

Project Proposal Second Draft

Introduction

I would like to make a short film that investigates how sexual and intimate encounters within online spaces relate to corporeal encounters. I have particular interest in how we view and shape (our) sexuality and experience intimacy within this liminal, digital space. How does this mediated form of bodily representation influence us and what do the spaces they are set in tell us?

My goal is to make a movie that compares or aligns the digital liminal space to the corporeal one. I will start with different experiments, and work from there.

“The internet is a natural environment for liminality and ekstasis, a place where self and society must be made to exist in a process where both are translated into the convention of the medium.” (Waskul 2005)



Room San Francisco, Herzog Studio, Russia



Room Quebec, Herzog Studio, Russia



Room Belveder, Herzog Studio, Russia



Room Dresden, Herzog Studio, Russia

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 studio's. Cam studio's 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 studio's 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 richness 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.

Start of project

The start of my project will be visiting these spaces in person. Right now they just exist online for me. I want to physically be present in those spaces, experience them in another sense. I'd like to document them on film and photo.

At the same time I want to start interviewing and talking to webcam performers, moderators and viewers.

The questions that I want to research within this project are ;

- What do these spaces say without the digital translation and context of a website.
- Can we extract a different meaning from these corporeal spaces, that are liminal in itself?
- How do sexual encounters within digital space, being a liminal one, create forms of desire and intimacy?

For my graduation work I look at and draw parallels between the on-line space and the physical.

With the interviews I'm looking to create narratives that shape and explore our sexuality and intimacy in a way that only a digital space facilitates. Engaging in online sex asks for us evoking a body (Waskul 2005). This is done through webcam images but also through typed words and other forms of fantasy. How do we shape and form lust and desire within this liminal space?

Next to the research and experiments I am thinking of re-enacting an online space and chat-conversation on film. In this way I will make the digital space a corporeal one. Exposing the differences between these spaces. How do these online digital translate to a corporeal one?

This could be in the form of an adaptation of the phone-scene in the film *Paris, Texas* (1984) by Wim Wenders.



Paris, Texas, 1984

In this particular scene the two main characters, Travis (Harry Dean Stanton) and Jane (Natassja Kinski) meet for the first time in four years, through a one-way mirror of a peepshow booth she now works. This peepshow-booth for me is offline translation (or a predecessor) of what websites like chaturbate.com are. But these modern peepshows contain extra elements, things only existing in the online. The division is not only in the interface, it's also in the way the online culture creeps into conversations. I want to take these symbols and interfaces and translate them also into the corporeal.

How do you plan to make it?

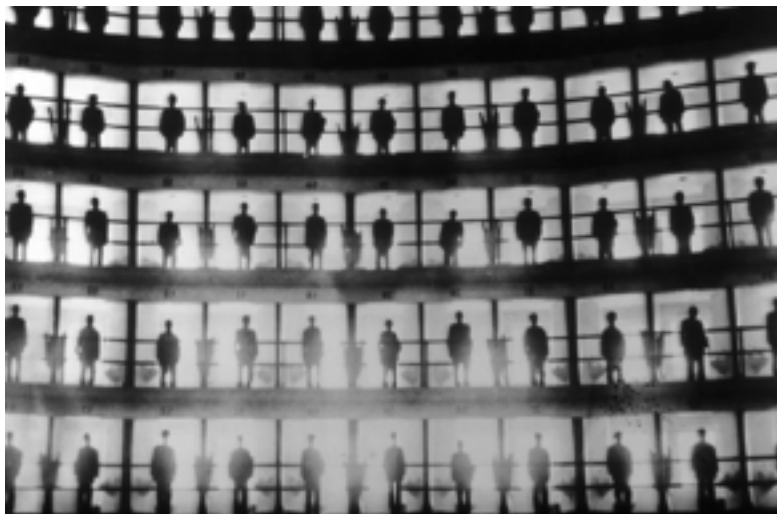
During the coming months I will write a script alongside my research for my thesis. This script will partly derive from interviews with performers, viewers and moderators through digital platforms like chaturbate.com. At the same time one of my first experiments is visiting the webcam companies the performers work from and documenting the offline liminal spaces.

Another part of my plan is to visit the houses / spaces of the spectators and moderators, from where do they 'gaze'? How do these spaces relate to the digital ones?

I might use these interviews on screen and in audio, as part of the film, but could also interpret them and use them in a more fictional setting. At the same time I will use these conversations to further explore my personal voice and interests within these subjects.

All this material I will use as a starting point towards (or part of) my graduation work.

My background is in 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 idea's 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.



Inmates standing in their cells, Prison Presido Modelo, Cuba, 1926

What is your timetable?

T.B.A.

Why do you want to make it?

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'.

For me it is important to approach subjects like online sex and the obsession we have with it, without moral judgements. Personally I feel like part of the attraction and obsession for example online pornography is because it is at the same time deplorable. This duality has always existed in sexuality (dominance vs submissiveness) and is enlarged within a liminal space.

In this work my different fascinations and interest come together; sexuality, ownership of body, identity, online communities, privacy but also obsession and lust within this digital frame-work.

Who can help you and how?

Productional I have a big network in film, so I have people to help and work with me on this project (hopefully). The plan I have right now is going to one of these webcam-sets. I would like to take a cinematographer with me to help me capture and document these spaces. Also I might need a translator.

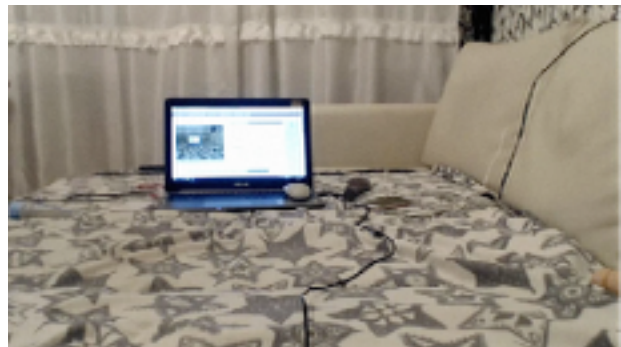
Theoretically I hope to talk to some researchers, online sex workers, journalists and research into online intimacy, the online gaze and embodiment through webcam based practices.

Relation to previous practice

The digital space as a place for sexual has been a subject of my work for the past years.

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.

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.



Still from my work BRB (2018)

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.

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.

Relation to a larger context

-> *Artist -> Jon Rafman and Ed Atkins relating to digital / physical and the meaning. Jon Rafman relates to online space as a liminal one. Ed Atkins makes hyperreal animations within a context of digital meaning and symbolism.*

Paris / Texas scene

-> *RATE ME - FYZAL BOULIFA (2015)*

-> *Dragon Fly Eyes by Xu Bing*

-> *panopticon*

-> *documentary CLICK ME*

Although feminism in relation to pornography is an undeniable 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. Of-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.

References

Waskul - ekstasis and the internet

Michele White - The_Body_and_the_Screen

The Naked Self: Being a Body in Televideo Cybersex - Dennis D. Waskul

Now the Orgy Is Over - Dennis D. Waskul