



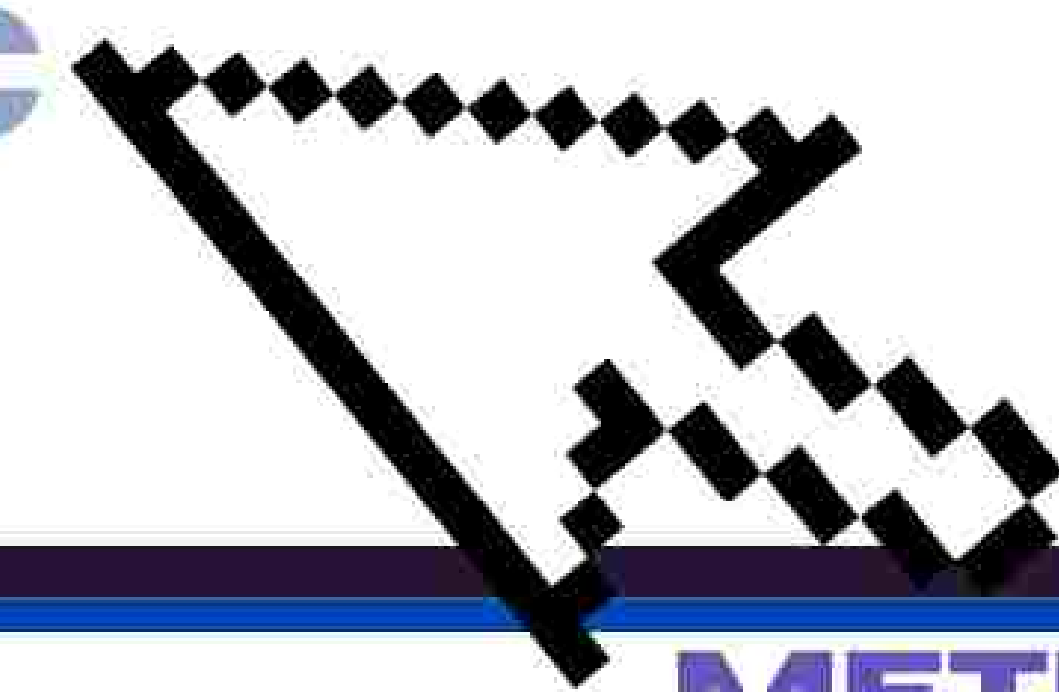
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# THE WELL-MADE PORN:

## THE DRAMATURGIES OF EROTIC WEBCAMMING

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THIS RESEARCH WAS  
SUPPORTED BY THE JAMIE  
CASSELS UNDERGRADUATE  
RESEARCH AWARD,



### BACKGROUND

Erotic webcamming, also known as camming, is the trade of using a webcam to perform live sex acts in exchange for goods or money. In erotic webcamming itself, webcammers- or cammers- utilise a live chat function to allow the audience to make requests for acts they would pay money to watch the performer enact. In my research, I examine the act of webcamming as not simply a form of survivalist sex work, but as a form of theatre- a distinction important not only for widening perspectives of what theatrical performance can be, but in destigmatizing virtual sex work itself. When examining, through a theatrical, analytical lens, erotic webcamming live-streams themselves- the relationship between performer and audience, the sexual performances themselves, and the scenographic elements that the performers utilise in the process of presenting themselves and their work to a virtual, aroused, audience, it becomes clear that its embedded dramaturgical structure of audience interaction, and the unique scenography created to encompass and guide sexual solo performance, the theatrical practices that inform erotic webcamming have established it as a form of live, virtual, performance art.

### METHODS

- Viewing and analyzing the primary source materials of online erotic webcamming through a critical, theatrical lens- noting the acting techniques, scenographic choices, and interactions with the audience- and their similarities to traditional western theatrical practice.
- Examining past literature relating to this topic, as well as past performance art made by and about sex workers- specifically erotic webcammers.
- Interviewing a former actress, and current erotic webcammer, about the intersections in her differing identities and the ways in which she utilises her theatre training in performing sex acts online.

### SCENOGRAPHY

Elements of live theatrical design such as lighting, sound, and costuming are made deliberately and specifically calculated in order to increase the amount of virtual patrons.

- Performances often happen in webcammer's bedrooms- psychologists argue this fulfils a voyeuristic "peeping tom" fantasy
- The tailored lack of set is a scenographic choice as well.
- Each of these deliberate choices help to furnish and aid creatively to the performance being given, much as in traditional theatre, and many strive to go above and beyond in order to stand out in an online space.
- Examples of scenographic choices in a webcamming space can include, visible shelving with rows of sex toys, sheer lingerie, LED strips, fuzzy bedding, etc.
- The webcammer calculates what scenographic choices will align with their chosen "niche", what will entice patrons, and what will add to the performance without distracting the audience- all choices theatrical scenic designers make as well.

### AUDIENCE

In camming, the audience seems to function as a virtual co-star, a demanding crowd, and a director- the audience is who gives commands and the one who rewards them as they are delivered.

- The "chat" structure of the webcamming sites allows for the audience to request, reward, and respond to the performer- asking for specific sexual performances, offering monetary rewards for different angles, and, in certain performances, paying money to virtually change the levels of vibration on a sex toy, through an app.
- As in in much COVID lockdown-era online theatre, the chat is visible throughout the performance- but in webcamming, it is a part of the performance. Without the live audience, webcamming, like so much of pre-recorded porn, loses the personality, presentness, and spontaneity that patrons eagerly watch for.
- Erotic webcamming's unique formatting prioritizes anonymity for the audience, the ability to silently interject an request, and a participative space where one can choose to watch silently.
- Unlike traditional, detached, pre-filmed pornography- it is the connection between cammer and patron that is allure of erotic webcamming itself.

### PERFORMANCE

The exhibition of performative masturbation makes up the better part of erotic webcamming, and within its general structure we find the main acting techniques applied in these solo performances.

- In webcamming, performers find a niche they fit into- something to define their own channel while simultaneously setting themselves apart from others.
- The cammers, while performing sexual acts, employ a practiced arsenal of facial expression, bodily movement, and vocalizations.
- While the idea of pornographic performers using their own created, singular, repertoire and stunts to their advantage is not a new one, it is a tried and true technique, just as Stanislavski's or Miesner's, and one that performs favourably for an audience less interested in character development than they are in the sexualized representation of the character.
- The plot of an erotic webcam livestream is not the predictable build-up and release of a conventional story arc- but more of a staccato performance of response and teasing- a series of smaller builds and climaxes- so to speak- that continue on and on.



Newell, El. "An Erotic Webcammer's Prop Table" November 20th, 2023

### CONCLUSION

The placing of erotic webcamming as completely divorced from the sphere of theatrical and performance practice is an active antagonistic agent in the fight to destigmatize online sex work as a legitimate industry. The dramaturgies discussed herein all pivot to point directly to the classification expanded upon in my research, of the inclusion of camming to our collective consciousness as an active performance art constantly being informed by modern theatrical practices in order to deliver a satiating, live, experience to a wide, willing, audience. A large majority of erotic webcammers diverge from more traditional pornographic stars- ones who work in the pre-recorded erotic film industry- in their influence on the creation of the performance, as well as its distribution- marking erotic webcammers as theatrical practitioners in truly every step of the process. These theories and questions circle around us, this line in the sand between sex and work, sex and art, theatre and the internet- but in the end, we must strive to recognize and acknowledge, as art, the institution of camming- where erotic performance can continue be theatricalized in an online, accessible, manner.

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POSTER CREATED FEBRUARY 10TH, 2024