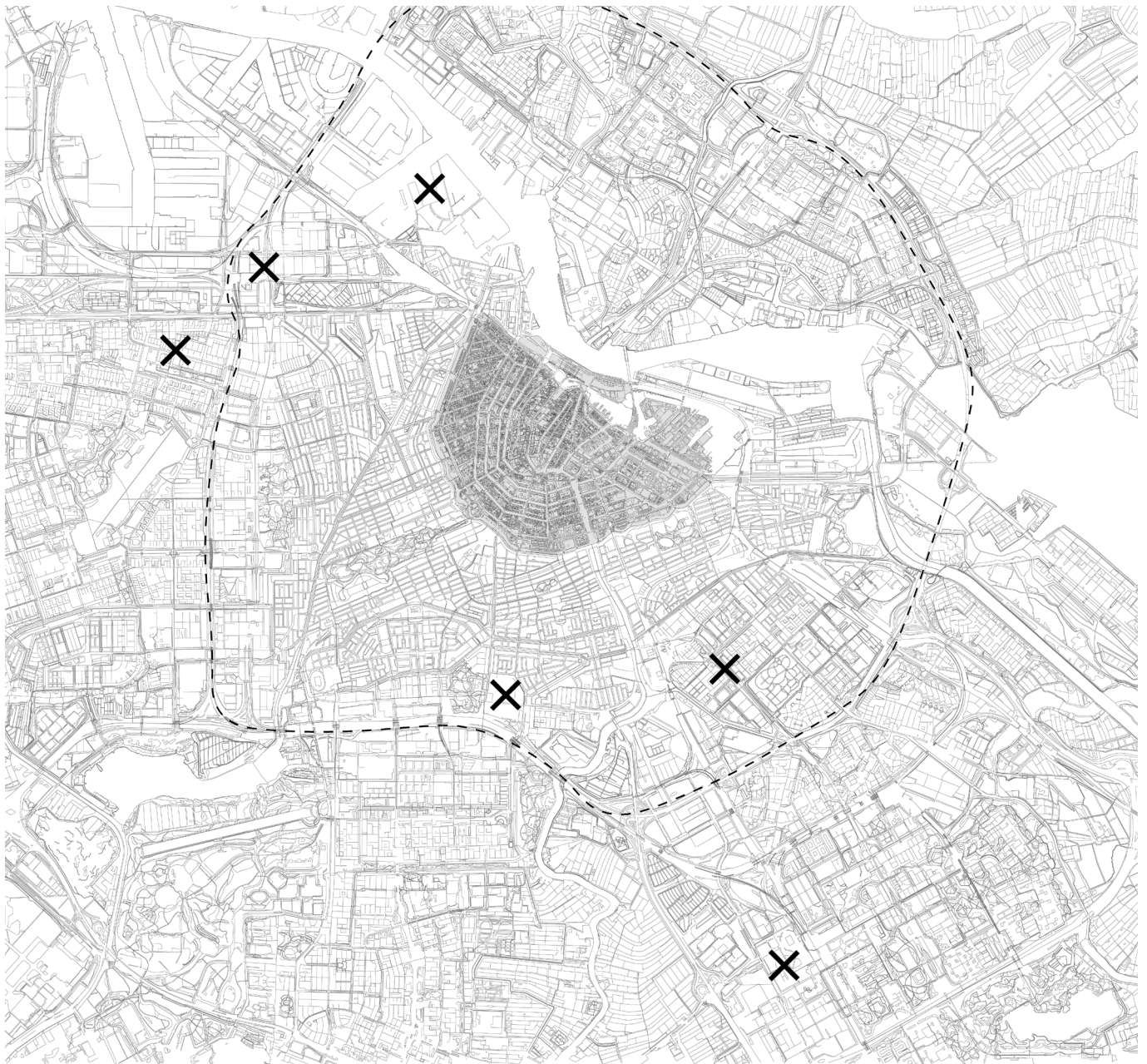


Figure 2:  
Suggested locations Erotic Centre

<sup>1</sup> Brandt, Chrisje. 1998. "The Fine Arts of Regulated Tolerance: Prostitution in Amsterdam". *Journal of Law and Society* Vol. 25, No. 4

*"Not surprisingly, a sustained policy of regulated tolerance is often followed by legalization, as over time moral attitudes are influenced by non-intervention policies"* (Brandt, 1998)<sup>1</sup>. We can observe how historically the Netherlands struggled with on one side the public norm about sexual morality and on the other individual rights about body autonomy. While some conceive regulations to be a form of protection and emancipation others, such as sex workers, experience them as infantilizing or interference and as a system to exercise control. Later on, in this research I will illustrate how norms, values and regulations relate to the position of sex workers in society.

While the city council tries to relieve the city center from its mass tourism-related problems by relocating sex workers, it also claims that this intervention will be beneficial for the sex workers as well. Nevertheless, I argue that a homogenous building like the Erotic Center is not capable of reproducing the same existing qualities as the Red-Light District, especially the qualities which are essential to the sex workers. Without improving the working conditions of sex workers, I argue that the Erotic Center will improve the position of sex workers in society like they claimed. The problem seems that the municipality considers all innovations as improvement without a critical judgement, or understanding of the consequences that comes along with this spatial intervention. In light of this, as spatial designers I think we should question ourselves if all innovation is better per se? It seems that we should not only recognize what something gives or provides but also what it takes away.





# Part of Life Part of City

Personal position

The Wallen is a complex and vulnerable piece of urban fabric which should be threatened with care and sensibility, but binary thinking processes have brought forward policies that did the neighbourhood more harm than good. As a resident of the Wallen, I experience the dynamics within the neighbourhood closely and although there are troubles, I would like to advocate on the qualities within this part of the city as a result of the diversity between people living and working here.

In her book 'the Wallen, the Future of Our Past' former prostitute of the area Mariska Majoor, describes the network in this neighborhood as an "...combination of entrepreneurs, residents, institutes, buildings and functions that have grown there historically. There is cohesion, there is history, identity and authenticity. It is such a special and precious piece of the social fabric. I am not saying that that is why everything is good because I am not talking about good or bad" (Majoor, 2020) <sup>1</sup>. In her book Majoor and other sex workers keep referring to the significance of the social dynamics and I started wondering about the same question as sex worker Mary who stated in an interview: "Why would you want to fix something which has not been broken?<sup>3</sup>". The reason why the Wallen is subject to so many public opinions and political policies became clear to me after Majoor started describing how the area functions as a 'moral clock' where time can be told because affairs like sex and drugs openly occur here: "I call the neighborhood a mirror of society. When the world becomes more prudish and the debate about sex work gets sparked again it is usually followed by that of alcohol and drugs, affairs which are part of life, but since they are happening openly at the Wallen the discussion can be noticed from the area" (Majoor, 2020) <sup>2</sup>. The statement by Majoor has been significant to the formulation of my earlier research 'Imitating the Wallen' where I focused on the public debate that took place concerning sex work and the Erotic Centre over the last couple of years. Here, I illustrated how despite the legalization of sex work in the Netherlands, being morally condemned the sex workers are threatened to be evicted towards the city's periphery and how being out of sight of the public will ultimately enhance the denormalization of the profession even more along with prejudices, which in turn has proven to aggravate problems such as human traffic<sup>7</sup>. To me, this research demonstrated the agency of space by its transformative potential to change our norms and values, which made the observation about the Wallen as moral clock of Majoor even more relevant. Besides this, it also clarified the non-sequential way in which affects emerge, which is why problems we are trying to fix it could aggravate despite having right intentions. For this reason, I ended by advocating on opening up the discussion about the role of agency in the material discourse, which is why I want continue with developing arguments related to this.

Personally, I consider prostitution as a part of life and therefore part of the city. Sex work should be integrated in the urban structure instead of being pushed away towards the periphery. The relation between agency and space became even more apparent when I noticed how this somehow theatrical neighborhood actually functions like this way as well, when I observed how everyone and everything in this neighborhood has specific roles and positions. Only in this play, the roles between actors and observers are not fixed but fluid and subjective. For instance, when walking pass the Red-Lighted windows I did not manage to lose the feeling as if I am the one who is being observed, which is why I started to wonder about who the actual observers and performers of this neighborhood are? Becoming interested in both sides of the window, I started stretching this concept of agency and speculating about actors and spectators, who is considered passive or active, the oppressed or the oppressor and maybe most important who and what determines this? If we are to follow Karan Barad, agency is not an individual property<sup>4</sup> as she explains in Meeting the Universe, phenomena in the world only exist 'as a result of, and as part of, the world's ongoing intra-activity' and we humans participate in its becoming, "We have to meet the universe halfway, to move toward what may come to be in ways that are accountable for our part in the world's differential becoming. All real living is meeting. And each meeting matters"(Barad, 2003)<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, instead of thinking about what a window 'is' by understanding it as a separated solid object, we should contemplate about what it can do by letting it 'meet' with the world. Thinking about it this way, the window has two sides and when positioned between two subjects it separates as much as it connects.

Therefore, letting the window meet with the world, what it is and what can it do? The window is a structure

<sup>1</sup> Majoor, Mariska. 2020. "De Wallen: Toekomst van ons verleden" (My translation). Amsterdam: De Wallenwinkel. page 21.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Page 6.

<sup>3</sup> Mary Sexworker. 2021. <https://www.vice.com/nl/article/jgqkw4/prostitutie-verbannen-van-de-wallen-naar-erotisch-centrum>.

<sup>4</sup> Barad, Karen. 2003. "Posthumanist Performativity". University of Chicago Press. Page 827.

<sup>5</sup> Barad, Karen. 2007. "Meeting the Universe Halfway". Duke University Press. Page 353.

<sup>6</sup> Kleinherenbrink, Arjen. 2015 "Territory and Ritornello: Deleuze and Guattari on Thinking Living Beings" Page 223.

<sup>7</sup> Sikkema, Amber. 2022 "Imitating the Wallen, a Reflection on Amsterdams Erotic Centre"



Sex workers Around the Window  
 Oudekopersplein, 1991  
 by Floris Leeuwenberg

in the facade that holds glass. It is an element, object or device that connects spaces and people to each other through vision. It is framing and filtering what is on the other side and while it can expose or reveal, it can also simply be used to let in daylight or regulate the climate. In the city windows are often perceived as static elements that rarely change over time. However, they fulfill a variety purposes and I will explain how this contributes to the significant role windows play as meaning carriers of the city. At first sight the window seems like an extraordinary element, but when we start to think more deeply about them they have a different meaning to each building and for each individual. The window in the facade of an apartment has a different meaning than the window of a storefront and from the different ways individuals use them, it could tell a lot about certain living situations. We could understand window as a moment in architecture, where habits, acts, behaviors, feelings and regulations change and we can also observe how spaces are arranged differently around them. Because the window is placed on both the inside and the outside of architecture, it is possible to discern different meanings to each side of the window. This way, at least historically, we could perceive the window as gendered, where one side of it belonged to women, the realm of the private and domestic, while the other belonged to men, the realm of the public. Concerning the windows of the sex workers on the Red-Light District this element makes it possible to connect the sex worker to their neighborhood and vice versa. Besides this it is also an important moment where the first interaction happens between sex worker and client. The of quality this interaction could change the meaning of the window, whereas the window sometimes functions to connect sex worker and client, with another person it provides safety through separation.

Following Majoor, the urban surfaces of the Wallen have the potential of communicating certain norms, values and regulation. For me it became clear how windows have a way of telling stories of the neighborhood. The window is an essential architectural element for the sex workers on the Wallen, to either connect or separate them from their clients and to the neighborhood. Through the window sex work becomes part of life and part of the city, which is why I would like to learn more about sex work and space through this architectural element within my research.

# Research Questions

The municipality of Amsterdam wants to realize an Erotic Centre on the periphery of the city. However, I argue that moving the sex workers away from the city center will be a deterioration for the societal position of sex workers. Sex work is part of life, which is why this must be visible and has to remain part of the city center. Therefore, in order to improve the social position of sex workers, I want to improve their working conditions by creating both safe and sensual working spaces on the Red-Light District.

**How to create safe and sensual working spaces that help improve the current working conditions of sex workers?** In order to find answers to this overarching question, this research can be divided into three research topics, that each will be examined and described parallel to each other, and as I will explain later on with a different methodology. The first part of the research analysis the position of sex workers in the Netherlands/Amsterdam and explores which norms, values and regulations have led to the position of sex workers historically. Moving on from the past, their current position will be described and it will try to illustrate a vision of what we could expect from sex work in the future. In order to understand how safety is secured and sensuality is realized in space, it is important to understand that these aspects have a different meaning to all genders. Which is why the second part of the research wonders about the relationship between sexuality. Which begins with creating a joint understanding of what sexuality is, by examining how sexuality is embodied and spatially expressed. To contribute to a broader environmental discussion, this part of the research also wonders if and how space could move beyond gender. Besides this, for the final design assignment I would especially like to know how the window is related to the aspects of safety and sensuality? What we can observe is how both topics mostly already related to the topic space, which is the third topic within this research. In the diagram shown in figure 4 the most important research questions are posed and you can observe how the three topics are related to each other. For example, the question about the working conditions of sex workers relates to both sex work as space, while the question how sex workers express their sexuality relates to sexuality and sex work. Besides this it is also visible how certain research questions are more closely related to the final design assignment than others.

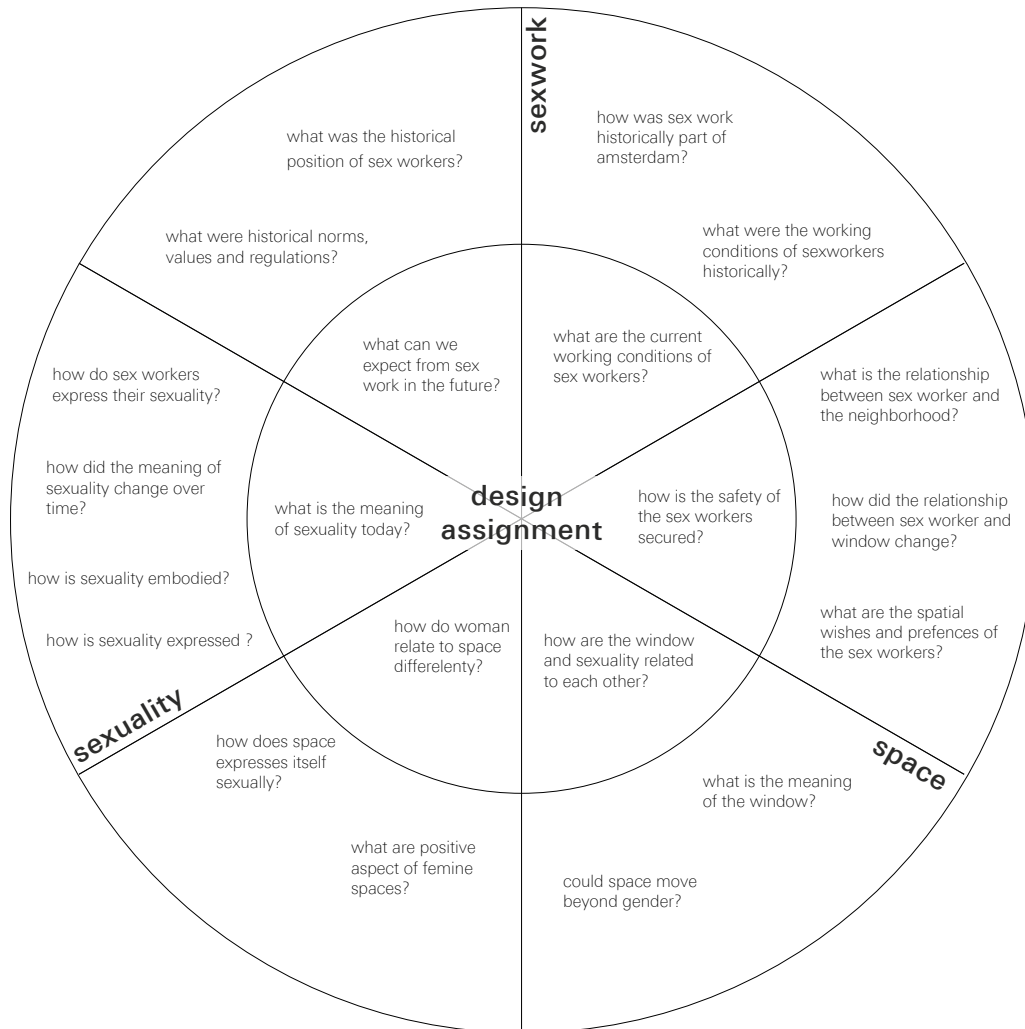


Figure 4  
Research Questions

# Sex work, Sexuality and Space

Methodology

Following these questions, this research can be divided into the topics: sex work, sexuality and space, and through the relationship between sex worker and their window I hope to provide more knowledge about these topics.

Therefore, the first part of this research which concerns about sex work, describes the relation between sex worker and window, with the help of literature and historical photographs, which will reveal specific norms, values and regulations, during the time periods between the 16th and 20th century (fig.5). For the second part of this research, regarding sexuality, the same historical photographs will be fragmented into specific layers (fig.6), that each have their own and different way of expressing certain gender performances. The photographs are layered into the following three categories: non-fixed features, semi-fixed features and fixed features. The first layer collects features that move and change quickly, such as body movements and positions, hand gestures and eye contacts. The second layer will collect semi-fixed features that dress up and arrange space, such as furniture and clothing. The last layer will show features change slowly, like windows and other architectural elements, forms, shapes and materializations. Both parts of the research will be supported by literature from philosophical and feminist thinkers and writers, such as Michel Foucault and Rosi Braidotti. This part of the research will result into a final product in the form of a research paper. To develop a design assignment which helps improve the working conditions and position of sex workers, the conclusions of the research paper, that contributed to the knowledge about sex work, safety and sensuality, will be used to continue further research in the third part of this research (fig.7), which studies the current condition of the Red-Light District and sex work spaces. Since this research aims to respect the agency and knowledge of the sex workers, their vision will be the last input in order to formulate the final design assignment. This complete methodology scheme of this research is shown in figure 8 on the next page.

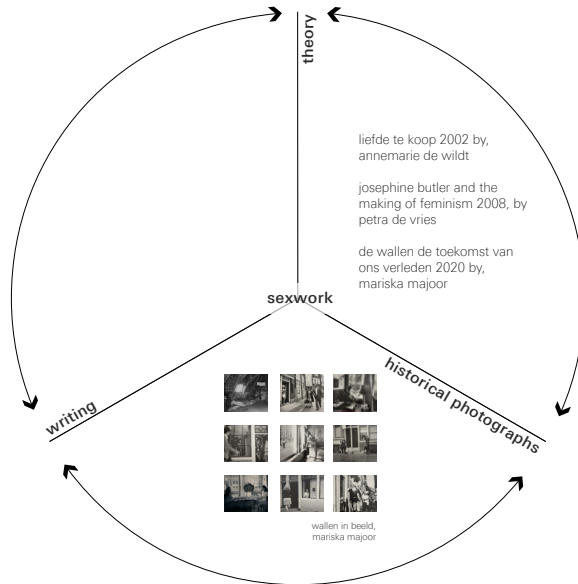


Figure 5  
Topic Sex work

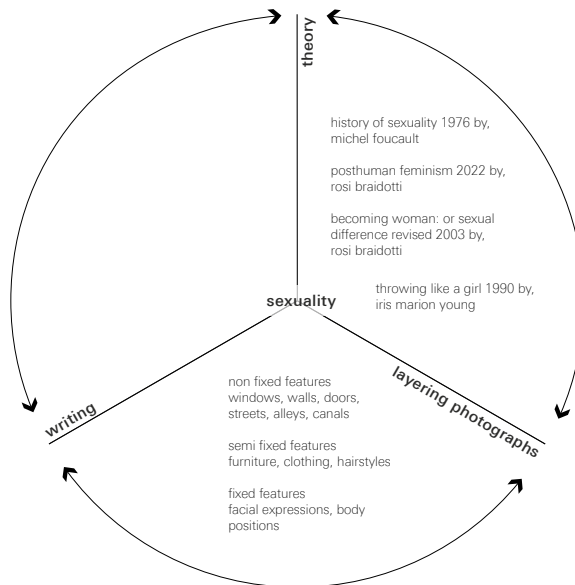


Figure 6  
Topic Sexuality

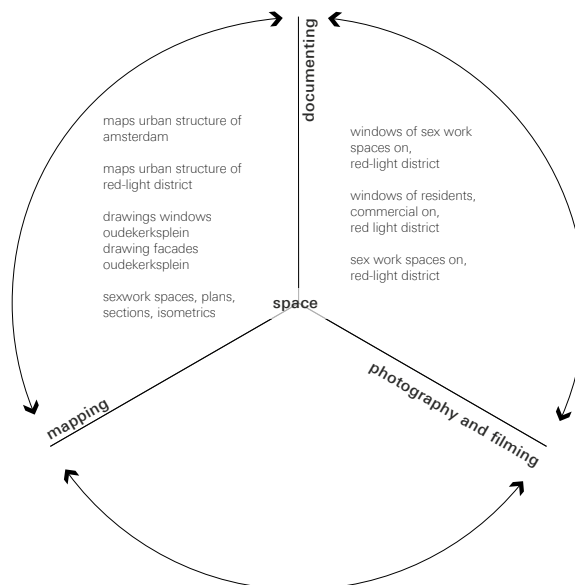


Figure 7  
Topic Space

how to create safe and sensual working spaces  
that help improve the current working conditions of sex workers?

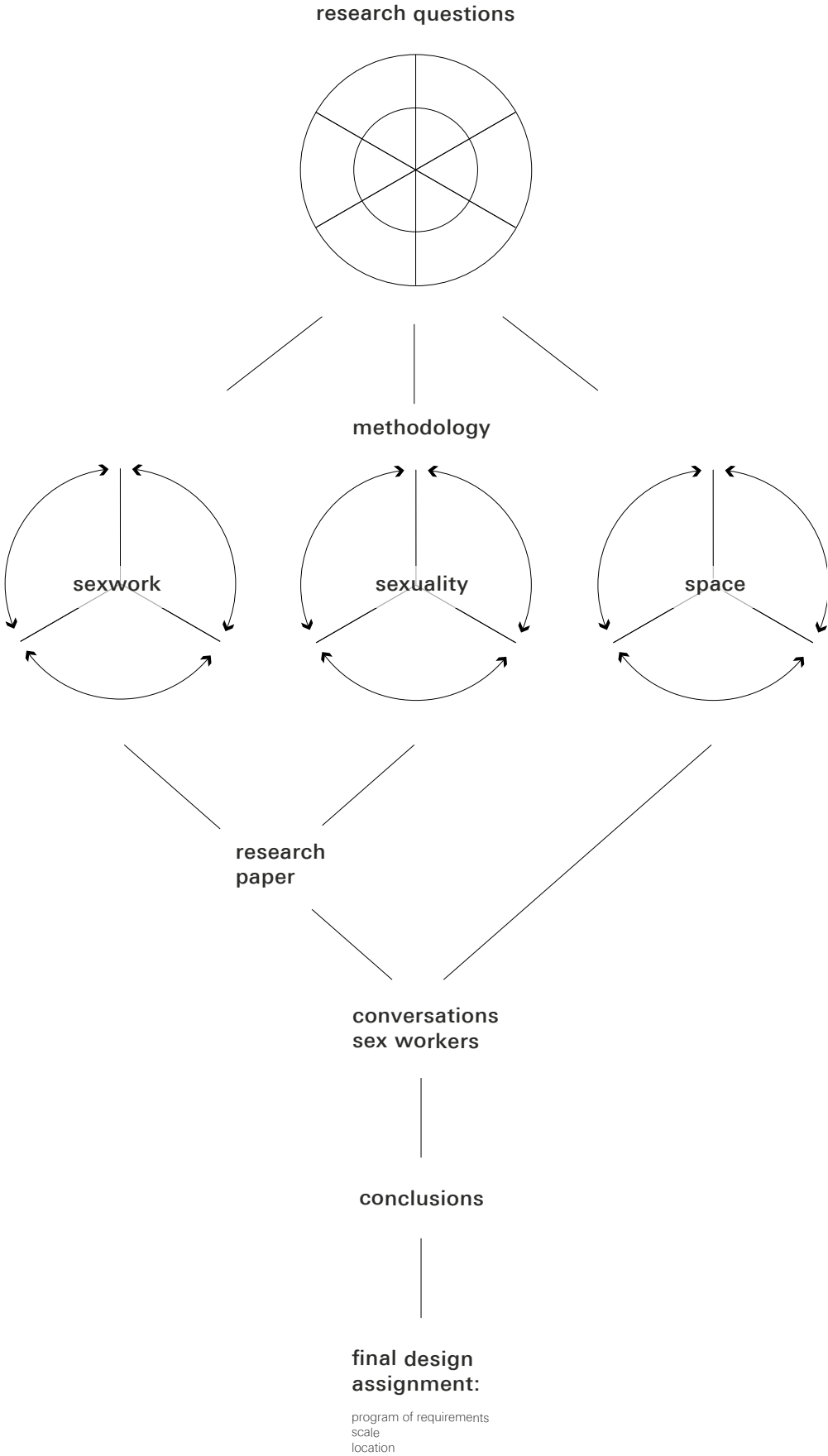


Figure 8  
Complete methodology scheme





# Process of Becoming

## Theoretical Framework

This research uses theoretical literature that follows contemporary philosophy and feminist theories, and it will mainly follow from philosophers Michel Foucault and feminist thinker and writer Rosi Braidotti, who I will introduce and position in this framework.

In his book *History of Sexuality*<sup>1</sup> (1976) Foucault discusses how it was believed during the twentieth century that western sexuality was suppressed. However, he notices that although we talk more and more about sex we still are not more liberated, which made him questioning the way sexuality was examined. In his work he doubts if sexual repression is a true historical fact and he examines the widespread notion that sexuality moved from being something guilty free and delicious towards something repressed during the Victorian era. As a result he shows how sexuality was far from suppressed during this time, but that a change in western attitudes, separated sex from life and pleasure and made into a science of desire. Instead of answering why sex was silenced or suppressed, he asks, why do we say that we are repressed and what did we actually say about it? These questions showed him how modern industrial society made sex into a discourse: *"Rather than the uniform concern to hide sex, rather than a general prudishness of language, what distinguishes these last three centuries is the variety, the wide dispersion of devices that were invented for speaking about it, for having it to be spoken about, for inducing it to speak of itself, for listening, recording, transcribing, and redistributing what is said about it: around sex, a whole network of varying, specific, and coercive transpositions into a discourse"* (Foucault, 1976). Which is why he concluded that sex was never truly suppressed, but rather repressed through multiple discourses of power. The work by Foucault was written in 1976 and was very influential to various philosophers and historians. However, the work Foucault mainly focused on historical debates about sexuality that took place between the nineteenth- and twentieth century, and he leaves out discussions on the topic of gender. Since I want to know from this research how each gender has a different relation to the topic of sexuality, this brought me to the work of Rosi Braidotti, which helps to situate the contemporary debate about sexuality from a feminist perspective. To position Braidotti's work we can observe how she got, besides Foucault, influenced by the work of other French philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze and feminist Luce Irigaray. In her essay, *Becoming Woman: or Sexual Difference Revisited* (2003)<sup>3</sup>, it can be noticed how Braidotti approaches the theory of Irigaray's sexed subjects in a Deleuzian way. Like Foucault in his work, Braidotti therefore departs from making transversal connections and questions not only why we are sexed, but how subjects become sexual different. *"In other words, the subject of feminism is not Woman as the complementary and specular other of man, but rather a complex and multi-layered embodied subject who has taken her distance from the institution of femininity (45)"*. This layered understanding of the becoming of woman is important within Braidotti's later work *Posthuman Feminism*<sup>5</sup> (2022), where she unravels a wide range of feminist positions that are all contributing to a new understanding of sexuality that goes beyond gender and the body. In the examination of contemporary feminist ideas and struggles, she includes perspectives which each confront systems of sexism, racism and capitalism.

It can already be noted that I am refraining from the terms such woman or men, feminine or masculinity, which I am deliberately doing from a personal feminist perspective, because I think that in order to move on from certain power relations, we should rethink the existing gender dichotomies. In Braidotti's words: *"Feminism is the struggle, to empower those who live along multiple axes of inequality. It involves empowering the disposed and impoverished, not only women, but also LGBTQ+ people, people of color, Black and Indigenous peoples"* (Braidotti, 2022)<sup>4</sup> On that note, it might also be important to mention that since my research uses the work of post-structuralist thinkers, a lot of times the terms of 'woman' and 'man' refer to much more complex notions of subjectivity instead of gender. However, when trying to positioning myself within the contemporary feminist debate, I experience difficulty because it is hard to do this without defining what feminism is nowadays. Therefore, positioning the feminist debate is one of the aims of my research, in order to take a position myself and look for ways to translate this theory into a material practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault, Michel. (1976) *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1. The Will to Knowledge*, Penguin Classics.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Page 34.

<sup>3</sup> Braidotti, Rosi. 2003. *Becoming Woman: or Sexual Difference Revisited*. Cambridge, Polity Press.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Page 45.

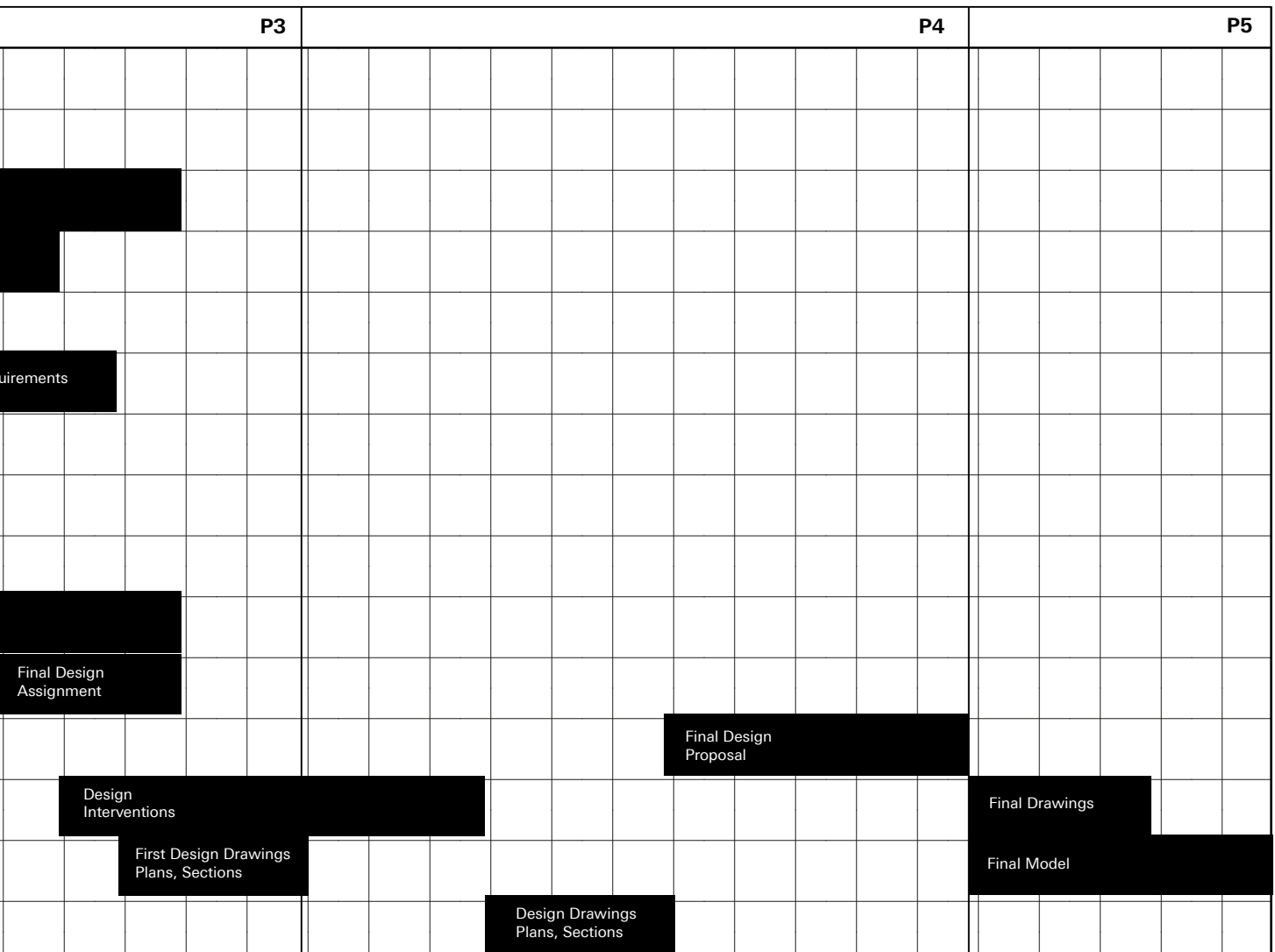
<sup>5</sup> Braidotti, Rosi. 2020. *Posthuman feminism*. Cambridge, Polity Press.




# Planning

## Year Schedule

Research schedule	P1	P2											
Research	Questions	Sexuality											
		Sex work						Space					
		Conversations Sex Workers											
Products	Historical Photographs	A1 Drawing Integration Sex Work						Program of Requirements					
		Photo's Windows				Photo's Site							
		Sketches Photographs						Facades Ouderkerksplein					
		Research Paper											
End Products													
Design schedule													
	Site Model												
							Drawings Design Location						
							Drawings Design Building						
First Design Suggestions													



 = 1 week



Personally, I believe that architecture is a discipline that builds sexed spaces, subjects and cultures, meaning that it is never neutral for the architect to design. The architect therefore has the social obligation to secure and integrate this knowledge into the design process. This way, my research will not only find social relevance by trying to improve the position of sex workers, but also towards the architectural profession, since it aims to contribute to the existing knowledge about sexed spaces in architecture. By problematizing spatial questions that are related to, for example, the feelings of safety and sensuality and the way in which all sexed subjects experience this differently, this will hopefully aid to the knowledge about space and gender inequality. Since a lot of feminist questions and problems are material based I hope to provide more sensitivity within spatial design, which all sexed subjects could benefit from.

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