Thesis Lotte Louise de Jong

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Three different subjects linked togehter…

One; The gaze; being looked at and looking at, disassociating and objectifying the body, re-evaluating the body

Two; The emotional side of webcamming, it's sex-work, body & emotional work. But more emotional work since the physical body is less present, it is just a mediation of the physical body. The relationships and fantasies created online are emanate from this emotional work.

Three; The physical environment and digital environment informing each other and creating space for these fantasies and relationships, that can only exist in this liminal space.

1. **An Introduction to sex**
1.   1

When I was around eleven years old I once dialled the number of a sex-phone. I remember the choice menu you had to go through; what kind of woman did you want to talk to? Old and experienced, young and naive, etc. I don't remember what I chose, but what I do remember is that my parents found out quite quickly when I was confronted with the high telephone costs. Not a lot later I downloaded my first porn. Back then it was normal you had to pay for pornography on websites, but I'd learned my lesson by then, and everything I downloaded was illegally, through peer2peer software like lime-wire. With software that doesn't moderate it's material in any way, and everyone being able to share whatever they like, I've seen a lot of different things come by. Throughout my youth and still, the wonderful world of the internet has influences and shaped me and my sexuality in different ways.

Not only in porn, but in general, the objectification of the female body has always worried and fascinated me, especially during my teenage years. I felt that the insecurities I dealt with had to do with the way girls and woman were portrayed in magazines, movies, videoclips, etc. My high-school research project was a short documentary I shot visiting several dancehall music parties. I edited the material together with some explicit videoclips that were shown on TV at the time, to make a comparison between the way teenagers behaved at these sort of parties and the images we were confronted with daily. During the presentation of our projects, one of my classmates grandparents stood up and left. The school almost failed me for showing such explicit content. At that moment it struck me that some people willingly close their eyes and don't want to be confronted with the reality of sexuality. We can watch porn but we can't talk about it.

Although objectifying the (female) body has obvious negative aspects to it, it also fascinates me a lot. I always wonder how it feels to be wanted for just your body, there to be looked at, to be wanted, to get off on. Maybe this is my 'taboo'. Somehow it turns me on more to see my boyfriends watch porn then actually consuming it myself. It has something to do with the gaze. Apart from some occasional sexting, I hadn't really experienced having online sex myself until I had a boyfriend that was quite some years younger than me and was living in another country. Seeing myself on camera turned me on. Often I caught myself gazing at my own body rather than my boyfriend's. I could see my body and my actions as someone else would see it, dissociated from my person.

[[ultimately; being payed to be wanted is one step further.]]

What is it about being looked at and looking at? By viewing the body as an object through a digital lens, sometimes even disconnecting the body completely from the self by not showing the face, the body can be seen as something different, something disembodied almost. This gives people participating in webcam-sex the opportunity view their body form a distance-like perspective and see their body being viewed and desired without the self intervening in this objectification. [Waskul]

    "Significantly, participants themselves are spectators unto their own bodies, as they must see and respond to the images of their bodies and thus act toward, manage, and interpret that image as others might." Waskul (2005)
…

"Surely the body, unlike the self, is an empirical entity that can be observed, measured, and seen to exist in time and space independently from our own conscious awareness of it. But even so, what that body means is no more or less innately predetermined or any more or less socially shaped than any other object."

1.2

In recent years the main thematics in my work as a filmmaker and artist have closely related to identity and sexuality. More specifically the work I make investigates how we, as a society, view and shape our sexual identity through mediated spaces like the world wide web. I look at these spaces through different lenses, to create a distance from its explicit content, to re-contextualise it. The digital space as a space/place for sexual encounters has been the main focus of my past projects.

My interested in these subjects started with webcam site's like *chaturbate.com* and *myfreecams.com*. These are website where webcam-models earn money by performing (sexual) acts. Visitor's can tip them in 'tokens', which are converted to dollars. In my research and work I mainly focus on cis female performers and cis male spectators and moderators. Moderators are people that keep a chatroom 'clean', it's a form of free labor, in return for private shows and/or 'friendships' with the performers. I emphasise the word friendship here because it is seen as a medium of exchange.

During my research I came across performers that work from home (e.g. their own bedroom, living room, etc.) and performers that work for and from webcam studios. Cam studios are company's that hire webcam models to work for them. They provide a safe environment and 'sets', colourful rooms set up with lighting, a webcam, a keyboard and a mouse, a screen and a high speed internet connection, from where the cam models can work. Sometimes theses companies also provide hairdressers and make-up artist. Most of these companies are situated in Bulgaria, Romania and Russia.

The rooms that are created within these studios really intrigue me. A lot of rooms have names like 'Los Angeles', 'Hollywood' and other names referring to the western world which probably sounds attractive to work in. The rooms are filled with kitsch and cliché ideas of what richdom looks like. They are in themselves liminal spaces, almost like you step into a virtual reality box. A room created just to exist in an online digital setting, for the

spectator not one to be experienced offline or unconnected. Sometimes they are even provided with a green screen.

At the same time these spaces are corporeal, they hide things in the corners that the webcam can't reach, sometimes they even hide an 'operator'; a person, often a guy, present in the corner of the room talking as if they were the webcam model. They also translate requests to the models and moderate the chatrooms.

2.1 Sex work is work

I don't see sex-work, especially digital sex-work, as being exploitative on it's own, in that sense I'm more of a 'liberal' feminist [1]. I am not ignoring the fact that the business of camming, especially studio-work, *can be* exploitative. I have read many messages on online fora from models that had bad experiences with studios, like no payment, not being able to move to another studio or work individual within a certain time, etc.) but almost all of them are about money. Like marxist feminist argue; sex work is inherently exploitative due to the oppressive nature of work under capitalism. [2]   But this would be the case for any form of making money within this economic system. It is a wide spread misunderstanding that women and men are forced into this line of work in Romania. The reason that there are so many webcam studios is because of the economic situation and liberal rules towards the webcam industry and high-speed internet.
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2.2 Sex work is emotional work
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-> both ways, the performer build a relationship with the client, helping them. On the other side the client communicates positively or negatively with the performer, making them feel bad or good about themselves. From talking to most performers tho, they deal with the abuse and mostly hold on to the positive feedback they get. Most of talks I had and fora's I read the woman feel empowered and more beautiful about their own body.
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"but i was complexed feeling ugly because i have big nose round face normal weight but big hips…."

in a way this job made me feel beautiful and liked appreciated "

about the insults maybe i wasn't clear enough...this job isn t for sensitive girls that cry often or narcissistic girls that think they are perfect and would kill anyone who dares to criticise them

[…]

but i say it because not any type of girl would accept that easily and also because some of my colleagues cried or got depressed and quit the job

you need a strong character and understand it s a game not something personal

and yes there are more compliments than insults"

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3 The fantasy exists.

-> from a clients point of view.

3. Pixelated wallpapers and empty echoes of luxury

3.1   When I close my eyes I wander through the spaces, like a digital ghost, slowly moving forward through the hallways, into the rooms, limited by the interface these websites provide. Red is definitely a colour that appears in front of my eyes. Pixelated wallpapers and empty echoes of luxury. When 'walking' through these spaces I am subjected to the transparency these websites provide. They upload these 360 walkthroughs as a means to entice potential webcam models to work for them. For me its an inexhaustible source of data. Although the rooms in itself appear meaningless, an empty subject, they promise something to the workers and the viewers. I wonder for who these spaces are designed. Do they want to hide the actual conditions of the webcam models working from them, to act like they are in a wealthy environment, or pretend that they are girly? Or maybe they are designed for the models themselves, designed as a promise of prosperity.

I enter the hallway, the first space that pops up on my screen when opening the digital walkthrough. On the left hand there are lockers. There are more lockers situated in the hallway further up. In total there must be like 100 different lockers, all to be opened by keys, none of them sticking out of the locks. This webcam studio maybe has ten different rooms, so there will be no more than ten people working at the same time. I wonder why there are so many lockers, are they meant for the models to store stuff during working hours or are they for when they leave for home, to stow their sexy outfits? All the windows in the hallway and the rooms are covered by fake wallpaper views, nowhere to look out to the real world. There are three paper holders above the lockers and they are all empty except one. -> *The paper has to be translated*

The hall connects to an open smoking space, which basically makes the whole hallway a smoking space. I've been walking through this hall a lot, clicking forward and backward, always wondering why I couldn't pass through the smoking room to the other side of the hallway. I kept bumping into borders. It took me several visits to realise it's mirror I've been bumping into. Somehow they did a very good job in erasing the 360 camera. Because of the absence of any human form or digital capturer these mirrors become very disconcerting, with no reference to where a space stops existing. I'm baffled by how clean the mirrors are and how much mirrors there are.

The hallway turns into the smoking room on one side and the kitchen on the other end. The kitchen is equipped with a tv, a washing machine and a dryer. The kitchen also connects to a corridor with a total of six doors. On the

other end of the hallway there is also a corridor consisting of four doors. All these doors lead to different rooms except for one, that leads to a room with a cabin inside it. I presume it's like a stand-up tan-bed but I haven't figured it out yet. The hallway and smoking room are covered in low quality prints. Mostly consisting of images of an American subway, probably New York. I tried reverse image search these different images, hoping to find the source and location but I could only find one picture of a girl in front of a graffiti wall. I found the image pop-up on a number of computer-wallpaper websites that look like they are designed in the 90's. I wonder if someone hand picked this image and printing it especially for this room. The one who did these wallpapers must have done the room interiors as well.

The smoking room keeps confusing me every time I visit it. The mirror in the back just makes it look like its's very narrow space with four ashtrays, instead of it just being one room.

Event the bathroom is visitable. It looks really modern, like it has recently been refurbished. There are purple led-lights surrounding the space. It doesn't seem like the most convenient spot to put make-up one. There is hand-soap next to the sinks but no shampoo or shower-gel in the shower cabin, unless it's hidden in the cabinet under the sink. Maybe they all have to bring their own?

There are some random photo's scattered through the hallway, big prints with wooden plinths around it. There's two of a bowling trip; one of a young woman holding a bowling ball and in the kitchen there's a group-photo consisting of three men and six woman all holding each other and pulling weird faces, it seems like it was a company outing.

The kitchen is the only room with a window that hasn't been stickered. The blinds are almost hermetically sealed. Across from the kitchen there's a washing machine and a TV. On the screen there's a paused image of an 'angel' on the catwalk of a Victoria Secret show. The image is clearly superimposed during the editing of this 360photo walkthrough. The house is filled with empty promises [Statement]. The confinement of the space makes it feel like it exists in a different reality. It is made to exist for people to sell fantasies, must they therefor live and believe in these fantasies?

3.2

There are 7 rooms, they are all numbered. The fact that they wouldn't exist without the internet fascinates me. They wouldn't exist if there weren't people looking for sexual pleasure combined with a sense of intimacy. What makes us want to look and gaze into these rooms from across a screen, mediated through wires, codes and lenses. The distance this creates to the subject at the same creates a possibility to connect. Every body shows just what they want to show, a distilled or morphed version of theirselves. [being able to see yourself through the web cam on the screen, to choose what you want to show, by looking at yourself in the way others do you can control your own image, control of one's own mediation = managing one's own image - controlling my image [cite] [The Work of Being Watched - see also video therapy. 0]]

[perhaps it's the case that the fact we can see the wires and cables carries the burden of proof [cite]]

The internet creates a liminal world, a space, where the cybersex occurs. Webcam sex is done from a particular place, e.g. a home or webcam studio, but the internet juxtaposes these "spaces" and "places", and creates a natural environment for liminality; a place separate from one's space, where the ordinary norms of everyday life easily may be suspended.

This liminality, the dislocated and disembodied nature of computer-mediated communication make cybersex an experience that potentially expresses a sexuality separate from and transgressive of the person, the body, and

everyday life. This makes it possible to explore and experiment with new forms and different forms of sexual play.

The interior architectures, who might just be the owners of the studio, or friends, or acquaintances, who knows, they try to create something which has identity, but at the same time is a fantasy. The themed rooms make you think about cheap porn sets.
…. (TBC)

Sites Used
myfreecams.com
chaturbate.com
Ambercutie.forum
http://www.gertsog.ru/tour-en.php