

Sleeping with the Devil / Please Come Again

By

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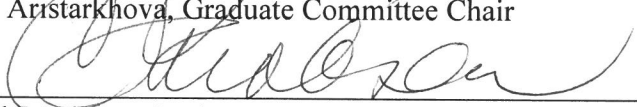
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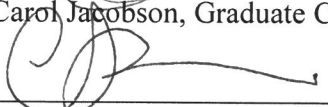
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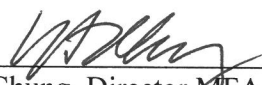
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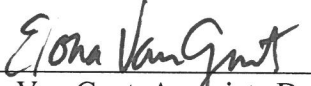
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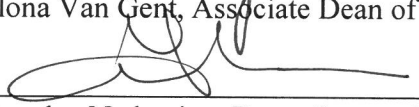
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Written thesis

Alisa Yang

♪ Sleeping with the Devil ♪

Dual thesis shows of
“Sleeping with the Devil”
and “Please Come Again”



Abstract

This written thesis provides the research background, critical analysis, and documentation of the creative process behind my thesis work. Framing the two thesis shows as different methods of presenting and making in a time based media at the intersection of experimental film, anthropology, and personal narrative; I am exploring feminist consciousness in issues of sexuality, cultural identity and language as an Asian American female artist.

In *Sleeping with the Devil*, I have uses found footage and a recorded Skype exorcism to confront my past growing up in the Evangelical prophetic and deliverance ministry.

Please come again is a multi-media installation Incorporating the collective and personal memory of three generations of women in my family into a narrative journey that navigates the themed rooms in love hotels. *Please come again* is a poetic contemplation of one's sexuality, femininity, and cultural identity. Exploring these spaces as a metaphor for the female body, the two room installation leads the viewer first, as a tourist into a staged red love hotel room, and then second, as a voyeur into a blue carpeted room to experience the single video projection.

Keywords

Collage, film, feminism, installation, identity, video, language, sexuality, love hotels, exorcism

Aknowledgement

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Introduction

Artist Statement

I am a voyeur
A sensitive lover
A tree

I believe in sincere gestures,
Strength in vulnerability,
genuine eating

I believe in finding beauty from within the thing we do not speak of,
to listen when no one is around

I make art in a space where words fail and water never boils
I also like to make love in the woods

Before innocence corrupted us
we were naked material, no bodies
before names separated us
we were no different, no one

I feel our collective suffering,
the weight of their silence carries our phantom pain
trauma stinks like bad breath in the morning
Sitting there waiting to disappear in the mouth
We forget that forgetting can't erase the smell of rain

I remember how narrative moves
I want to move mountains, islands, and seas
I want to make soup

I make art in a space where time naps and tea stays hot
sipping on the slippage of truth,
rearranging our archive of meanings,
all for your viewing pleasure
a treat



line, pencil on paper, 42" x 150", 2014

Chapter 1: language

The pivotal moment of transition during my first year of the graduate program was when I started to scrutinize the process of language acquisition. This resulted in a series of line drawings, a meditative mediation of drawing the same line over and over again without being able to replicate the same stroke. Then the series of ascemic writing, *The Shape of Uncanny*, I attempted to create anti-symbols shapes, a wordless language. I was reminded of a memory of when I was learning to write Chinese. As an American kid who moved to Taiwan, I could hardly read or write. As punishment, my teacher would give me extra homework by making me write each character I spelled wrong 100 times. I spent at least an hour every night writing characters until I committed them to memory. The character, which was foreign to me, was associated with a meaning through repetition, but by the 100th time, the meaning was drained from the character. I became fascinated with the moment that happens on that 100th time, that simultaneous recognition of unfamiliarity and familiarity, emptiness and wholeness all contained into one ambiguous state.

The relationship between the signifier and the signified is what fascinates me. I looked into semiotics to get a better look at the mechanism in which this arbitrary system of assigning meaning works, and how it's translated across culture, language, and time.

By the end of the semester I was interested in articulating the arbitrary system of assigning meaning into my work, to abolish the authority of signs and language by appealing to its discontinuous activity. I created "Between", a dual 35mm slide projection installation, 80 slides per carousel. The viewer is invited to play with the speed at which the slide advances in time intervals between 3sec-22sec, letting randomness and chance play an important role. One projector shows slides of made-up definitions of words that don't exist, and the other projectors shows slides of found images and my drawn slides of shapes from *The Shapes of Uncanny*.

As individuals we want words to be transparent in their representation of truth. This extends to all forms of communication including art and cinema. Not being able to decipher the meaning of a painting or a film drives people mad. Debates over interpretation can take place anywhere in a gallery, on an online forum, in books, and even in the bedroom. We are so instinctually ingrained in our search for meaning we construct different institutions to explain why things are they way they are wither it's religion, horoscopes, science, or philosophy. What Foucault calls "The will to truth" is one of the external institutional factors that exercise its control over words. (1) My goal was to simulate the mechanics of the meaning-making machine, to emulate the repetition that validates the meaning in the process of language acquisition. In doing so I hope to reveal the inherit inadequacy of language, signs, and image; to prove that there is no dominant interpretation that is "correct" or "authentic".

Umberto Eco explains "Semiotics is in principle studying everything which can be used in order lie, conversely it cannot be used to tell the truth: it cannot in fact be used 'to tell' at all." (2) In this respect, I am interested in using moving-image to navigate the film's mediated nature as representation. My thesis work sits at the intersection of personal narrative, experimental film, and anthropology. New to video and film making, I decided to choose myself as a subject matter. It was important to me that I learn how to tell my story first before I tell the stories of others. Acknowledging that the reality perceived is constructed through film by means of editing, framing, and other techniques, not unlike any other forms of mediation, I wanted to translate what I have been doing with collage in my practice with film.

Chapter 2: memory



you never had a chance in life



Labrynthitis

Coincidences are made in remembering
It feels like fear of heights
Except you are walking along the edges of your sanity
You become a voyeur of your own body

The back of your head looks odd, shoulders uneven
You dream in third person, but watch in the first row
You see cracked brown eggs

Flipping through the channels of your memory
Sudden white snow
Eavesdropping on conversations remembered
A lemon tree

Krauss proposes that video uses psychology as a medium(3)
Perpetual frustration of a narcissistic space
You wonder if your personal problems are indeed political
You wonder if you'd look good naked in pixels

As you sink into the old couch
You feel the shame gravity pulled through your mother and hers
A prayer passed down between your legs

Halbwachs wanted us to see memory as reconstructed
Images takes up a lot of memory, so you play with the order of things
To save space,
You wonder if you can make contradictory things to coexist
You wonder if you can escape the loop time resist

"Feminist consciousness is understood here not as a state of awareness arrived at after an accumulation of knowledge and experiences, but as the term of a process... what seems necessary today are works that address each viewer in her unique (but) social self, that speak to her personally, inviting her to perceive them according to her own experience and background while soliciting at the same time her ability to reflect on her social conditioning or on the ties that bind her to other social selves in the very process of perceiving."

-Trinh Ming Ha, When the Moon Waxes Red.

Chapter 3: Experimental film, anthropology, personal narrative

'We do not say "experimental paintings" painting is a repaired medium, constantly patched and reworked through the centuries, accepted through endless growth. Is the label "experimental film" to say that we cannot deny the cinema is still an unknown, only the cinema is still an unknown, only hinted at by hindsight, fantasy, dream, hallucinations, comedy'

- Stan Vanderbeek, *"The Cinema Delimina"*, 1961

Both works weave in and out of personal experiences and collective history in the issues of sexuality, power dynamic, and cultural identity - specifically for Asian American females. The films present questions of how traumas are dealt without arriving at a solution. The perpetual struggle is signified in how "Please Come Again" plays in a loop with no clear point of beginning (entry) or ending (exits), and in "Sleeping with the Devil", with the use of montage of newsclip, TV shows, and faith healing conferences found on the internet.

Unresolved ambiguity in these cases is as intentional as I am genuinely still searching for a way out. Video editing became a method of that search, a similar process in negotiating power dynamics and representation in real life. Relationship between word, image, and sound is intuitively arranged to give expression of the psychological suffering not bound by the past, present, or future. Jean Baudrillard argues, "there is a kind of primal pleasure, of anthropological joy in images, a kind of brute fascination unencumbered by aesthetic, moral, social, or political judgment. It is because of this that I suggest they are immoral, and that their fundamental power lies in this immorality." (4) There is comfort and safety in searching in this immorality, and there is pleasure in the spectatorship of this immorality.

There is a shared subjectivity shaped by displacement and marginality with Asian Americans whose collective experience continues to be regarded as the perpetual foreigner, strangers in perpetual disappearance and reappearance not only in history, the American consciousness, but also in cinema. Glen M. Mimura points to this kind of spectral quality in Asian American media arts after the 80s - most prominent in works by feminists, queer artists and activists - as a "ghost life of Third Cinema" (5) [*1].

Pioneering the field in the spirit of Third Cinema is the work of Trinh Minh-Ha. Trinh's film practice underlines the notion that documentary is no more realistic than fiction. Her documentary flows between fact and fiction, using artifice to destabilize authority, film aware of its own contractedness. In *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989), the interviews of Vietnamese women talking about their past and postwar life in Vietnam are shaped by multiple histories of translation and cultural geographical displacement. Oral interviews are transcribed in Vietnamese, translated into French as a book, translated into English film script, and finally performed by members of a diaspora community. The transcribed text scrolls across the performer, asserting its own merit for comparison in its equivalent size and proportion to the subject.

For research, I looked at Dara Birnbaum's video art in the way she engages tv media in her early works, Birnbaum describes her tapes as new "ready-mades" for the late 20th century—works that "manipulate a medium which is itself highly manipulative." I also looked at the work of Shu Lea Cheang. a multi-media artist working in the field of net-based installation and film, a prominent figure in identity politics and erotic exploration

When using myself as the subject matter, I made myself vulnerable to the question of authenticity in the multi-dimensional reconstruction of my narrative. Closing the gap between self and representation becomes a game of attracting my own ghost. I am fascinated with how moving-images can address the dislocation of subjectivity and the dislocation of spectator in

Chapter 3: Experimental film, anthropology, personal narrative



Shu Lea Cheng, "Coming Home" , 1995

different spatiotemporal situations, particularly in the primary sites of a gallery/museum, cinema theater, and the recent addition of the digital space. Appealing to our voyeuristic inclination in viewing documentary, I reinforce voyeurism in the aesthetic of POV camera movement in "please come again", and in the recorded private Skype conversation of "Sleeping with Devil". The voyeur spectator is given the illusion of intimacy through the emotional intense stories without the reward of real knowledge or resolution. Serving as a metaphor for the frustration of negotiating incongruent cultural identities as Asian American women.



Dara Birnbaum, "Kiss the Girls: Make them Cry", 1979



Sleeping with the Devil

In *Sleeping with the Devil*, I used found footage and a recorded Skype exorcism to confront my past growing up in the Evangelical prophetic and deliverance ministry. In high school, believing that I was possessed by demons, my mother forced me to see dozen exorcists and faith healers. Unill this day she still begs for me to go back to church, and even offered to pay for a prayer/deliverance service over Skype. So When I saw that Bob Larson offers a Skype exorcism for \$295, I took it as an opportunity to record the conversation and make a piece on about it.

This is the first time I willingly participated for an exorcism. In all my previous experiences I was rebellious, resistant, and incredibly annoyed – which only confirms that I was redolent of curses and demonic possessions. My motivation for making the film was to attempt to understand the fanatic attraction to this form of Christianity, and in the process purge the guilt, shame, self-hate it has taught me to feel.

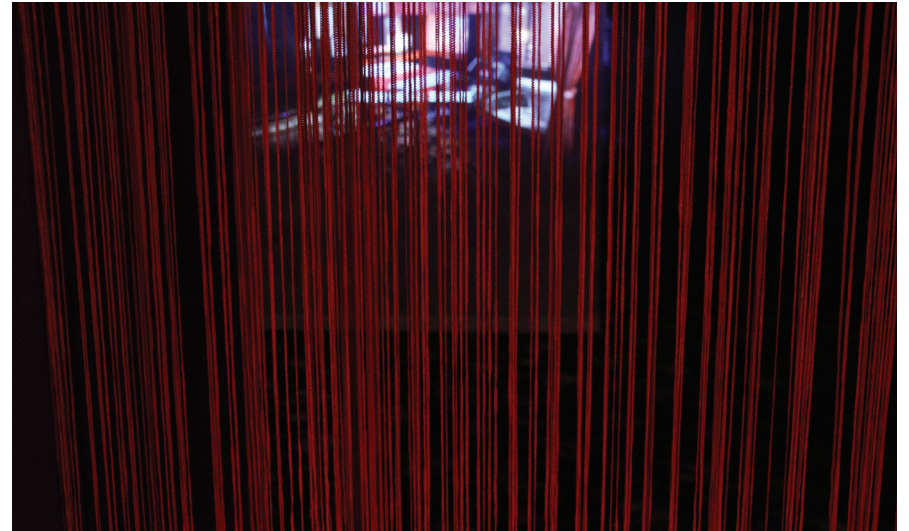
I did not realize how intensely emotional it was going to be in the beginning to edit the one hour long conversation. Listening to the preacher repeatedly telling me that I am a whore, that all I was missing was a father to tell me the right thing to do, that

I'm cursed, and it was my ancestors 'fault that I was sexually abused and raped. Half way through the year, the over exposure of his harsh words rendered itself effect-less, he became a absurd caricature of himself. As distance built I was able to make formal and aesthetic decisions without being clouded by sentimental garbage.

The decision to montage the news clip and TV shows was to provide context while disrupting the linear narrative of the Skype conversation. I placed the interruption where the conversation needed a break. The different resolutions between the low quality skype video, HD TV clips, youtube uploads created different layers of texture, an important element I carried over as a collage based artist. Being primarily a 2-D artist working with drawing, painting, mix media, and printmaking, I've been looking for ways to film and edit as I would collage, paint, and draw. In similar effect, technology and aesthetic of the pixel added friction and tension of different representations. In addition, the perception of time embedded in technical apparatus suggest the era in which it was made.



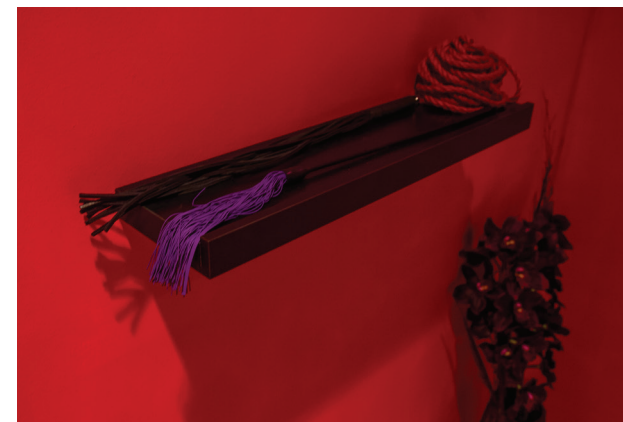
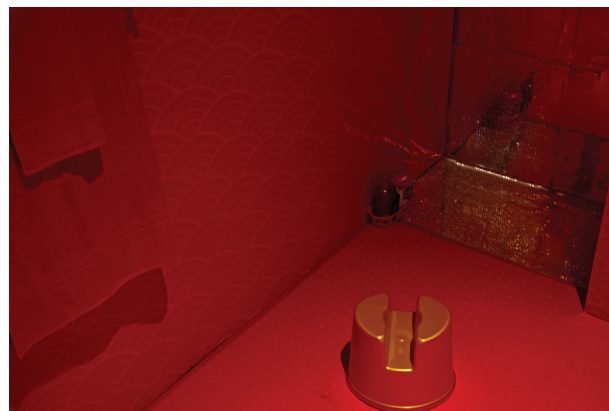
"Welcome desk, Control Room", installation view
Please Come Again exhibition, 2016



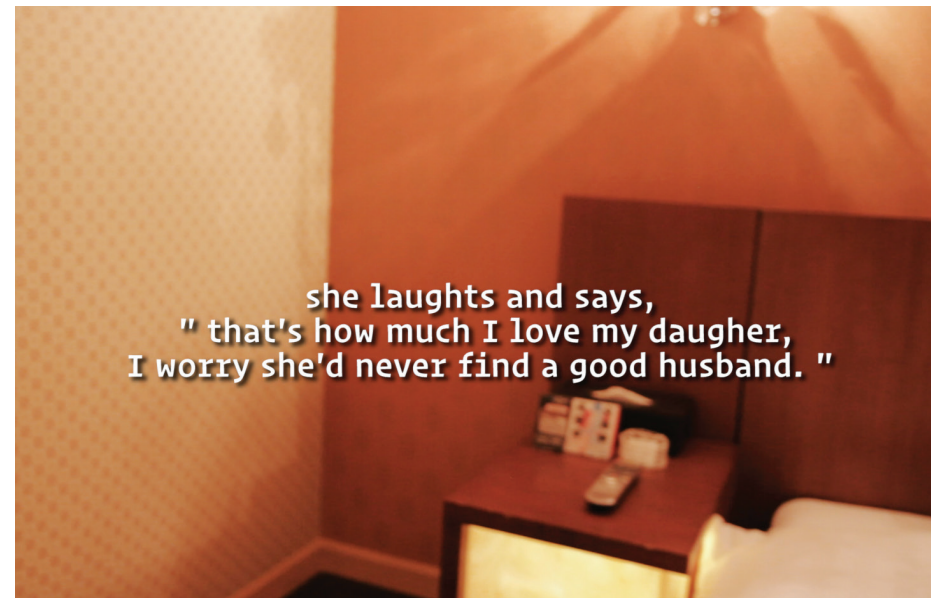
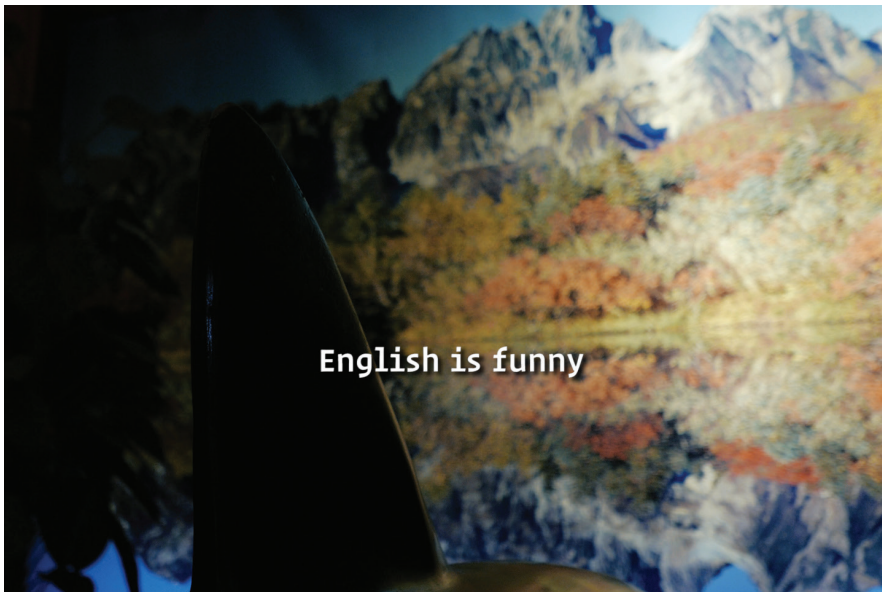
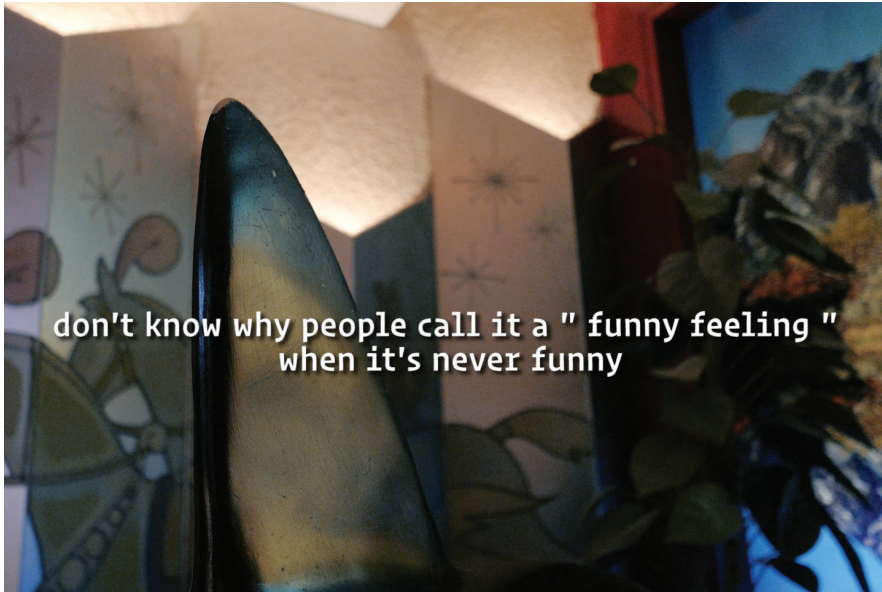
"Honeymoon suite", installation view
Please Come Again exhibition, 2016

Creative Work

“Honeymoon suite”, installation view
Please Come Again exhibition, 2016



Creative Work



film stills from "Please Come Again", 2016

FUNNY

This funny feeling haunts me
I am a ghost trapped in the wrong body
My mom was arranged to marry the wrong guy
And now we are both miserable
Looking in the mirror, my mind wonders who the fuck that is
That's not mine
Just a love hotel for the night
One of these lifetimes, my body will be mine, maybe a tree
Don't know why people call it a "funny feeling" when its never funny
English is funny
Words don't always appear as it's supposed to mean

PINK

As a child, my father locked me in the bathroom for as long as an entire day
Got to know the bathroom really well
It never ran out of toilet paper
The bathroom had Pepto-Bismol pink tiles
A matching pink sink and a pink tub
I hate that pink
There was nothing to do in that room
But take a bath or stare out the window
My eyes closed to fantasize about my escape
Or laid as still as possible in the tub, pretended it was a different kind of container
Convinced myself that this was a dream
Imagined that if death came inside the bathroom, at least my body would be clean
The funny thing is, I always leave the bathroom door open when I'm alone

FAMILY SECRETS

There was a rumor
My great grandmother was a comfort woman
She had an enemy baby
There was another rumor
My grandmother was a prostitute when she was young
She refused to answer questions about her past
She told me a story instead
A man is sentenced to death,
For his last request, he asks his mother to hold him like a baby and feed him
She pulls out her breast and cradles his head
When the executioner comes, he bites off her nipple,
She shrieks in pain and yells "why, son, why!"
He spits out her nipple and replies, "Because you made me into a criminal."
This was my bedtime story

MICHIGAN WINTER

When my mother was asked about her first born
My mother would say, she woke up one day in the Michigan winter
Too many days of white rice and soy sauce
Shame grew in her belly
She apologizes for using too much soy sauce
My mother didn't know her daughter would come out so murky
She even asked her nurse, "are you sure this is mine?"
She was confused why this burnt ugly baby was hers
My mother told the story like a broken record
She makes this funny face by furrowing her brows and tilting her head
She laughs and says, " that's how much I love you, I worry she'd never find a good husband."

MAGIC WAND

My mother taught me my body is a holy temple where Jesus lives
My duty is to clean and smell clean
After I masturbated I prayed for forgiveness
I didn't like how Jesus never cleaned up after himself
So I broke up with his holy ass
My grandmother used to tell me
" Your body can be a powerful weapon,
It can make the strongest men break for you -
I might teach you when you're older -
Only if I liked you, only if you were pale."
She still doesn't like me
And I'm still murky
But I have this heart shaped tub all to myself
I learned how to please myself today

SOLO FEMALE

Missed the last train at Umeda station,
Looking for a room to crash in a love hotel,
I'm denied four times in the rain.
Later, at the ninth floor S&M bar
The hostess girl tells me
It's common for love hotels not to allow solo females.
Love hotels are a popular place for women to kill themselves.
Most themed love hotels in Osaka have been renovated into normal hotels.
Dancing at a basement reggae bar in Kyoto
Young girls tell me
New love hotels are like a relaxing getaway
They enjoy the outdoor bath and the affections from their suite
Drinking in a damp cigarette alley bar, some expired men reminisce
The traditional love hotels of their youth are fading
It doesn't matter, modern women won't go with them to love hotels

DISCUSSION

“... You can say they (Japanese) love fantasies more than they love sex. Which is exactly why love hotels developed.”

- Natsuo Kiring

Please Come Again

This immersive installation contains two rooms divided by curtains. The first room is a facsimile of love hotel room, a staged set to give sensorial context of the looping video projected in the second room.

Asia's Love hotels offer a private space for not only for sex, but for intimacy and freedom of expression in a culture that demands selfless conformity, especially women. In the summer of 2015, I went to Kyoto and Osaka with the intention of filming the changes of love hotel. While I was there, I saw the transition of women from pleasing others to pleasing themselves in the transformation of love hotels.

Love hotels originated in Japan and it is a type of business unique to Asia. These hotels allow for a wide variety of fantasy “sets” for erotic experiences in very crowded cities. Even during economic hard times, love hotels are a recession proof business. The NY Daily News estimates, as of 2014, there are up to 30,000 hotels, an industry worth 40 billions that is thriving in Japan. The popularity of love hotels can be attributed to the lack of privacy and busy schedules of working adults, coupled with the high prices of real estate, more people living with their parents or roommates. Although recent laws have been passed to prohibit any new building of love hotels, new love hotels are bypassing what qualifies as a “love hotel” by claiming to be luxury hotels that provide love hotel like amenities.

Besides the pressure of conforming to regulation of obscenity laws, love hotels are motivated to change their image for two reasons: one, women are less inclined to go to love hotels since they have been the depicted in TV shows, manga, and literature as a place of crime and nefarious activities; and two, woman, are increasingly the ones deciding the love hotel they want to go to. Concurrent to recent rise of women entering the workforce, choosing careers over the traditional homemaker role of marriage, women in Japan are exploring their sexuality and identity in increasing numbers. Just as women are

demanding to be the one to choose the love hotels in the relationship, they are proclaiming ownership of their bodies, demanding fulfillment of their desires and pleasure. They are rejecting the prosaic attitudes that women's bodies are in servitude to their husband, family, and society.

In terms of designing the installation, I took into account how the Love hotel functions as a cultural barometer, “As a democratic and accessible place at the service of the general public, the love hotel offers a powerful window on the changing nature of Japanese relationship both to their own culture and to other cultures, which have become embodied in the design and use of the love hotel.”(6)

Design trends were constricted by “public moral regulations” and the current popular fantasy of sexual desires. The film set quality of extravagant appropriation of Western culture cliché and sexualized space of the 80s are faded out in favor of a more minimal, luxurious, spa resort design. What remains the same is the exotic appeal of the otherworldliness, a safe and private space to explore love, sexuality, and intimacy. When the social expectation of being and interacting is dependent of group mentality instead of individuality, there is no real dedicated space for individuals to authentically occupy. Perhaps this is one of the reasons love hotels are necessities in Japanese culture but not needed in Western cultures. Although an inauthentic environment, love hotels tries to fill in the gap by manufacturing images of both home and rootlessness, nostalgia and unfamiliarity to give permission for being yourself.

I immediately identified with this sentiment of dislocation.

Being an Asian American, I am either seen as a foreigner in America, or regarded as white-washed in my homeland of Taiwan. I inherited both cultures and an incongruent identity, a collage of Asianness and Western cliché.

While noting the renovations of love hotels were determined by catering to female desires, and how women are the one in the relationship deciding which love hotels to go. I thought about desires and oppression experienced by women in my family.

In the book "The Development of Feminist Consciousness among Asian American Women" Esther chow explains, "Domination by men is commonly shared oppression for Asian American women. These women have been socialized to accept their devaluation, restricted roles for women, psychological reinforcement of gender stereotypes, and a subordinate position within Asian communities as well as in the society at large." (7)

The unexpected reflections I experienced were written into the film in the segments of "Michigan Winter", "Magic Wand", and "Family Secrets". These segments touched on cycle of shame and oppression perpetually shared by the generations of Asian women and how we deal with it within the different cultural, geographical, and generational context.

I take this concept one step further, appropriating the Japanese love hotel for a Western audience in Michigan. The result is a collage of amenities, props, lighting, and interior design I've encountered in the various love hotels in my trip. The experience of uncanny delight of recognizing 80s culture cliché and twice-exoticization of Asianness as an Asian American female is reproduced in the red heart shaped themed love hotel room and in the blue floral carpeted room.

I was able to locate these love hotels through research and going to different bars in Japan. When appropriate, I was able to have casual conversations about love hotels, and sometimes, exchange stories and insight into relationship and sex. I collected these experiences into a segment of the film mixing exterior shots of love hotels with my writing "Solo female".

In designing the installation, I wanted to build a room that

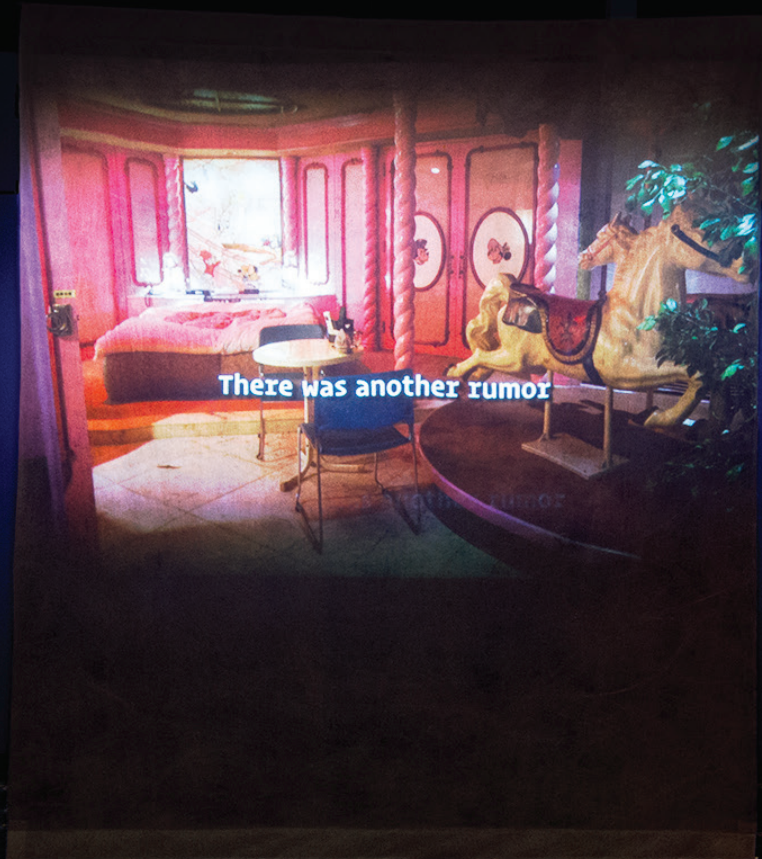
mixes all the elements I saw on trip, and also to encapsulate what it would look like if my body and my desires was a love hotel room?

I decided to do a red themed room. Besides the known associations of passion, pleasure, love, and lust, it is also a color for celebration in many Asian cultures, and color of the wedding dress for Asian woman,

I thought about the archetype girl in red so prevalent in stories such as the little red riding hood, scarlet letter, and how its used in commercials, cartoons, and films as visual device to suggest seduction and sexual availability. and most significantly to me, the Chinese myth of female ghost who committed suicide in red.

I was disturbed and confused when I was denied to some of the love hotels because I was a solo female. I learned later that this is probably because there has been at least a case of female suicide in that particular hotel, and for old love hotels who hang on to superstitious, they wouldn't dare to take a risk.

This triggered something in me, it conjured up an image I saw on in the newspaper in Taiwan, of a woman in red, dangling from her ceiling. It is believed that if a woman commits suicide in red, she can become a ghost to avenge her death or preserve her honor, and usually, this is reserved for survivors of domestic violence, sexual abuse, and rape, for some women, this is the only way to redeem herself from shame. This has been one of the tropes of Chinese myth and fiction for many centuries. Most popular in late imperial fiction, the prominent themes of young women caught between the requirements of sexual purity, the repressed sexual desires, and the shame of hiding sexual abuse. Suicide is as predictable a result as "they got married and lived happily ever after" in fairy tales. The psychological undertone of creating a red room was thus also to make a room fit for this kind scenario.



There was another rumor

Conclusion

Focusing on the theme of language, sexuality, and cultural identity, My thesis work “Sleeping with the Devil” and “Please Come Again” examines personal and collective memories at the intersection of Experimental films, anthropology, and personal narratives; and in this case, specifically on the subjectivity of being an Asian American woman. In addition, the dual exhibition explores different formats in the two main sites of spectatorship, one in a cinema-theater setting and one in a gallery setting.

I believe both projects are successful in its emotional infectiousness and in experimenting with documentary forms of self-reflection, an important stepping-stone towards my goal of creating experimental documentaries and installation art

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