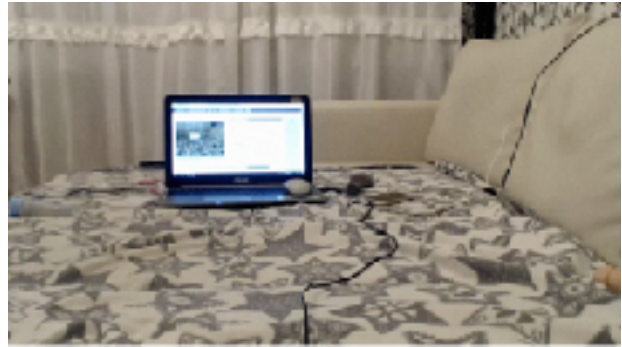


## Introduction

My recent research focuses on the intimate relation we have with technology and the 'online'. Identity and sexuality are the major subjects in my work. More specifically I am interested in the way we view and shape our sexual identity through mediated forms of bodily representation. Often my method of working involves investigating what reveals or remains when you put pornographic or sexual content and references in another context.



Still from my work BRB (2018)

In my work I try to create a space where people can reflect their own ideas and opinions. Although theoretic research informs my work, it's very important to me that my work communicates on its own, without people having to have a knowledgeable background concerning the subjects.

## Background

My background is in (documentary) filmmaking. In my practice as a filmmaker I always tried to create films that reflect upon a certain subject without it becoming pamphletistic. Everyone already walks around with their own ideas and opinions, as a filmmaker I want to give them the possibility to view things from a different (or closer) perspective. This room for the viewer to reflect upon is very important to me. At the same time I don't want my work to be vague. I hope that when people see my work it's clear to them what questions resonate through the work.

A lot of my work is also a reflection on the medium itself. Maybe not so much on what we use, but how we use it; webcams, online-pornography, Instagram, Facebook. In my research I always try to take into account the question how the user relates to the medium. At the same time 'old'-media also influences my work, either aesthetically or subject-wise.

My practice comes really close to who I am as a person. I always like to break taboos or talk about things other people would think better not to be discussed in public. Whether it's personal problems or sexuality, for me making certain things public works liberating, gives more room for reflection and opens up the conversation and possibility for other points of view.

## My Work

For a long time I've been intrigued by the world of sex-webcam websites like *Chaturbate.com*. On the one hand it's an extremely personal space supported by a strong online community, on the other hand their body's are viewed as objects and the woman are asked to perform for tips in the form of 'tokens'.

One of my recent video works is **BRB** (2018). *BRB* is a poetic observation of online sex webcams where the absence of sexual acts is the focus of the work. In the form of subtitles we follow several online community chats, users talking amongst other users. In video images we see empty rooms, a poetic reflection of what is not there. The recordings are made when the girls are gone, just before they come

back or go online. The chat that occurs when the girls are gone sometimes create funny situations where others have a darker context.



Still from my work BRB (2018)

The girls working (or ‘playing’) behind the webcam’s objectify their body by displaying it. 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 to almost from a distance view their body and see their body being viewed and desired without the self intervening in this objectification.<sup>1</sup> By taking this actor away, the objectification doesn’t distract you anymore and you are left to wonder who these persons are and what happened in the moments before, with only some clues to help you imagine.

In this work my different fascinations and interest come together; sexuality, ownership of body, the power structure and distribution regarding online sex and sex-work, identity, online communities and privacy.



Installation view On Holiday (2018)

<sup>1</sup> The naked self: Being a Body in Televideo Cybersex

For a workshop I did led by artist Shimon Attie I came up with the idea of working with a website that I've know for a while now. It's a dutch review site where you can review sex-workers. This research resulted in the work **On Holiday** (2018). Me and Salvador Miranda worked together on this project.

The reviews fascinated me because of the explicitness and the harshness (the extremeness, the shock), but also what also interested me was the fact that people would actually advise each other on sex-workers. We took these reviews as a starting point for the work and came across the term 'holiday' a lot. Most of the sex-workers in Holland are not originally Dutch and come here under false pretences. It's a thing amongst these reviewers or 'clientele' to keep track of where the (mostly) girls are (i.e. if they moved windows/city's, etc). They use the term holiday a lot to describe the sex-workers mostly going back home for a while to visit their family's. The reviewers sugar-coating the sex but also the visit back home was something that stood out.

We took tropical holiday items and sexualised them by putting and filming them in a certainty position. We used a lot of sexual image metaphors like melting ice-cream and dripping liquid. In this way literally 'objectified' the items. There is a voice-over consisting of different male voices reading out reviews. On the other screen we show a rendering of an ocean, also a make-believe. This stands for the idea that the reviewers have for the girls to be 'on holiday', something that is also a fake idea.

### **Context**

Although feminism in relation to pornography are a big part of my work, my work is not intended to be a feminist statement. I am much more interested in the relationship we, as humans with sexual desires, have to this online and personal space. I don't want to make much judgments with my work, mainly because I don't feel like I am the person who is in the position to judge. Everyone has their fetishes and kinks and I also see the online as a space to free yourself. Off-course I can not and won't ignore the part of sex-labour that the subject I have chosen entails, but like I said before, I rather provide insights and create a different context in which people can form their own opinion and views about the matter.

### **Coming Research**

During the research on Chaturbate website for my BRB project, I came across the "moderator" phenomena.

To become a moderator on Chaturbate for example, you have to be appointed one by the girls that own that particular chat room. Mostly these are guys that are a 'fan' of the girls and help them keep the 'scum' out. "[...]moderators do not get paid for being moderators. They are volunteers who want to do some favor to their broadcasters." <sup>2</sup> The idea of these moderators fascinate me. Who are these (mostly) men, why do they do this? How do they see the relationship they have with the screen, with this weird space on the internet.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cammodelplaza.com/how-to-be-a-moderator-on-chaturbate.html>

A moderator is a Chaturbate user who works alongside the broadcaster to ensure a quality broadcast for the broadcaster and viewers alike.

Moderators can communicate directly with the broadcaster, encourage viewers to tip in order to reach a goal, give insight to viewers should a problem with the broadcast arise, and much more.

Maybe the most important job a moderator has, is to watch the chat log during the broadcast. By carefully examining what is being said by viewers during the broadcast, moderators can silence a user for breaking any rules a broadcaster might have.

Certain language, requests, or behavior might be offensive to the broadcaster, and it is up to the moderator to decide whether or not to continue to allow that person to view a broadcast.

Broadcasters have the ability to set an expiration for Moderators on Chaturbate. The options are from 1 day to 6 months. This can be set under the "Settings & Privacy" tab.

Source: <https://support.chaturbate.com/customer/en/portal/articles/2744557-what-is-a-mod->

As I identify myself as mostly heterosexual, also in this world of online webcams and pornography I mostly focus on heterosexual webcam rooms and users. At this point I am trying to contact a couple of these moderators to see if I can talk to them personally. As with the BRB project I am very interested what the 'real' space behind the webspace tells.

I'm thinking of working with 360 material to get a sense of the rooms these moderators spend hours and hours behind their screens in. What do their environments tell us. How do these environments relate to the virtual environments and virtual and real rooms of the girls.

In extension to the notion of spaces I am also interested in the webcam model 'sets'. While there are a lot of webcam models camming from their own personal environment (bedroom, livingroom, kitchen, etc.), there are also a lot of models that rent a 'set', like a porn-set these are equipped with everything necessary for the show. But these rooms are impersonal and identity-less if you compare them to the personal rooms of some models. These sets where girls work from are mostly located in eastern Europe and the girls who work for these company's have



Photo of a webcam set



Locations of webcam companies

to hand in up to 75% of their income to pay for these companies their services.

I hope this research can lead me into a narrative I can use for my film. My plan for next year is to work towards a short essay film / fiction film for my graduation project. This could be the story of a moderator or webcam girl but also make a more experimental work about the online offline / space. A good example of a way I could go about is the film *Dragon Fly Eyes*<sup>3</sup> by Xu Bing that screened during last year's IFFR and that is made out of ten thousand hours of security camera footage, narrated through a fiction love story. This film also come close to a work I made in 2014 based all on unprotected IP camera's in people's houses.

This could be a mixed media fiction project. Important for me is that I really want to base it on my personal research. Right now I'm looking for Dutch moderators who want to talk to me. I think it would be really interesting to visit them and interview them. Maybe this could turn into a story told by one of the moderators. Next to that I am thinking of going to eastern-europa beginning of next year for research to find the locations of where these 'web-cam studio's' operate. I'm curious what these spaces look and feel like. How do these virtual environments relate to reality and vice versa.

Another interesting way of how 'online' culture could translate into a movie is the short movie *Rate Me (2015)*<sup>4</sup>, the short raises the question of what is real in our post-truth, online world. Based on online ratings and reviews of a young woman named Coco, she is presented throughout the film in different persona's.

Coming year I will focus on developing my research into a narrative project.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://variety.com/2017/film/reviews/dragonfly-eyes-review-qing-ting-zhi-yan-1202525754/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://vimeo.com/195878566>