

Inhibited by Media Narcissism: Magibon and the Other

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INTRODUCTION

The advent of the modern age has brought visual voyeurism closer to us than ever before. From any given location an individual can utilise mobile equipment to quickly gaze into the self-produced online world of others via social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Here we may check information, but above all indulge in visual stimuli such as photographs or videos that persons or companies have seemingly found worthy to share. This ever-growing material ranges from vernacular family pictures to illegally obtained- and published nude imagery. Somewhere in between this dichotomy of experience, there is a niche to be found that questions notions of character construction, narcissism and appropriation, for example: the self-centred YouTube clips of Margaret Lillian Adams (1986), better known as *Magibon*.

I first came across the cultural phenomenon of Magibon in an obscure internet article, of which I could not verify the source's opinions to be necessarily trustworthy - as is often the case with public writing online.¹ However, the article provoked my attention as it described Magibon to be a "typical case of internet disease" by "getting famous for doing absolutely nothing".² The article, laced with an overly apparent negative tone which continued to describe how Magibon had tried to "escape her white trash life" as she uploaded "useless crap" to YouTube.³ As I ruminated and subsequently explored the origins of the article, I decided to randomly access one of Magibon's videos displayed on the website.

As I watched, an uncanny feeling began to creep up on me. The video displays an indoor setting, seen through a small perspective distorting lens of a webcam. The experience of the video was that of being continually gazed upon by a girl during the entire timespan of over half a minute. The clip is somewhat reminiscent of David Cronenberg's classic *Videodrome* (1983), in which the borders between reality and medial reality are progressively eroded: the aspect of immediacy offered by the webcam, made me feel as if I was being literally observed in a live setting, even though I was aware that the material had been pre-recorded. I was fascinated by Magibon's video, but at the same time wondered why anyone would go through the effort of not only watching but appreciating her presence online. Even more strange perhaps, many people had via the comments section voiced a overtly negative critique on her videos. I decided to perform an investigation regarding the hardly ever looked into subject Magibon, which eventually expanded into a wellspring of material; now the main topic of this thesis.

Magibon, a native American, lived at the time of producing her first videos between 2006 - 2008 together with her mother and younger sister in a rural town in Pennsylvania, United States. According to an interview, she led "a slow life" in her town, where she would "not ever do anything but [use] the internet and YouTube."⁴ This state of boredom wherein the internet is extensively

utilised, seems to reveal inner desire in Magibon to be meaningful somehow. Clinical psychologist John Eastwood of the York University in Toronto, Canada and his colleagues attempt in their famed 2012-paper⁵ to scientifically redefine 'boredom', a word that seemingly appeared for the first time in a Charles Dickens novel.⁶ Eastwood proposes in the paper that boredom can be "universally conceptualised" as "the aversive experience of wanting, but being unable, to engage in satisfying activity", which is characterised by both restlessness and slowness.⁷ The exact causes of boredom are less determined, since Eastwood eludes that this boredom might be the consequence of a combination of factors, such as for a vulnerability to boredom and an underlying mental state.⁸ However, Eastwood also suggests that boredom is mainly a matter of attention: "When the individual fails to engage [their] attention with an unrewarding external environment, they focus instead on more rewarding internal thought processes."⁹ Such "rewarding thought processes" include spontaneous mental activities "such as daydreaming or other associative thought processes."¹⁰ To a great extent Magibon's YouTube-videos indeed seem to testify the aforementioned notion. Magibon's videos predominantly feature an aesthetics of pure idleness. The regular Magibon-viewer will be confronted by the often dreamy, long lasting stare of Magibon. Other antics include, but are not limited to demonstrating the consumption of her favourite food or showing off various household- and decorative items. What makes the case of Magibon so interesting is an unexpected contradiction. As far as one can see, her videos reveal internal boredom-invoked processes, which are said to be caused by the failure of engaging with an external environment. However, by the means of externally displaying her videos on the public hosting service of YouTube, Magibon *did* eventually succeed in attracting massive external attention from her viewers. This apparent boredom I argue, is made meaningful in a paradoxical sense (not through Magibon's desire, but through her actions).

The first chapter consists of an in-depth visual exploration of the production processes that forewent her videos. I will explore the way in which Magibon managed to elevate her seemingly uninteresting productions to the level of mass approval. How is it possible that a previously uncelebrated person like Magibon became a so-called YouTube-celebrity through her videos' formal devices? How does her work correspond to art-historical media history? This chapter serves to link the relation between Magibon's performance and the interests of her audience through such considerations.

The conclusions that arise in the first chapter, will help to set in motion the second chapter's discursive investigation into the role of Magibon's online audience, aka the Other¹¹. As we will see in the last chapter, Magibon gained interest not only from the internet, but in other discursive fields¹², such as the interest of her fan-base, photographers and even documentary film makers. Which eventually led to her unwilling and unwitting involvement in various media productions and their visual processes. The second chapter crucially, determines notions that emanate from and therefore must be drawn back towards the viewers' point of the view. What impact do the

audiovisual productions of Magibon impose on the viewer? And, what is the dialogue (if any), between Magibon and the spectator? Theoretical frameworks of spectatorship and narrative will help to gravitate towards questioning why certain viewers long to get a hold of her, by imagining psychologically projected possession of her.

The third and last chapter deals with the externalisation and appropriation of Magibon. In this chapter I will consider two main productions (documentary and photographic media). Both notions serve to analytically and literally investigate Magibon. Similar to my approach in the first chapter, these media productions mainly serve to question Magibon's previously constructed image. On the other hand, Magibon is also appropriated, or as some would perhaps deem it 'exploited', in order to comply with the view of a director and photographer - her construction is therefore deconstructed on many levels. I will compare the productions' origins and ties to the previously analysed spectator, Magibon's audience, her viewers.

It is my hope that analysis of Magibon will contribute towards a contemporary understanding of the (visual) relations between subject - public medium - spectator. I believe Magibon to be a relevant case study within our contemporary Zeitgeist whereby vernacular media¹³ dominates, and in which the consequences of uploading material to public hosting services online can be far reaching. YouTube's sensationalism provides new forms of stardom and psychological mishaps to be researched, I investigate the negative realm of such uncontrollable and unforeseeable outcomes stemming from Magibon's output.

CHAPTER 1: SELF-REALISATION

The first videoclip ever to be uploaded to the now widely-used video hosting service YouTube, is entitled 'Me at the zoo'¹⁴. It was uploaded on 23 April 2005 and features one of the company's male founders anxiously explaining his liking for elephant trunks at the San Diego (Calif., USA) zoo. The protagonist concludes the clip: "...and that's pretty much all there's to say." The banal narrative and amateurish quality of this clip seem to have forebode the great quantity of seemingly pointless vernacular footage the video website mainly retains within its public domain.

July 2, 2006, more than one year after YouTube's introduction, a video with a nondescript title similar to the zoo-clip emerged. The 47-seconds lasting clip 'Me doing nothing'¹⁵ reveals a seemingly bored girl in a red t-shirt in a dimly lit indoor setting. She alternates between looking past and inside the camera lens, at one point of the clip even bending her heads towards it. Now and then she waves with her right hand; she ends the clip by performing a peace-sign. There is no sound, except for a hiss and what appears to be mouse-clicks. Also the quality and frame-rate of the video appear to be extremely low, as if it were an artefact of some forgotten time. Apparently, the girl in the videoclip was 'playing around' with YouTube, as she just wanted to see herself being appropriated into an online video. She did not expect others to watch it, aside from herself and her friends.¹⁶ Then, within a week her video was said to be viewed several thousand times. Soon, it was revealed that a link on the Japanese message board '2channel' was responsible for the influx of visitors. The otherwise prone to be overseen Margaret Lillian Adams (1986) from the American state of Pennsylvania was thrilled by this attention, as she loved the Japanese.¹⁷ Not much later, she started to create more indolent videoclips in which she for the first time tried speaking Japanese, mainly to thank the incoming visitors from '2channel'.¹⁸ From that moment on, the production of her clips expanded, as well as her incorporation of the Japanese language. Using the web alias *Magibon*, Adams would eventually provoke millions of worldwide views and reactions of her YouTube-viewers.¹⁹

It may be evident that *Magibon* reflects a massive, almost voyeuristic interest in video material depicting fragments of an otherwise anonymous person: apart from her part-time job in a local pharmacy store, Adams had no known preoccupation during the recordings of her early YouTube films.²⁰ Sociologists Green, Derlega and Mathews provide to some extent an insight into the roots of this apparent mass-appeal for a young, uncelebrated individual's depicted life²¹. According to the sociologists, especially teenagers and young adults prove to have been involved in privacy issues throughout human history. As a result of their self-exploring nature, they fall easier prey to voyeurism on open media such as the internet.²² If we would assume this statement to be

leading in this case, how then does Magibon explore herself in such way that she retracts such great amount of attention?

To solely deem the act of uploading oneself to YouTube a form of self-exploration, which naturally attracts attention, would be a bit too short sighted, since it does not reveal any information on the exchanging processes between subject and viewer. Ergo, the answer to this first chapter's main question is logically expected to be found mainly within the production processes- and features of Magibon's videos. Which brings us to the first part of the chapter, a technical analysis of the production processes involved in creating the online videos of Magibon. What (visual) notions and concepts are to be linked to Magibon's presumed self-exploration? Mainly through the references of Ursula Frohne, a scholar that has written extensively on the subject of medial transformation of the self in conceptual art and mass media, I will elaborate on the effects Magibon's production induce on herself and eventually the viewer. The second part of this chapter serves to frame those found notions of self-exploration within historical context: i.e. to trace relations between Magibon, the viewer and historically rooted video concepts and theories. What rhetorics do historiographical notions of the medium video reveal within Magibon's used concepts? The theoretical point of reference for the second and last part of the chapter hinges mainly on the combined references of art theorist Rosalind Krauss and Ursula Frohne. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion and summary of the effects that can be attributed to the way in which Magibon uses the medium of online video.

§ 1.1 — Narcissistic Playground

Although personal statements on the production process of Magibon's films are available, they can be argued to merely represent her individual voice as an 'artist'.²³ Since Magibon's personal opinion might distract from the initial observation process, I will therefore foremost focus on objective perceptions that can be verified by anyone. Starting with a brief audiovisual analysis of her early body of film clips.²⁴

Magibon's public webcam 'diary' videos typically last between thirty seconds and a few minutes. The majority of the videoclips deal with a fixed bird-view perspective, which is caused by the pivoted viewpoint of a webcam connected to a laptop.²⁵ Magibon is always featured solitary in an indoor setting; most commonly a bedroom. The clips are usually interluded by Magibon saying "Minna-san, Konnichiwa! Magibon desu." (Hello everyone, I'm Magibon). Apart from occasionally presenting an object, eating, singing, or speaking some words of (broken) Japanese, Magibon withholds - barely blinking - a gaze directed towards the centre of the camera. Another recurring trademark found in the videos is the aforementioned stare in combination with pure silence as the

partial, or complete input of a video clip. The conclusion is performed by Magibon forming the peace-sign and / or waving, often accompanied by an audible 'good bye' in either Japanese or English. Also, the outro often includes an overlapping graphic with the Japanese word 'arigatou', meaning 'thank you' (see Fig. 1).

Magibon's mise-en-scene is not presented to bear any importance at all: we are never provided a guided tour through her home, let alone room. Instead, all attention is bundled at Magibon's (diegetic) performance.

Media theorist Ursula Frohne unveils another insight into the presentation of Magibon with a notion emphasising on the spectator's contemporary gaze, in which, according to some media theorists, "images of personal intimacy [seem to have] become a new social currency."²⁶ Frohne notes, as many others preceded her, that the exhibition of private life for the observation of an unknown 'Other'²⁷ has become a popular fascination in our era. Peter Weibel supports her observation with a backing argument: "A new market of attention is generating narcissism, exhibitionism, voyeurism in new playgrounds of the mass media."²⁸ He interestingly mentions the affinity between the consumptive desire structure of voyeuristic television (VTV) and gladiator battles held in ancient Rome. VTV productions such as Endemol's *Big Brother*, Frohne mentions, contrast themselves with the stereotypical images of mainstream productions such as regular game shows or soap series. By opening up the view into 'the realms of the unfiltered and private', she acknowledges new media genres to move "[the] last preserves of authenticity into the public's field of visions". The result is a chance at medial 'self realisation' for those previously neglected by the camera's gaze and "[who] do not embody exceptional stories or careers". Magibon indirectly supports this notion by being unknown prior to the popularity rise of her YouTube clips and by admitting to not use any script for her clips: "There's no grand plan."²⁹ Furthermore YouTube, Magibon's mass medium of choice lends itself with its vast amount of publicly accessible home-videos perfectly to reveal the private spheres of 'nobodies' and to subsequently penetrate their identity-forming structures via a worldwide audience. Frohne reveals the popular fascination with 'the unknown other' to attribute "an almost obligatory social power" to contemporary techniques of self-presentation and 'spectacularisation': the process of fabricating a representation in the form of a major spectacle.³⁰ Frohne therefore helps to create the assumption that these aforementioned individual media-related concepts might confer with Magibon's film clips.

Magibon's closed world celebrates the dominance of ego: no family member, friend or being ever enters the frame of her homemade films³¹: indeed, her self-presentation *is* the main leitmotif within her videos. However, it is a configuration of self-presentation that does not reveal to be that 'spectacular' at first sight. The observable background stage usually consists of a generic post-colonial interior, partly revealing a wooden bed frame or cupboard. This indoor mise-en-scene could have been situated anywhere in the world. And even though the webcam invokes with its distinctive

distorted looks feelings of authenticity³², and thus a voyeuristic reality aspect, the style is not to be awarded as outstanding extravagant. Webcams have become a common good with the advent of the technological rise. Again, this is a signifier that Frohne's notion of 'spectacularisation' is to be found somewhere within the persona of Magibon.

Media theorist Thomas Macho believes that a modern subject has to produce social differences itself, in order to rise in prominence and to ensure his or her actions will be rewarded with maximum attention.³³ Magibon's protruding gaze clearly is a form of social deviance that has rewarded her since 2006 attention in the form of barely countable internet comments and video parodies questioning her stare. Apparently spontaneous self-staging did take place since the videos were obviously recorded and self-published under Magibon's own YouTube-account, making her simultaneously actor, producer *and* director. According to the basic principles and matrix of media logic Magibon must be significant because she has been noted. This video-invoked significance in combination with her characteristic narcissistic (yet minimalistic) approach – the predominant ego – have a strong affiliation with early film- and video experiments carried out by artists during the beginning of the seventies.

§ 1.2 — Successful Screen Test

An notable precursor and entrepreneur of the early video art movement was Andy Warhol. Between 1964 and 1966, Warhol had maintained an ambitious film project; his so-called *Screen Tests* – the title being a reference to the film industry's casting procedure. Although sporadically recognised, the massive amount of silent portraits divided onto 40-minute reels of 16mm film would later on influence many artists active in the field of performance and video art.³⁴

Similar to some of his first films *Eat* (1964), *Blow Job* (1964) and *Empire* (1964), the *Screen Tests* were shot via a fixed camera position and lacked any directing. The approximately 500 three-minute portraits featured the actions of Factory visitors and Warhol's personal friends in real-time. The act of "being-filmed" allowed these often unknown subjects to step out of their anonymity for the short timespan of the provided single take, they were granted the possibility to become a "Superstar". Warhol's concept of the *Screen Tests* stood for this reason in great contrast to Hollywood procedures involving actual superstars and scripted scenes. Critic Dara Meyers-Kingsley notices how the unknown persons expose themselves in the *Screen Tests* similar to subjects in an ethnographic study, by allowing themselves to be observed in their relation to the camera's gaze.³⁵ Retrospectively, it is even arguable that Warhol's early documentation of self-awareness and banality is reincarnated by current, barely filtered³⁶, privacy invading medium such as the here-forenamed YouTube.³⁷ Warhol's early reflections also highlight the theatricalisation of life's facets in fashion,

lifestyle trends, political PR and other related social phenomena. Frohne: “This compulsive desire to attain tele-presence, to verify and validate one’s own existence - in a kind of “screen test” - under the gaze of the media society and thereby to anchor one’s cultural self-realisation is characteristic of contemporary media narcissism.”³⁸

The idea of media narcissism Frohne summarises seems very applicable to Magibon. Indeed, a form of unintentional - yet apparent - self-realisation took place in her productions: Magibon the ‘actress’ underwent in 2006 her first ‘screen test’ in front of an unknown world wide audience that ultimately granted her attention and a fan-base (a subject that will be expanded further in the third chapter). Jean Baudrillard believes the staging of the ego in combination with the theatricalisation of the everyday (mind the banality of the Magibon *mise-en-scène*) to be performative extensions of medial fiction that create the features of ‘the society of the image’. Meanwhile, according to contemporary philosopher Slavoj Žižek, self-staging and theatricalisation express a sense of loss that compensates for “the experience of the real world of material decay”³⁹ since they juxtapose real-life onto a substance-less fantasy world. According to Frohne staged reality erodes the real world and “the hyper-reality of media worlds becomes the mirror projection of its narcissistic desire, which compensates for the progressive erosion of (...) the life world”.⁴⁰

The above notions impose that Magibon’s digital narcissism is a form of pure escapism. A 2008 television interview (*Midtown TV*) with Magibon reveals her fascination with Japan and her will to learn the language, which is not her native tongue. Also, Magibon’s longtime -literally escapist- wish to leave her small town in the Pennsylvania, USA, clearly stand in for this escapism. However, the principle of medial awareness (i.e. anticipating on the effects of a medium) should also not be overlooked: Magibon continued to pursue producing webcam clips after the videos rose in popularity. This implicates that a form of self observation - however minimal - is present. The media attention she received did not got by to her unnoticed: she welcomed it by inserting messages addressed towards her fan-base in her later videos and by repeating her silent gaze⁴¹: all plausible forms of self-control.⁴²

Practices reflecting on the transformation of media control (“the all seeing eye of god”) into self-control took place since the introduction of video technology in the 1960s. Video offered artists the chance to engage in self-observation, without too much effort they could stage themselves for the camera while maintaining the role of director.⁴³ Artist William Sharp, to name one, moved in the early 1970s into a gallery for some time. He subjected himself to a camera, which transmitted his actions live to a monitor on the outside. Frohne praises the anticipation of the early video artists: “[The] artistic concept of directly transmitting events from a private space into the public, anticipated not only the transparent architecture of the Big Brother container, but also the broadcast of intimacy as it occurs today via thousands of webcams on the internet.”⁴⁴

This early surrendering to the gaze of the 'all seeing eye' of the camera implicates awareness: the authority is swapped. Therefore, the common interpretation of Michel Foucault's panopticon⁴⁵ as a concept of disciplining, punishing power is inverted. Intimate early video works forebode the current omnipresence of the media, which has generated a form of 'self-awareness' that no longer avoids the camera as an instance of punishment, but rather as a focal point or mirror to articulate the narcissistic ego.⁴⁶ According to Frohne, Foucault's *dispositif*⁴⁷ seems to indicate a transgression from bureaucratic surveillance towards media-staged spectacles of 'the individual's surrender to the media's regime of the gaze'.

Yet Frohne's forenamed ideas of compulsive desire to verify one's existence via self-staging and broadcasting the private seem not the solitary condition to which video narcissism may be accomplished. Theorist Rosalind Krauss takes on a slightly different stance by arguing narcissistic forms of self-regard to be *the* condition of the *medium* video, rather than a product caused and enhanced by reality-eroding media worlds. Although Krauss' theory dates from the late seventies and could therefore not entirely foresee the rise of the current tele-presence, it is still relevant in the sense that the medium video has kept its basic characteristics: only some technical properties have changed.⁴⁸ Regarding those early video-experiments again, but now through the framework of Krauss, reveals another thought on the connection medium - narcissism - artist.

Krauss introduces artist Vito Acconci's work *Centers* (1971) as her thesis' main example. *Centers*, consisting of a 20-minute long black and white video take, depicts Acconci himself uninterruptedly pointing towards the centre of a television screen. The production of *Centers* involved a video monitor utilised as mirror; Acconci was able to see himself while filming. Krauss notices a sustained tautology to be formed by this act: "[A] line of sight that begins at Acconci's plane of vision and ends at the eyes of his projected double."⁴⁹

The mise-en-scène of Acconci's work typifies the structural characteristics that can be often found in video works: by simultaneously recording and transmitting (the use of instant feedback) a form of self-encapsulation is created. "The body is therefore as it were centred between two machines that are the opening and closing of a parenthesis. The first of these is the camera; the second is the monitor, which re-projected the performer's images with the immediacy of a mirror."⁵⁰ It is in particular this encapsulated image in which Krauss finds the video-characteristic she describes as 'configured narcissism'. Krauss further develops this notion of mirror-reflection to be a mode of appropriation, that allows for the merging of subject and object. Or relying on system theorist Niklas Luhmann's statement on the individual: "Individuals are self-observers. They distinguish themselves through the fact that they observe their own act of observation. In today's society they are no longer defined by their (more or less) good birth, nor by origin or traits that set them apart from all other individuals ... It is often said of Simmel, Mead, or Sartre that they gain an identity

only through the looks of the others; but this happens only if they watch themselves being watched.”⁵¹

It is worth to note -although perhaps obvious- that Magibon's videos inherit exactly the aforementioned tendency of feedback. The webcam that Magibon utilises to record her videos is connected to a laptop. Most computer software provides forms of instant feedback: whenever the webcam is utilised to record, a screen pops up, revealing the sight of the webcam, allowing Magibon to see herself while recording by looking at the screen. Is it therefore plausible to argue that Magibon's invisible mirror-reflection is dominating her work?

It is true that Magibon's videos are centred on her body and psyche. Magibon the performer is seen alone, mostly silent, gazing into the centre of the camera, devoid of external input. For Krauss this means any 'possible' (textual) content is substituted by a displacement of the self, which implicates a transformation of Magibon's subjectivity into a self-presentation without past or connection to external objects: a mirror-object. The agency (software feedback on the laptop screen) provides for the fusing of subject and object (the webcam). Since Krauss sees the object 'bracketed out' in such situation, she finds it "inappropriate to speak of a physical medium in relation to video". "For the object (...) has become merely an appurtenance". Instead, Krauss proposes the medium of video to be more of a psychological nature, having the objective to gain attention from the "Other" while investing in the "Self": "[I]t is not just any psychological condition one is speaking of. Rather it is the condition of someone who has, in Freud's words, "abandoned the investment of objects with libido and transformed object-libido into ego-libido.""⁵²

The result for 'maker and the viewer' [of video-art] is what Krauss names "a kind of weightless fall through the suspended space of narcissism". It is certain that Magibon conforms in some way to Krauss' idea of the video medium, seeing as she managed to gain attention from the "Other" (e.g. her fans) and has invested in her "Self" by proceeding to make videos. It is interesting to note Frohne's and Krauss' notions align in the sense that they both contribute to understanding individual characteristics of video narcissism directed to Freud's definition of the "Other" and the "Self", the mirror as focal point principle and ego. However, some extra thought on the actual intentions of the person behind the character of Magibon is needed to determine which characteristics of the aforementioned traditions specifically apply. As I namely stated in this chapter's introduction, Magibon apparently never mentioned any specific goal of her video performances. The narcissism might rather be a personal leitmotif than an art project, the opposite or a combination. However, this does not weaken the notion that Magibon is clearly working with the medium video as a mirror-like focal point: although she does not directly grasp her own reflection within the webcam (this would be nearly impossible, since the lens is too small), she does use the nearby laptop screen to do so. The *mise-en-scène* is directed at her body and unwilling to

avoid the disciplining camera; she uses it to enhance her self-image. Unlike many early video artists, Magibon does not exploit the medium video in order to criticise it, neither physically assaults the medium, nor utilises it for painting or sculpting, leaving the basic counter-arguments for Krauss' thesis aside.⁵³

It proves fascinating to see that depictions of the banal, private life of others can serve a massive human interest on today's popular media. Revealing the Magibon phenomena's historical and contemporary narcissistic rhetorics has raised apart from answers, also a lot of inevitable social and philosophical questions of 'belonging' and 'identity' that I will not delve into too much. Conflicting with the initial notions of power to be intrinsic to Magibon's solo performance, we have to conclude that Magibon's virtual narcissistic gaze upon the 'Other', however reverse-panoptical it might seem, is prone to be appropriated. The personal privacy she gave up in order to be appreciated as a video phenomena, led apart from written reactions to more serious visual appropriation of her material by third parties.⁵⁴ The next chapter will mainly discuss voyeuristic deconstructive effects and possible appropriation by fans, that the self-subjecting mirror of Magibon has (in)directly attributed to.

CHAPTER 2: FRACTURED VOYEURISM

As the previous chapter elided, the narcissistic elements incorporated in Magibon's videos may be summarised to be medial self-realisation in combination with some fundamental properties linked to the medium video in its formative years. The rather deviant nature of the videos in combination with the intimate and realistic element that a bed- or living room offers, echo the preference for privacy inhibition that our contemporary viewing culture has cultivated. In this sense, the case of Magibon also draws a strong historical parallel to the early webcam deviances of Jennifer Ringley and her obsolete 'JenniCam'-project.

Back in 1996, Ringley installed a webcam in her college dorm room, from which she streamed every three minutes an uncensored live image to the web.⁵⁵ Ringley had since received lots of press coverage, mainly defining her to be an exhibitionist. Victor Burgin does not agree with this description, i.e. simply coining the term without distinguishing her from 'the man who compulsively exposes his penis in the street.'⁵⁶ Instead, Burgin proposes Ringley's presumed exhibitionism to be derived from the voyeurism of the viewer. Burgin sees the option to open the JenniCam in a separate virtual window, as a way to transform Ringley and/or her room into a persistent companion for the 'otherwise solitary computer operator'.⁵⁷ "To think of Ringley's camera as a window is to privilege our own point of view. If from this position we judge Ringley to be an exhibitionist, we (...) acknowledge our own voyeurism. From our side of the screen, the camera is a window. From Ringley's position, her camera is a mirror."⁵⁸ Although Magibon - to my knowledge - did never stream (uncensored) live imagery from her webcam, she still literally utilises the device as a one-sided mirror, which is then later on perceived inside a YouTube window by internet users. Apart from statistics, such as gender and location, Magibon cannot see those who are on 'the other side' of the YouTube window. Both cases define the paradox of being alone while someone else is present.⁵⁹

Then again, the implication of Magibon's self-subjecting, narcissistic mirror, would have been hard to realise without this massive attention of the viewer: according to media theories the public field of vision is foremost needed to anchor a media ego.⁶⁰ Yet regarding the aforementioned voyeuristic nature the attention generally possesses, it is not too surprising that the surveillance of Magibon caused various discrepancies between the *intended* self and the ego as *observed* by thirds. Apart from heavily negative internet critique and threats, that Magibon distances from emotionally⁶¹, her self-control is, as I will reveal in the last chapter, manipulated by various forms of appropriation sprouting from the voyeuristic gaze of the Other.

But in order to decipher those Magibon-specific forms of voyeurism, the precursors associated with appropriation must be analysed. The contemporary wish to indulge into the 'reality'

of others, seems to logically request an in-depth analysis of diegetic elements in Magibon's video clips, which results in the following main question. What is the general impact on the spectator of Magibon's audio-visual features? This time firmly maintaining the perspective of the spectator, I will analyse three processes. Starting again with technological characteristics: what features of Magibon's online videos (other than the domesticated interior decor) reinforce the notion of voyeurism? Following up will be an examination on the characteristics of the contemporary video spectator. How does the voyeur approach the medium of online video to fit his or her needs? And finally: what is the result of this modern voyeur being confronted by Magibon's gaze? The dialogue between the narcissistic Magibon and the spectator is analysed through film theory frameworks mainly hinging on spectatorship and narrative.

§2.1 — The Constrained Voyeur

The constructing process of Magibon's act and the implications it has back and forth on constructing an online identity have been revealed. Nonetheless the main critiques of the individual viewers reveal rigorously different viewing experiences, although it has been noted that Japanese viewers mostly favour Magibon's performance.⁶² Also, the elusive, ever-changing medium YouTube makes it hard to specifically answer 'who exactly is watching'. For now, I want to avoid getting lost in personal vantage points, which also differ per culture. I will approach the vantage point of the spectator from a film theoretical point of view, avoiding the sociological semiotics of non-Western cultural symbols and subcultures.

Film theorist David Campany suggests a consistent binary discrepancy to exist between the terms 'acting' and 'posing'. While we are prone to associate acting with "something unfolding or 'time based' like cinema or theatre", we refer to 'posing' as "suggest[ing] the stillness of photography or painting."⁶³ As Magibon's film clips confine to both (she mainly acts, but sporadically poses: hence the concentrated gaze), her work can be deemed a cross-over. Photography - the medium naturally associated with posing - refers in this sense to Magibon's pose becoming a film still: as the film continues from the point Magibon illustrates her silent gaze, she barely moves. She becomes a 'living' still frame instead. In the late seventies, Roland Barthes looked into the 'unnamable' meaning he sensed in the details of still movie frames.⁶⁴ According to Campany, Barthes finds the suspended frame to emphasise the notion of "still things that attach themselves to the flesh and blood of the living body - hair, nails, clothing and teeth. (...) These are things that neither belong to life nor to death."⁶⁵ According to the somewhat morbid revelation of Barthes, the suspended frame points out the excess of these 'inanimate' things attached to the body.⁶⁶ Of course the agreement of this notion partially hinges on the personal observations of the spectator, yet it is possible to argue that

Magibon receives specific attention for her ‘inanimate’ facial and bodily features. As soon as she starts to pose, albeit for five seconds, she can namely be argued to transform herself into a form of excess, a snapshot waiting to be contemplated on by an interested voyeur.

Leo Braudy demonstrates, the Magibon clips’ aesthetics to possess even more easily overseen features which might ‘trap’ the viewer into contemplation. When one would randomly select a couple of videos from the early Magibon ‘oeuvre’, the displayed act may vary: it may for example be Magibon’s notorious silent-posed gaze, a short talk in Japanese intertwined by a waving Magibon, the formation of a peace sign or a munch session. However, the vantage point is fixed due to the pivoted viewpoint of a webcam, and is never altered throughout the duration. The result is that the spectator is bound to deal with an enclosing form of video, finding him- or herself inertly trapped in Magibon’s solo performances. The videos thus feature a visually limited world, retained by an immobile viewing frame. Film theorists often link closed filmic compositions with the cinematic concept of ‘frame’, which foregrounds the attention to “the organisation of the material” and “exists solely for the eyes of the beholder”. This in contrast with the phenomena of open film in which a “mobile window implies a diegetic world that extends beyond the limit of time image”.⁶⁷

Film critic Leo Braudy further explains that forms of closed film (video in this case) retain a universe that closes in upon itself, in a way that it only contains necessary, internally motivated diegetic elements. Indeed, we are for example never taken on a guided tour through the house of the Magibon family, limiting our visual perspective on Magibon’s selected surroundings. Braudy brings up negative implications introducing voyeuristic elements connected with this notion: “Voyeurism is a characteristic visual device of the closed film, for it contains the proper mixture of freedom and compulsion: free to see something dangerous and forbidden, conscious that one wants to see and cannot look away. In closed films the audience is a victim, imposed on by the perfect coherence of the world on the screen.”⁶⁸

Braudy’s notion creates the assumption that the Magibon-viewer is automatically conformed to being an (un)willing voyeur. To be precise a modern type of spectatorial voyeur, that proves rather immune for conventional interpretation. In contrast to the immobile viewer associated with traditional television and cinema, the rise of the digital granted the spectator the option to mobilise. Phones, tablets and laptops can store and stream (online) content to virtually anywhere. This shift also underlines that a general cinematic approach regarding the position of the voyeur towards the screen is redundant. Such research would put too much focus on (technological) aspects of different apparatuses and location and therefore miss out on social structures. I will rather focus on something that practically any modern spectator deals with: the possibility to treat film or video as a *commodity*. We can choose whether or not to be a consumer, watching internet videos for the sake of entertainment; optionally leaving feedback. Or to be a producer, downloading and appropriating found video clips for usage in for example a television show. And if wished, one can share video as

an experience with others, or alternatively treat it as a text to be studied, which is the case in this thesis.⁶⁹ This being said, what characteristics of this modern (production) spectrum are utilised by the contemporary video-voyeur?

§2.2 — Reconfigured Looks

As a consequence of the aforementioned technological developments, the classical definition of a voyeur being a “person who gains (sexual) pleasure from watching others”⁷⁰ proves indeed too narrow in regard to digital cinema. Digital viewing has further empowered and institutionalised Jacques Lacan’s concept of the dark and controlling gaze, that we imagine to be unleashed upon our ideal ego by the Other.⁷¹ The possibility to not only mobilise (in contrast to the notion of classic cinema), but literally control the cinematic image by repeating a favourite scene, or pausing at a favoured frame grants the literally gazing ‘Other’ a strengthened relation towards the human body.⁷² Film theorist Laura Mulvey points out how this shift in spectatorial power undermines the protagonist’s command over the action and simultaneously weakens the narrative. Resulting in a ‘fetishistic spectator’, in charge of the human figure.

More fascinated by visual aesthetics found in the *mise en scène* than by a plot, the fetishistic- or possessive spectator longs for a certain mastery: “The desire for possession, only previously realised outside the film, in stills and pin-ups, can now be fulfilled not only in stillness but also in the repetition of movements, gestures, looks, actions. In the process, the illusion of life, so essential to the cinema’s reality effect, weakens, and the apparatus overtakes the figure’s movements as they are inescapably repeated with mechanical exactitude. The human figure becomes an extension of the machine, conjuring up the pre-cinematic ghosts of automata.”⁷³ Additionally, Mulvey’s contemporary notion of the fetishistic spectator alters Metz’ classical notion of film being ‘difficult’ to characterise as a fetish. According to Metz, film *does* contain individual elements such as different shots, sounds and *mise-en-scène* (so-called ‘part-objects’) attributable to the concept of fetish⁷⁴. Yet “each of them disappears quickly after a moment of presence, whereas a fetish has to be kept, mastered, held, like the photograph in the pocket.”⁷⁵ If we again contemplate on the aforementioned mobile viewer, we realise that film (clips) can now also be withheld in one’s pocket; ready to be taken out and resumed from a preferred scene, at any given time, as long as the battery permits.

But does Magibon inevitably grant the possessive spectator this mastery? The previous chapter revealed the deviance of Magibon’s gaze and her behaviour to have contributed in establishing her popularity. In regard to maintaining her relation with the spectator, Magibon purposefully chose to

keep her fans involved in her videos, through maintaining elements of interest.⁷⁶ “When I first started making the videos, when they first started becoming popular, I was listening to people’s suggestions and trying to do what they wanted.”⁷⁷ Magibon’s devotion towards her (mainly Japanese) fans – that is to partially commit her productions to them – seems to indicate a certain type of submissiveness intrinsic to her persona. Further on, we never see Magibon disappearing off-frame in her webcam clips. She is confirmed to be visible from the very start of the clips, only to be briefly obscured by a crossfade during the introduction and outro. In this sense, the object-Magibon is thus instantly available to the spectator. At the same time, we are dealing with the previously mentioned form of closed film, which only partially exhibits the surrounding space(s) in Magibon’s home, limited by the frame. The spectator has no (or very little) observable knowledge of the off-frame’s contents, yet “...at the same [the spectator] cannot help imagining some off-frame, hallucinating it, dreaming the shape of this emptiness.”⁷⁸ Metz suggests that this status of exclusion of the off-frame space – its absence caused by the rectangle frame – relates to feelings of lack: a recurring main element embedded in the Freudian definition of fetish.⁷⁹

The combination of Magibon’s devotion towards her viewers and the fetishistic elements caused or provided by respectively the aesthetics of her film’s ‘narrative’, camerawork and the ease of access provided by modern day technique, but also Mulvey’s notion of the fetishistic spectator to prefer visual aesthetics over a consistent narrative⁸⁰, seem to indicate an interest by the possessive spectator is at hand.

In regard to the above findings, the possible effects of Magibon’s behaviour on the fetishistic spectator should thus not be overlooked. On the other hand, there are also theories to be named that rule *against* the pleasures or fantasies of the spectator. An earlier theory of Mulvey, formulated in her essay ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ (1972) specifically focuses on filmic features that can *disrupt* the spectator’s pleasure and mastery. However, since the 1980s critique arose to her model for leaving no room for gender identifications other than the heterosexist norm of the male gaze. This critique did not withheld generations of film students from compressing Mulvey’s gender argument into claims as “the look is male” or “desire is lack”.⁸¹ However, it should definitely be noted that Mulvey recently revised, with the help of other critiques, her hypothesis to among others include a controlling female spectatorship.⁸² I will now proceed to juxtapose Mulvey’s spectator theories with those of the protagonist, starting off with the former.

§2.3 — Cinematic Disruption and the Possessive Spectator

Mulvey’s essay ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ discerns between three types of looks affiliated with cinematic experience: 1. The look of the camera at the action, 2. the look of the

spectator at the screen, and 3. the characters' intra-diegetic look at one another. Each of these looks is embedded hierarchically in the Hollywood cinematic system, the first two looks of respectively camera- and spectator are categorised as inferior to the look of the characters and may even be replaced by this third look.⁸³ The system forms the foundation of a classical film's ruleset for continuity, in which the presence of the camera nor the spectator is acknowledged. Whenever this continuity is disrupted, by for example a character's direct look in the camera that is not logically explained by the up-following shot, the spectator's identification and understanding of the narrative is said to "crack at the seams" due to the loss of seamless synchronisation. According to Mulvey this results into a "cinema of displeasure": ideological effects such as the illusionism of a smooth transition are cancelled out or completely taken over by the disruption.

Magibon's production process incorporates only two of Mulvey's original definitions of classical cinema: never is another character entering the frame. This leaves us with the look of the camera and the spectator. We know the camera viewpoint is fixed, and acknowledge the spectator's view to be voyeuristic due to the Magibon videos' previously discussed *mise-en-scène* and nature. This foremost seems to connect with Mulvey's notion of cinema as a medium of spectacle, wherein particularly Hollywood films present the female star as an erotic spectacle. Margaret Adams indeed created a female star version of herself: she became a YouTube-icon. Similar to Hollywood-traditions she baptised herself 'Magibon', a name recognisable among fans, attributing herself to exist simultaneously somewhere in between a fictional performance and outside of it.⁸⁴ Then again, do her awkward performances and the registration of it keep the flow of the spectacle going?

Within cinematic aspect number one, the notion of a camera is partly revealed through the grainy, low-quality look a webcam provides. Yet this is a reality *aspect* of immediacy which enhances the voyeuristic interest, and therefore it does not oppose a direct threat or confrontation with the materiality of existence: i.e. the Real⁸⁵. Jacques Lacan's concept of the Real, in film theories prominently adapted by Slavoj Žižek, can be seen as a force existing outside of the representative realm. It marks the boundary and excess of the Imaginary and Symbolic order. The Real undercuts, quite similar to Mulvey's thesis, the aforementioned orders of pleasurable recognition linked with the Imaginary and the subsequent controlling gaze associated with the Symbolic.

Initially, the Real does not to surface upon further analysis on the role of the first cinematic aspect. Magibon's productions, apart from their reality setting, namely institutionalise filmic continuity, reinforcing Lacan's Imaginary. Static camerawork allows the voyeuristic look imposed by the closed frame to last during the complete run time. However, Magibon does provide a visual interruption by occasionally intertwining her videos with freeze frames containing text and ASCII-art⁸⁶. Although the frames only temporarily disrupt the apparent voyeur, their content does acknowledge the existence of a spectator. Cinematic disruption is introduced.

The second element of displeasure that emerges from the perspective of the acknowledged anonymous YouTube-viewer, is unquestionably the undermined scopophilic look. A 'cinematic displeasure' is often provided by Magibon in the form of her direct gaze into the centre of the visual pane. We are no longer only looking at - but as well *being* looked at. At this moment the Real is introduced: Lacan regards the gaze as an element of the Real, which is found outside of pleasurable recognition and social control. Lacan attributes the gaze to exist as an uncontrollable force, manifesting itself externally from the human subject (aka the beholder).⁸⁷ The Real is manifested by the uncanny fact that our object of visual contemplation may look back at us. In contrast with Mulvey, Lacan believes the gaze to solely belong to the *object* of our contemplation. The character Magibon has, according to Lacan, from the moment her gaze manifests a dominating control that inescapably confronts the viewer with reality, while Mulvey finds in the gaze an acknowledgement of the spectator that merely cancels illusionism (i.e. causing displeasure). Of course the gaze could also be experienced as pleasant, by a perhaps more submissive viewer that likes being dominated, feminized by a scopophilic gaze.

At this point it proves interesting to consider the possible effect of this displeasure on the possessive viewer. It is a given fact that the possessive viewer is in charge of the controls: he or she even has the power to break down voyeurism, exchanging it for possession.⁸⁸ In case the spectator indeed feels overwhelmed or confronted by Magibon's gaze, it is possible to ridicule her performance, subjecting it to manipulation of for example speed and repetition. The protagonist's gaze that previously attributed the power to interrupt a viewing experience, is now converted into more harmless 'feminized' film aesthetics such as lighting, choreography and pose.⁸⁹ The role reversal that took place is marked as sadistic by Mulvey: "The possessive spectator commits an act of violence against the cohesion of a story, the aesthetic integrity that holds it together, and the vision of its creator. But, more specifically, the sadistic instinct is expressed through the possessive spectator's desire for mastery and will to power."⁹⁰ The reconfigured power relation can, in contrast to the former, also be utilised in a less sadistic manner: a spectator repeating a favourite moment of Magibon's performance refers more to fandom than it does to sadism.

Not the angry, provoking or approving comments voiced under Magibon's videos, but tenacious possessive voyeurs form the unseen danger in this modern era. Possessive spectators were granted to further lift their sadistic fantasies or fandom to a level which enforces YouTube to be a privacy-inhibiting panoptical instance, that ultimately disciplines or ridicules the actions of Magibon. As we will namely see in the next chapter, Magibon cannot always successfully avoid facing consequences while reacting to the gaze of the Other through self observation, or by obeying to requests from fans⁹¹. By performing a seemingly harmless task - for e.g. disclosing personal information within an interview - Magibon can be appropriated in an identity that may lie beyond her will. As we will

namely see in the last chapter, even the most banal information disclosures such as a 'favourite food' can be fetishistically focussed on. An identity that can be appropriated at will, to conform to the rules of the possessive voyeur.

CHAPTER 3: MAGIBON REVISITED

Magibon became, most likely enthralled by various audiovisual productions she found via the internet, a committed Japanophile⁹². Among others she used the medium to indulge into Japanese pop music and TV-dramas.⁹³ Shortly after she started to produce her own videos, the primary source of Magibon's inspiration seemed to return at an increased rate and maintain a likewise fascination in her online performances. Magibon gained positive attention from the Japanese: "Americans (...) mostly didn't get Magibon ... Japanese viewers, however, males especially, found her [indolent American Zen act] funny, charming and [cute] – and made her a YouTube star."⁹⁴ The more appreciative spectators of the East ultimately took literal hold of Magibon in early 2008, after her YouTube-manifestations were noted by Japanese media, which eventually invited her to visit the nation. She was flown multiple times from the United States to Japan for television features, interviews, live appearances, photography and commercials. The media parties involved did not merely relocate Magibon as a character in a different setting, but more prominently influenced Magibon's previously maintained self-control. Being deprived of her webcam she was now bound to deal with other pan-optical gazes, new forms of direction and aesthetics bluntly forced upon her by the Japanese. Although often differing in approach, as well as medium, each Japanese production seems to serve by virtue of their subject the same goal: the appropriation of Magibon. Which leads to the main question of this chapter: how is the character Magibon (de)constructed within the most well-known productions⁹⁵ and what consequences can be appointed? As the previous chapters eluded on the various forms of voyeurism linked to Magibon's self-presentation, this chapter may be regarded as a discursive investigation into external representations and foremost their impact. What is the influence of each production on the visual ego / perceived appearance of Magibon? Laura Mulvey's (film) theories on the pensive and possessive spectator are utilised as this chapter's main theoretical framework.

On April 2008, one month before Magibon flew to Japan, the Japanese magazine *Weekly Playboy* (published by the company Shueisha) and television producer GyaO cooperated to visit Magibon at her parental home in the state of Pennsylvania. This can be regarded as an preliminary investigation by the Japanese into the persona of Magibon, in which the wish to 'find and capture' her constantly reappears.⁹⁶ *Weekly Playboy*, for example, proudly noted in their April 2008-publication how they 'caught Magibon in an obscure corner of the Appalachian Mountains' and 'were the first to interview her at all'⁹⁷, while the the GyaO company wondered in their program excerpt whether 'mysterious' Magibon's identity 'could be real'.⁹⁸ Both productions feature a form of participatory and glamorous journalism, as Magibon is interviewed and captured on film and video. The visual approach of these productions can be seen as the forebode of the more intrusive,

observational style maintained by the subsequent productions of the same companies, which were made in Japan.⁹⁹

This chapter will commence with a brief technical of Magibon's appearance as initially represented by *Weekly Playboy*: the first company to exhibit Magibon as an photographic object of contemplation.¹⁰⁰ What context can be extracted from the individual photos and their captions? Followed upon this will be an analysis of GyaO's documentary approach of introducing Magibon in her natural environment. How is Magibon approached by the television crew and what role does the medium video partake in this? The second part of the chapter will enquire with a similar visual-theoretical approach into the later, more notorious Japan-based productions by Shueisha (*Weekly Playboy*) and GyaO.

§ 3.1 — Magibon Illustrated

The *Weekly Playboy* (WPB), not to be mistaken for the American *Playboy Magazine*, is a long-running Japanese adult-magazine featuring among others columns, interviews and celebrity gossip. The WPB featured Magibon for the first time in the 25 February 2008 edition, in an article on the then popular YouTube-phenomena.¹⁰¹ The greyscale article is mainly composed of an interview discursive text, discussing the Japanese popularity and online outings of Magibon and features a lot of self-portraits; which are either YouTube stills or photos taken from Magibon's personal blog. What is interesting here is that the visual image of Magibon, as discussed in the previous chapter, remains practically unaltered. Even though the still frames and photos provide moments frozen in time (as opposed to the time-based YouTube clips) and the photos are juxtaposed with a gossipy text, the *author* of the imagery remains unchanged.

We still deal with the familiar post-colonial style wooden backdrops and intrusive stare or absent expression, albeit sometimes from a slightly unusual perspective (Fig. 3) or previously unseen location (Fig. 4). The published indoor auto-portraits devoid of any other person seem to be legitimately intrinsic to the YouTube persona of Magibon. Film critic Andrew Sarris' conceived auteur theory understates this view: "Over a group of [works] a director must exhibit certain recurrent characteristics of style, which serve as [his or her] signature."¹⁰² In this particular case, the WPB converts Magibon's online signature into tactile, printed images, which can be said to supplement her YouTube clips. According to Laura Mulvey, this film-industry related practice might provide the 'film fan the illusion of possession, making a bridge between the irretrievable spectacle and the individual's imagination.'¹⁰³ Since the Japanese had previously shown great interest in Magibon's film clips, it can be safely assumed that the first Magibon-edition of the *Weekly Playboy* provided for many possessive spectators (See Chapter 2) a way to physically hold- and contemplate on their American idol outside the realms of YouTube. Since I do not have the

impression of the magazine's content or vernacular imagery to withhold any further meaning, other than glorifying and pointing at the importance of Magibon for the Japanese, I will now draw attention at the second issue of *WPB*.

Two months after the release of the first fan-oriented article, a photographer for *WPB* came along together with a television crew to document Magibon in her domestic environment, which resulted in a 5-page article (greyscale with one full-colour spread) for the 18 April 2008 edition of the magazine. The first page of the article features a medium-shot of Magibon outside, leaning against a fence. Biographical information is displayed alongside with the magazine's notion of her being the 'cute girl from YouTube ... pursued by *Weekly Playboy*'.¹⁰⁴ The image is striking, because it signifies the momentum¹⁰⁵ of Magibon being seen, photographed and then published by someone other than herself, outside of her home. The magazine also seems to have anticipated towards this moment: "...at this time, her fans around the world continue to increase, because of her lovely gestures. But we heard rumours she did not really exist, that somehow she is a computer-generated image, or an 'Americanised Japanese' living in Japan. No one received information from Magibon herself. (...) We came to the town and met Magibon at last!"¹⁰⁶ The still image of a smiling Magibon on the article's first page might therefore also be seen as the precursor of a so-called test-shoot: the photographer challenging the photographic sustainability or even existence of her self-established media ego.

However, as the photo story progresses, Magibon seems to have positively retained her image throughout the shoot. Well-framed and brightly lit pictures, reminiscent of fashion photography¹⁰⁷ provide a glamorous and seemingly transparent look into Magibon's life (Fig. 6). In a tradition similar to all Magibon's past audiovisual material, she is framed alone. Only the definition of 'place' has been slightly expanded, featuring among others a picnic bench with hills in the background, a shot of her laptop and webcam and an empty street in what is to be believed her hometown. Even though the photos are far more neutral than Magibon's auto-portraits, since it focuses on places that bear meaning for Magibon. Now, instead of low-quality webcam images, transparent professional photos guide the voyeuristic spectator further into small details that are part of Magibon's daily routine. The interview adds only up to these details by stating banal details such as Magibon's preference to obtain Japanese magazines via the internet and her favourite food.

§ 3.2 — Intrusive Invitation to Japan

In a way similar to *WPB*, the now defunct Japanese media production house GyaO¹⁰⁸ elaborated their first short transmission on the popularity and fandom surrounding Magibon. The show's excerpt can be roughly translated as "Who the heck is this mysterious internet idol that received 1,5

million YouTube views?”¹⁰⁹ The second episode of the series the company referred online to as the ‘Pretty Magibon Mystery’ included a message addressed via a YouTube video to Magibon. At the end of this episode it was revealed that Magibon accepted the request by sending a video reply back, welcoming the GyaO staff¹¹⁰ to visit America, in which she repeatedly thanked the company and everyone else for watching her videos.

The third instalment of the series, dubbed ‘Breaking! I was finally able to meet “Magibon”’ (aired March 26, 2008) follows the GyaO staff as they travel to the USA, in search of Magibon. Their arrival opens with the date ‘11 March 2008’ being displayed in close-up shots of what is recognisable as Midtown Manhattan, New York. Then, a female executive of GyaO introduces the search quest for Magibon, as she walks around Times Square during daytime, holding up a sign with a printed photo of Magibon towards a policeman. A male voice then questions the officer: “You don’t know this person?” on which the policeman answers “Is that you?” (nodding his head in the direction of the female employee). The male staff member then continues to question passers by about whether they are familiar with Magibon’s existence as a YouTube phenomena. His questions ranging from a simple “Do you know her?” to the more explicative “Have you seen this girl before on YouTube?” are answered by a negative consensus. One of the negative answers - “I don’t watch YouTube.” - outspoken by a young blonde woman is quite peculiar, in a sense that it reflects the Zeitgeist within the interview. Back in 2008 this was quite a new medium, being mainly accessible via personal computer or laptop. Nowadays for e.g. television shows, artists and scholars appropriate YouTube material by standard, also the medium is standardly embedded inside so-called smart TV’s, smartphones and tablets. Consequently, this makes it harder to deliberately avoid the medium in our current time.

After the short break at Times Square, the journey to Magibon’s Pennsylvanian town is suggested to continue, as we see some road footage shot via a car window. As the crew approaches the rural town, the environment is purposefully blurred for privacy reasons.¹¹¹ Then the car scene ends, as the home of Magibon is spotted. Again, we see the female executive of GyaO, this time she approaches the front door of Magibon’s home. Hesitantly she knocks on the door (Fig. 5). Magibon opens the door and performs a polite nod, then the image freezes and a twinkle-effect starts in, while the narrator assures the viewer we see the actual ‘internet idol’ Magibon. The shot then cuts to the interior of the home, where the camera pans vertically from Magibon’s feet towards her head, fully exposing her body. Magibon then tilts her head further into the fish-eye lens, in a exaggerated fashion similar to her YouTube stare-videos (Fig. 5). The camera continues to voyeuristically explore Magibon’s body shapes in close-up as she is seated (starting from her bottom till her cleavage). Then a preview is shown of the upcoming episodes, which features teasers of Magibon crying tears of joy, trying on clothes and paying a visit to her bedroom: the sanctuary from where she recorded the gross of her film clips.

The fourth instalment of the series, aired on April 2nd, 2008¹¹² logically continues where the third episode halted: inside the home of Magibon. While Magibon is seated on the sofa in her parental residence, she is questioned on her feelings meeting with a Japanese person for the very first time. Magibon admits this event makes her feel ‘very happy’. A cut follows, Magibon is now presented with various small gifts from the GyaO staff. Upon receiving a DVD featuring the Japanese pop idol Mari Yaguchi, Magibon expresses approval. We then see a shot of a computer monitor displaying the film clip of Magibon’s answer to GyaO’s request to visit America, it is used to illustrate the bedroom where the YouTube clips are fabricated. Then we follow Magibon and the female interviewer as they walk upstairs in the home, towards the bedroom. Two beds are revealed, one belonging to Magibon and the other to her younger sister. Magibon is then instructed to position herself at the point where she usually records her videos; the side of her bed. The camera now proceeds to frame her from the identical angle as her webcam usually does. To verify the bedroom to be the actual room that Magibon used to record her videos in, a frame still of the shot by the documentary’s handheld camera is juxtaposed with a webcam still (Fig. 2). Then Magibon proceeds to actually install her laptop on the bed, connecting her webcam to record a YouTube video together with the female GyaO member, which has been published online.¹¹³ The episode concludes with Magibon displaying her acquired Japanese items, such as notebooks, magazines and dictionaries. This is basically a moving, explicative version of the images that were featured earlier in the April-edition of *WPB*.

The Japanese camera crew’s visit to the house is interesting in a sense that it serves to continually question Magibon’s existence: was the home the camera crew had visited really the same as portrayed in the webcam clips? Also trying to affirm this existence outside ‘the internet’ are the extreme close-up shots, voyeuristically investigating Magibon’s body forms. Female screen performance has been often undermined by a scopophilic directorial perspective, displaying the body for the visual satisfaction of the spectator.¹¹⁴ Yet the shots of Magibon’s body seem to echo another desire of the Japanese, namely to master her. The shots made by the handheld camera are never zoomed. Instead the camera is being held close at an intimidating range, slowly rolling past her body. Although Magibon does not seem to mind the camera work (she seems at ease), the camera does work against aesthetic integrity rules of for example her privacy. Substituting what seems to be the fetishistic fascination of the possessive spectator (Chapter 2), the Japanese thrive to transform Magibon into an fetish-object, ‘scopophilically’ preserving her star presence on video.

The above theory seems to find support in the final America-episode (excerpt: “Home coverage of the idle Magibon, the mystery climaxes, at last! Is she broken at the moment her trip to Japan is determined?”) which aired a few days later on 5 April 2008.¹¹⁵ We find Magibon seated on a sofa, as she receives a kimono. The female interviewer helps her put on the kimono. Again, the camera vertically pans from top to bottom, and closely approaches Magibon’s face. The shot then

freezes, as Magibon demonstrates with both hands a peace-sign. This particular freeze-frame is very similar to the semiotics found in YouTube-productions by Magibon, the close-up and slight bird-perspective successfully imitate the visual counterpart.

A school uniform is the next present Magibon is expected to wear, as she walks upstairs to change in presumably her bedroom, the viewer is awarded with a Dutch-tilted close-up featuring a clock and the narrated and visual notion that Magibon took 20 minutes to change. Magibon descends the stairs, and the camera again displays Magibon's body from top till toe. This time Magibon seems less at ease, as she explains in close-up to find the uniform "a little odd." The narrator thanks Magibon for her cooperation, and we switch to the next shot.

The shot opens with the exterior of what appears to be a local pizza parlour, Magibon and the female interviewer open the entrance door and walk inside. A close-up of a pizza slice, Magibon's known to be favourite food, is followed by rather long takes of Magibon eating a slice of pizza. The odd element is that the camera keeps tracking Magibon as she devours the slice of pizza, as if the producers were afraid the spectator might miss a single moment of this dinner. During these takes, Magibon is asked to give her opinion on the pizza, which she reacts upon with trivial facts on the consistency of the dough, sauce and temperature. Magibon is seen throughout covering her mouth with her hand, hiding it for the view of the camera. A critical remark is made by inserting a countdown for Magibon to start eating her pizza slice.¹¹⁶ After the 3-2-1 counting has finished and the frame of Magibon holding her pizza slice unfreezes, one would logically expect Magibon to delve into her food, as if she were a contestant of a game show. Alternatively, with her mouth she barely reaches the slice, from which she takes miniature bites. The "joke" provides in this sense a meta-narrative.

The series' previously hinted at climax then follows. We are back in the Magibon-residence, where the female interviewer instructs Magibon to press the play-button on a DVD-player. A close-up of the television screen reveals the cheerful introduction of GyaO's first item on Magibon, which took place in the television studio of *Midtown TV*. Next to the male host, we see Magibon's Japanese idol Mari Yaguchi. The camera now zooms in on Magibon's face, capturing her reaction while a small in-screen video of the show is being displayed in the lower left corner of the frame. It seems Magibon did not know about the existence of the television-item. She anxiously reacts upon her idol holding the same on cardboard printed self-portrait that was later on used in New York. Gradually the camera zooms in, until her face is portrayed in an extreme close-up. On the other hand, Magibon covering her mouth seems to have become a leitmotif. At the time the DVD has ended, Magibon bursts out in tears, while murmuring behind her hands "[Amazing], Mari Yaguchi".¹¹⁷

In the last take, an off-frame person introduces Magibon to the program producer of the *Midtown TV*. She is apparently invited by the director to come over to be on the show in Japan.

Magibon reacts hysterically in disbelief, screaming ‘thank you’, while alternately covering her mouth. Then, the arm of the off-screen director becomes briefly visible to shake Magibon’s hand. Again a close-up shot of Magibon’s joy-filled face covered by her both hands. Then we advance to the last, perhaps most interesting shot in which Magibon seems to have the in the pre-announced breakdown. She dives into the sofa, covers her face and starts to cry. The cameraman, who was standing a few meters away quickly approaches Magibon, determined not to miss out on this moment and as he holds the camera top-down and close to Magibon’s face. Exactly at this moment some unseen GyaO staff-members burst out in laughter. The date for Magibon’s live appearance on *Midtown TV* is then displayed and announced by the narrator, while the take continues.

The previous notion of the Japanese to forge a certain form of mastery on Magibon culminates in the last episode of *GyaO in America*. Repeatedly affirming they were dealing with the ‘original’ Magibon (hence the contemplative freeze frames) gradually expanded into obsessively appropriating Magibon as if she were a human doll. It is clear that in this production the possessive spectator is involved. The meta-jokes of playing of the playing around with the footage, reveal a wish to not only institutionalise facts, but to obsessively focus on them. Also the way in which Magibon is directed to try on different clothes and the excessively zooming in on her eating pizza seem to testify of a strong fetishistic notion. However, the Japanese production also draws a parallel with Magibon’s webcam videos; both featuring a fish-eye lens .

§ 3.3 — Midtown TV

On 10 april 2008, Magibon made her live debut on Japanese internet television. She was featured on the weekly show *Midtown TV*, operated by media company GyaO that had invited her for the occasion.¹¹⁸ The show’s pre-announcement reveals a distinct approach anticipating Magibon’s appearance: “The original plan is to chase up idol of mystery “Magibon”, which holds a record of 1.5 million visitors on YouTube.”¹¹⁹ During *Midtown Tv*’s opening sequence Magibon is first introduced via a fact sheet, featuring what seems to be a still taken from one of her YouTube clips. The male host (Shuu Maruyama) reads out trivial Magibon-facts for the audience and main host Mari Yaguchi. The final announcement being directed towards Yaguchi: “Also, Magibon is a fan girl of you.” Following upon this revelation Yaguchi expresses a sign of distress: “Will it be all right? She might freak out, me being a big deal to her.” Maruyama reassures her to not worry, whereupon Yaguchi finally exclaims “Young Magibon, come to me!”

A handheld camera then follows Yaguchi as she proceeds to the backstage of the studio where Magibon is seated: disguised by an eye-mask and wearing headphones. Yaguchi takes the temporarily audiovisual-impaired Magibon by the hand and leads her to the studio’s main stage,

where she is positioned towards the main camera. In medium close-up Magibon's headphones are removed, which Magibon reacts upon by covering her mouth with both hands. Magibon is then instructed to remove the eye-mask. By doing so, she is not exclusively confronted with the show and its hosts; her appearance also faces the show's mediation. Magibon removes her mask and screams in amazement upon seeing her pop-idol Mari Yaguchi.

The exposure of Magibon's face first of all reassures the online viewer of her presence in a studio. In opposition to her low-tech domestic webcam videos, her telepresence is now reinforced by bright studio lighting, dynamic camera movement and a consistent frame rate. And last but not least: the aspect of immediacy is introduced. Those existential notions might not impress or affect viewers unacquainted with Magibon, since knowledge and recognition of the star phenomena is absent.¹²⁰ The Japanese media format, however, does retain the desire to challenge Magibon's star performance and in consequence her possessive fans. Ergo, *Midtown TV*'s goal to 'chase her up' brings the program's anticipating voyeuristic wish to learn more about its *objet trouvé* to notion. Do the aforementioned vérité aesthetics and direction of *Midtown TV* indeed forcefully contribute to this process of uncovering Magibon? And how is Magibon's stardom affected by this?

Midtown TV features Magibon as a interviewee: she therefore has little control over the direction of the (presumed) live show, she is rather *being directed*. Hence the masked walk from the backstage to the main stage during the introduction. This loss of control is emphasised in various stages, but most prominently featured in Magibon's acting on *Midtown TV*.

When standing face-to-face with her idol Yaguchi, Magibon repeatedly points at her, as if reaffirming her existence. The gesture - in Japan considered extremely rude - is playfully mirrored by co-host Maruyama. While pointing, Magibon keeps her mouth covered with her left hand, upon which Yaguchi seems to wonder why she does that. Instead of moving her hand away from her mouth some time after expressing shock, Magibon again resumes to her leitmotif of alternating between covering- and uncovering her mouth as she reacts to the questioning.¹²¹ As many YouTube comments suggest, Magibon seemingly felt the need to cover her teeth in order to prevent their exposure.¹²² This personal distress is enhanced by the immediacy that live television offers. Apart from the occasional switching between television camera's, the show is uncut and streamed live. A retake of a scene would be impossible. The notion that Magibon is most likely aware of her limited influence on the penetrating look of the cameras, as she hopelessly tries to prevent the camera from exposing her teeth makes the interview an unsettling experience to watch. The aesthetic aspect of the show's camera work only attributes to this uncanniness. The usage of the close-up is dominant throughout the show. Traditionally used to portray moments of contemplation in cinema, the close-up request a gaze from the viewer that is much more 'fixing' and 'fetishistic' than narratively voyeuristic¹²³

Mary Ann Doane, a film theorist specialised in the study of gender in film, reveals the desire for the close-up to have been traditionally marked by a refusal of the narrative's through time evolved structure. This, in order to support the coexisting moment itself. In regard to this theory, Douane explains the close-up can be seen as: "... [a] stasis, as a resistance to narrative linearity, as a vertical gateway to an almost irrecoverable depth behind the image. The discourse seems to exemplify a desire to stop the film, to grab hold of something that can be taken away, to transfer the relentless temporality of the narrative's unfolding to a more manageable temporality of contemplation."¹²⁴

The extreme close-up handled by *Midtown TV* seems to mainly hinge on the theory of Doane, accordingly to GyaO's wish to uncover Magibon, similar to a hunting trophy, the close-up serves the wish to grab hold of Magibon as she is displayed for the first time live on Japanese television. This is slightly opposed to another traditionally linked theory on the close-up as a moment which prefers contemplation over movement. In traditional filmmaking, the utilisation of the close-up required an actor to act as little as possible in order to provide a 'pleasurable delay'.¹²⁵ Admittedly, the live show's direction favours a strong voyeuristic tendency above this notion, its camerawork providing the constant 'verification' of Magibon.

Around five minutes of the show's progression an event that directly questions Magibon's star image precedes. As Maruyama instructs Magibon via a translator to "look at the camera and introduce [herself] in Japanese.", Magibon temporarily regains some of her directing powers. However, as she performs her YouTube introduction-ritual¹²⁶ on *Midtown TV*, a conscious split occurs between her YouTube- and live persona. *Midtown TV* directs Magibon to look straight into a specific camera, yet the main camera is never switched to the one which is supposed to frontally frame her. Although this might be an incident caused by an inattentive control room operator, it might as well be another pre-mediated concept of the documentary mode. A visual comparison based on still frames of Magibon's introduction from respectively the 'immediate' and 'original'¹²⁷ (Fig 2.) Magibon reveals a rather disrupting affect on the acquainted spectator.

The gestures and actions in both introductory clips are similar: Magibon raises her right hand to wave, while keeping her eyes locked towards the centre of a camera. As a logical consequence of the differing locations, the mise-en-scene deviates from one another. Yet the aspects that form a notable difference between the two representation forms are found within the vantage point and framing. *Midtown TV* resides in a fly-on-the-wall mode, capturing its subject 'as-is' by simply observing¹²⁸, while Magibon's YouTube clips are rather performative and static, featuring herself as a filmmaker who originally started off to create film clips to 'see herself'. The observational Japanese film mode rules the performative act out: the voyeuristic vérité camerawork renders Magibon's otherwise intrusive eye contact indirect, and thus powerless over the viewer. Therefore, the concept of the 'camera as a mirror'¹²⁹ is altered as well: while assuming to once again present her YouTube ego, Magibon is definitely not 'mirrored' *en-face* and seen from the usual central bird-view

perspective. Instead, her previously obscured character traits¹³⁰ are still being highlighted by the camera registering her *en-profile*; the newly introduced camera angle emphasises the fact that she is outdone of her temporary directional power (Fig. 2).

The combination of Magibon's personal distress, laborious communication and the voyeuristic camera which continuously registers from an 'outsider's perspective', proves to be responsible for a subversion of the star image: its protocols and recognizability are flawed. As Laura Mulvey argues, instantaneous recognizability of the star enforces stardom. Although *Midtown TV* announces and displays Magibon in close-up, her star characteristics are still drastically altered (Fig. 2). This new star image does not seem to coincide with the YouTube spectators' built-up expectation; it is subverted.

Directly supporting this argument is the outspoken commentary of numerous spectators, who seem touched by Magibon's previously unseen characteristics and acting. While some commenters deem her [representation] to be 'retarded' or 'ugly', some fans argue pro-Magibon, claiming that 'crooked teeth are considered beautiful in Japan.'¹³¹ Nonetheless, the vast majority YouTube commenters seem to argue that Magibon is 'fake in real life'. Such comments are most likely to have been placed by acquainted viewers and / or possessive spectators, who feel 'tricked' by Magibon's webcam performances and blame her for not for living up to their expectations.¹³² It is remarkable that nearly a decade after *Midtown TV*'s air date, this discussion on Magibon's appearance is still ongoing between commenters.¹³³ In reaction to this and her first trip to Japan, Magibon states the following: "Maybe everyone was under the assumption that because I have a lot of popularity or fame that I'm a professional or an entertainer. (...) On the second trip, there was a little bit more time."¹³⁴

In pursuing their initial wish to unveil Magibon, the Japanese production company thus crucially revealed a dichotomy to exist within Magibon's performance. The self-indulgence, 'mysteriousness' and shy exhibitionism, that once described Magibon the YouTube-star, seem to have been overtaken by labels of powerlessness and appropriation. Yet, at the same time this appropriation has power to commodify Magibon in ways previously unthought.

§ 3.4 — Magibon Eroticised

From the moment on the Japanese had noticed Magibon, she became a commodity. While the previous editions of the *Weekly Playboy* focussed on respectively her vernacular auto-portraits and documenting her in her domestic environment, the *WPB* edition of May 2008 chose for a soft-erotic approach in their third article on Magibon. In a way this is not surprising, since the previous productions in which Magibon partook, operated mainly through voyeuristic and scopophilic devices. However, it is interesting to note that the *WPB* eroticises Magibon, while for example

Midtown TV mainly set out to find “the truth” in which they encountered aspects that even seem to attest Magibon’s image.

It might therefore be possible, albeit it pure speculation, that the *WPB* needed to counter any unattractive elements of Magibon, to ensure the sale of the magazine. For the possessive spectators to reestablish their perhaps disrupted fantasy.

The first page of the magazine (Fig. 7) features a top-down shot of Magibon. The studio light provided by a ring-flash¹³⁵ diffusely lights Magibon’s bare skin and provides a shadowy halo around her head. Her skin seems very smooth and spotless, almost plastic. It is the type of glamour photo often seen in fashion, apart for the slightly distracting screen in the background displaying a frame of Magibon’s videos. And although Magibon features her trademark gaze, the picture is still a reminder of Magibon’s once reserved YouTube personality and the fact that she is now not represented by herself anymore. Three months prior to the shoot, Magibon still expressed in the same magazine to ‘[feel not especially] like doing a bikini photo’ on which she concludes: “I have poses which I do not want to get into.”¹³⁶ Assuming she did not change her mind on this in the meantime, makes this specific picture a grim reminder of Karl Marx’ comment on the peasantry: “They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented. Their representative must at the same time appear as their master, as an authority over them, an unlimited governmental power which protects them from the other classes and sends them rain and sunshine from above.”¹³⁷ In this case, the photographer is simultaneously master and representative: he commands Magibon to wear body revealing clothes, instructs her to pose and finally represents her via his photographic tools (Fig. 8). Even Marx’ of notion of the unlimited (governmental) power can be attributed to the appropriation: *WPB* decided to frame Magibon in a soft-pornographical manner; it was probably not her own idea. Historically, such distorted power relations in regard to erotic photography have already been recorded since the democratisation of erotica in late 19th century.¹³⁸

The fourth page of the publication (Fig. 8) reveals a shot of Magibon, apparently asleep on a sofa. Whether Magibon is actually asleep or not is irrelevant since the photo cannot ultimately testify for either option. The aesthetics however, thrive towards voyeurism. The direct flash used to light the scene reminds one of the photojournalistic snapshot: the spontaneous capturing of event. Or as Christian Metz underwrites it in his 1985 key-essay ‘Photography and Fetish’: “The snapshot, like death, is an instantaneous abduction of the object out of the world into another world, into another kind of time (...)”¹³⁹ The photographer abducts Magibon’s image unseen (assuming she is asleep). This is intrinsic to voyeurism, where the voyeur likes to watch without being part of the scene.

This last chapter reminiscing on the aesthetics of Magibon has shown the effect of some main productions on Magibon, as her image was re-used under the supervising eye of the Japanese.

Everything seemed carefully planned, as each production gradually inhibited Magibon's privacy borders. A fairly innocent photo shoot in her Pennsylvanian hometown being simultaneously produced with a participatory documentary series evolved into the demise of Magibon's YouTube image, as she was appropriated into erotic imagery as opposed to being 'hunted up' by a Cinéma Vérité-crew. If anything, this chapter has revealed the great amount of power that we may attribute to the possessive spectator and Laura Mulvey's theory regarding its nature.

CONCLUSION

Magibon - or in fact Margaret Adams - explored through her YouTube videos various contemporary medial stages of appropriation. A discursive and visual revisitation of her journeys led, mainly supported by the spectator theories formulated by Laura Mulvey, towards an answer to this thesis' congenital main enquiries: how far reaching can the publication of vernacular audiovisual media in our contemporary society be, and how do its consequences visually surface? Also: in what way did the development of photography and film underline the modern tendency of media-voyeurism?

As the first chapter eluded on the recently institutionalised societal interest into depictions of the private lives of others, it revealed that basically anyone (even 'nobodies') with an internet connection and a webcam is prone to becoming a famed internet-celebrity. The only requirement that seems to be asked from an individual to make such event occur, is the ability to be 'socially different'.¹⁴⁰ Magibon discerned herself from the crowd with her to an utmost extent silent YouTube videos, gazing straight at the viewer. Interestingly enough, Ursula Frohne proved Magibon's practice to be linked to the work of early video artists, such as Andy Warhol, who investigated the early medium of video in a narcissistic manner. Magibon's idle performances framed themselves within a voyeuristic medium that seemed to constantly demand her attention as well as criticising it, which she ultimately did not mind, since the medium helped her convert boredom into significance as a form of self-realisation. Kenneth Rogers proposes in his essay on New Media States that video practice is "victimized by its own success"¹⁴¹ "Video practice based on emphasizing a shallow love affair with smartphone apps, geomapping technology, video chat, or social media often results in artists and activists inadvertently providing an independent wing of early-adaptor market research for such technologies and platforms." Rogers continues to explain that a "technological order has become embedded in the social and political order, and conversely, the social and political in the technological."¹⁴² As the second chapter eludes, the case of Magibon embeds this notion, as it serves to point at the apparent ease of in which a voyeur can (via readily-accessible technology) collect and consequently appropriate (social) audiovisual imagery for any political reason imaginable. This aforementioned can be named the tendency of the possessive spectator¹⁴³, a type of viewer trying to obtain and master (video) images to supply his or her fetish-object.

As the third and last chapter proved, Magibon ultimately got physically in touch with this possessive spectator, in the form of Japanese media companies, which gradually (and successfully) tried to master Magibon. An analysis of their productions' visual effects proved that Magibon could be appropriated at will. While at the same time, she lost her previously settled self-image, which she

carefully constructed through her YouTube videos. This happening also proved a switch of power. At a first glance it namely seemed that it was Magibon, who was dominating the viewer with her embedded gaze. Having noticed the sudden attention from the Japanese, she welcomed the gaze of the Other upon the Self. Not realising the gaze of the voyeur to eventually become a Foucaultian instance of punishment, she ultimately reflected the given attention back towards any viewer or party interested in her ego. The demise, that seems so intrinsic to Magibon should however be approached with caution: since her initial TV-show in Japan, Magibon has been featured in numerous (paid) commercials and television shows, including a newer edition of *Midtown TV*, as she eventually was casted by a talent agency.

While my research proved initially to be hard - there were not many reliable sources to be found on the obscure subject of Magibon - a top-down visual-technical analysis proved to reveal structures I initially did not foresee. My analysis of the within the research field of film and photography barely mentioned topic eventually provided fruitful, as it successfully defined an overseen case of contemporary medial privacy. Also, Laura Mulvey's concept of the possessive spectator to be deeply embedded in our current society gains major importance. The concept of the possessive spectator can namely have notorious consequences for any media production dealing with intimacy. Finally, it is my hope that my writings will lead to more future research on the case of Magibon.

REFERENCES

- ¹ It seemed that this website, called *Encyclopedia Dramatica* mainly focuses on internet culture in a satirical (untrustworthy) manner.
- ² Encyclopedia Dramatica, <https://encyclopedia-dramatica.es/MRirian>, [last accessed, 01 August 2014].
- ³ Encyclopedia Dramatica, <https://encyclopedia-dramatica.es/MRirian>, [last accessed, 01 August 2014].
- ⁴ Snow, 26 December 2008.
- ⁵ Eastwood et al., 2012.
- ⁶ The *Oxford English Dictionary* insists that the word 'boredom' appeared first in Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (1852). See Paliwoda, 2009.
- ⁷ Eastwood et al., 2012, pp. 482 - 484.
- ⁸ Eastwood et al., 2012, p. 491.
- ⁹ Eastwood et al., 2012, p. 491.
- ¹⁰ Eastwood et al., 2012, p. 491.
- ¹¹ I hinge on Jacques Lacan's notion, in which the Other represents "other people" whom the individual can encounter in social life, but can also refer to conventions of social life and language. Since Magibon is later on approached by Other social conventions, I chose for this definition since it was more practical. See <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lacan/>, [last accessed, 20 July 2014].
- ¹² These reactions often balanced between extremely critical or appraisal. See Filho, 2009.
- ¹³ Not only Facebook and Twitter, but also 'social' phone applications such as 'Snapchat' and certain dating-applications, can be named vernacular, as they often deal with personal photography and video.
- ¹⁴ This clip still exists as of today. YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNQXAC9IVRw> [last accessed 15 July 2014].
- ¹⁵ 'Me doing nothing', YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDMCnpuZjEQ> [last accessed 16 July 2014].
- ¹⁶ Snow, 26 December 2008.
- ¹⁷ "I was so psyched because I love Japan - I've tried my whole life to get a Japanese penpal - and suddenly thousands of Japanese people saw my face." See Snow, 26 December 2008.
- ¹⁸ "After I did a few videos, I wanted to try and thank people on 2channel. I was using really broken Japanese, using machine translations, to try and say "that's me" and "thank you." From that point, I was writing in video information, or comments, trying to use Japanese." See Snow, 26 December 2008.
- ¹⁹ According to media scholar Sérgio Tavares Filho, the most basic comments regarding Magibon's films being differentiated between "I dislike it", "I love it", and "that is weird". These three reactions to Magibon's videos proved to be continuously recurring within the millions of internet comments. See Filho, S.T. (2009).
- ²⁰ This fact is acknowledged in an interview by Japanese television station GyaO.
- ²¹ Other examples include so-called 'reality' shows on MTV, amateur pornography and .
- ²² Green, Derlega & Mathews, 2006, p. 330.
- ²³ Magibon on the popularity of her videos: "It's a like a blank slate, it can be whatever you want it to be. There are a lot of other videos on YouTube — some of the most watched ones — that have a lot of arguing and negativity, and then you have my videos, with just silence, maybe just a smile, or a wave. To some people, that's really meaningful for them, to just make everything stop for a minute, and have someone just smile at them." Snow, 26 December 2008.
- ²⁴ I emphasize on early, since a split took place within the production process. See Chapter 2 and 3.
- ²⁵ Slow shutter time, lens distortion, a grainy look and automatic adjustment of light - features mainly associated with webcams - form the visual narrative of the clips. Also, the Japanese documentary aired by GyaO-TV (2008) demonstrates Magibon setting up the laptop with external webcam.
- ²⁶ McQuire, 2008, p. 195.
- ²⁷ Lacan, 1977 [2014].
- ²⁸ Weibel, 2002, p. 77.
- ²⁹ Schilling, 2008.
- ³⁰ Frohne, 2002.
- ³¹ However, an exception to this is made when a team of Japanese documentary makers visit Magibon at her family home. See Chapter 3.
- ³² We often tend to believe 'rough' and low-quality photographic material to possess a quality of the 'real', rather than 'works of perfection' made by professional photographers and film makers, since in the latter a feeling of manipulation is said to be more apparent. Van Gelder, H. & Westgeest, H. (2011).
- ³³ Macho, 2002, p. 126.
- ³⁴ Frohne, 2002, p. 253, 256.
- ³⁵ Meyers-Kingsley & Chang, 1996, Introduction.

- ³⁶ YouTube's current user-agreement eschews pornographic material, but allows for artistic nude and violent material.
- ³⁷ Hence private material made public on YouTube featuring personal living spaces, family events etcetera.
- ³⁸ Frohne, 2002, p. 256.
- ³⁹ See Ursula Frohne's citation of Slavoj Žižek. Frohne, 2002, p. 256.
- ⁴⁰ Frohne, 2002, p. 259.
- ⁴¹ Filho, 2009.
- ⁴² Because according to most of Magibon's biographies spread over the web, the idea of the "Silence" series of videos (where she just stares at the camera), has started after uploading a video testing her webcam and receiving good comments about it. It is plausible that she has been uploading the videos and enhancing her persona based on the comments: what works, is still on.
- ⁴³ Ursula Frohne explains this history in the introduction of her essay. Frohne, 2002, pp. 251-255.
- ⁴⁴ Frohne, 2002, p. 260.
- ⁴⁵ The main concept of the panopticon involves anonymous, unseen forces systematically controlling human population. Foucault, 1975 [1995], pp. 195 - 228.
- ⁴⁶ Frohne, 2002, p. 257.
- ⁴⁷ An organization of statements. The term is used by Michel Foucault to describe the systemic connection of statements. It is for this reason often translated as 'apparatus', although this doesn't really work as it is a virtual process rather than an actual entity. Its nearest cognate is probably Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of the assemblage (certainly their writing suggests that they appropriated the concept and made it their own). *The Oxford Reference*.
- ⁴⁸ To name one, the transformation from video-tape to DVD, or video feedback on an LCD-screen instead of a light cathode tube.
- ⁴⁹ Krauss, 1976 [2013], p. 50.
- ⁵⁰ Krauss, 1976 [2013], p. 50, 52.
- ⁵¹ Luhmann, 1995 [2000], 93.
- ⁵² Krauss, 1976 [2013].
- ⁵³ Krauss sums up these three conditions for countering her thesis of video narcissism. See Krauss, 1976 [2013].
- ⁵⁴ Magibon obviously has control over her self-presentation in the YouTube clips, yet this control is being reversed by the gaze of the television camera used in a Magibon-interview. See Chapter 3.
- ⁵⁵ Burgin, 2000, pp. 77 - 78.
- ⁵⁶ Burgin, 2000, p. 79.
- ⁵⁷ Burgin, 2000, p. 80.
- ⁵⁸ Burgin, 2000, p. 80.
- ⁵⁹ Winnicott, 1958, p.30.
- ⁶⁰ Macho, 2002.
- ⁶¹ Schilling, 2008.
- ⁶² Whereas 'many Americans' do not seem to understand Magibon, she is appreciated more in Japan.
- ⁶³ Company, 2006, p. 98.
- ⁶⁴ Barthes, the third meaning some notes on Eisenstein film stills 1970
- ⁶⁵ Company, 2006, p. 106.
- ⁶⁶ Company, 2006, p. 106.
- ⁶⁷ Brady, 1976, p. 52.
- ⁶⁸ Brady, 1976, p. 49.
- ⁶⁹ Elsaesser & Wagenaar, 2010, p. 176.
- ⁷⁰ *Oxford British Dictionary*.
- ⁷¹ Elsaesser & Wagenaar, 2010, p. 88.
- ⁷² Mulvey, 2006, p. 161.
- ⁷³ Mulvey, 2006, p. 170.
- ⁷⁴ *Fetish* is by most film theorists regarded to be a key concept attributable the theory of Sigmund Freud.
- ⁷⁵ Metz, 1985, p. 87.
- ⁷⁶ See also Chapter 1, section 2.
- ⁷⁷ Magibon as quoted from an interview. See Snow, 2008.
- ⁷⁸ Metz, 1985, p. 87. Chapter 3 testifies this notion of Metz, as the Japanese investigate into this off-frame space.
- ⁷⁹ Metz, 1985, p. 87.
- ⁸⁰ Magibon does not really feature a distinct narrative, suggesting it to be more prone to a fetishistic spectator.
- ⁸¹ Elsaesser & Wagenaar, 2010, p. 96.

- ⁸² Mulvey on the film of director Valentino. See Mulvey, 2006.
- ⁸³ Mulvey, 1975 [1999], section 2: 'Pleasure in Looking, Fascination With The Human Form'.
- ⁸⁴ Mulvey, 2006, p.161, 163 - 165.
- ⁸⁵ In Lacanian film theory the Real can be defined as the Imaginary and Symbolic for which it marks the boundary and the unbounded excess. An example. See Elsaesser & Wagenaar, p. 103, 104.
- ⁸⁶ ASCII-art is a technique which utilizes printable characters to create graphics. See also Fig 1.
- ⁸⁷ Elsaesser & Wagenaar, 2010, p. 103 and Lacan, 1977 [2014].
- ⁸⁸ Mulvey, 2006, p. 173.
- ⁸⁹ Mulvey, 2006, p. 165, 167.
- ⁹⁰ Mulvey, 2006, p. 171.
- ⁹¹ Snow, 2008.
- ⁹² *Japanophile*: one who especially admires and likes Japan or Japanese ways. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/> [last accessed 20 July 2014].
- ⁹³ Schilling, 2011. Magibon actually found out herself there was a looming interest from Japan, when she checked the origin of her viewers.
- ⁹⁴ Schilling, 2011.
- ⁹⁵ The quantity of Japanese productions featuring Magibon is immense. While staying in Japan she has been documented living with a family, visiting famous Tokyo neighborhoods and more. I chose two production companies that joint-invited her and which have had a significant impact on the Magibon phenomena and are apart from that relatively well-documented.
- ⁹⁶ It is interesting here to note the parallel with the 'possessive spectator', see Chapter 1.
- ⁹⁷ *Weekly Playboy*, 25 February 2008.
- ⁹⁸ GyaO, 26 March 2008.
- ⁹⁹ With the term 'observational', I refer to Bill Nichols' definition of the Observational documentary mode, in which the filmmaker hides behind the camera, while the camera continues to keep up with the (non-staged) action. Nichols, 2001, p. 174-176.
- ¹⁰⁰ Photos are often coined to be 'objects of contemplation', this contrasts with film, which because of its usual time-bound restrictions offer less time to contemplate.
- ¹⁰¹ *Weekly Playboy*, 25 February 2008.
- ¹⁰² I replaced the word 'films' by 'works' since I find it more applicable to Magibon's 'oeuvre'. Sarris, 1962 [1999], p. 562.
- ¹⁰³ Mulvey, 2006, p. 161.
- ¹⁰⁴ *Weekly Playboy*, 14 April 2008.
- ¹⁰⁵ In regard to momentum, I hinge on the later definition by Barthes. See Barthes, 1979 [2010].
- ¹⁰⁶ Quote translated from Japanese. *Weekly Playboy*, 14 April 2008.
- ¹⁰⁷ Fashion photography is normally focused on portraying beauty, conform to standards such as the golden ratio. The photos of Magibon seem to constitute the 'look and feel' of fashion photography.
- ¹⁰⁸ The name 'GyaO' still exists, yet the company profile has drastically changed since it was acquired by *Yahoo Japan* some years ago. The company does not operate their respective content anymore. The shows I will be discussing in this chapter, are no longer maintained within the database of the company. Therefore I rely mostly on archived webpages and found footage. This information was offered to me via telephone by Satoshi Imano, an engineer of GyaO.
- ¹⁰⁹ GyaO program excerpts.
https://web.archive.org/web/20080328151223/http://www.gyao.jp/sityou/catedetail/contents_id/cnt0057164/
[last accessed 04 August 2014].
- ¹¹⁰ Adams, March 2008.
- ¹¹¹ It is interesting to note that the Japanese crew grants anonymity to Magibon's whereabouts, while at the same time investigating her existence.
- ¹¹² A Youtube-playlist, containing various Magibon clips. YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSpdrUC3yBk&list=PL22E3474C2205ED9E&index=4> [last accessed 05 May 2014].
- ¹¹³ The video is still online and included on Magibon's YouTube channel. YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VF2Ue9Nzkc4> [last accessed July 2014].
- ¹¹⁴ Mulvey, 2006, p. 163 - 164.
- ¹¹⁵ As translated from the GyaO Website.
https://web.archive.org/web/20080831205052/http://www.gyao.jp/sityou/catelist/pac_id/pac0009933/
[last accessed 23 February 2014].
- ¹¹⁶ *Midtown TV* [prequel], 05 April 2008, 4:00 minutes.
- ¹¹⁷ *Midtown TV* [prequel], 05 April 2008, 6:36 minutes.
- ¹¹⁸ A YouTube clip, made with the sole purpose of the GyaO asking Magibon permission to visit her.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ov9ZJylihq8> [last accessed 01 July 2014]

- ¹¹⁹ Now-archived websites containing the schedules and excerpts for the GyaO shows. See <https://archive.is/JWs86> and <https://web.archive.org/web/20080414024403/http://www.gyao.jp/news/magibon/> [both last accessed 12 August 2014]
- ¹²⁰ As Laura Mulvey states, a recognition of the star in cinema is a kind of spectacle for the viewer, where he or she / relates him or herself to. The absence of this underlying structure for a first-time Magibon viewer might possibly make possibly her less interesting as subject. Mulvey, 2006.
- ¹²¹ See Chapter 3, section 1.
- ¹²² On her (Japanese) blog Magibon dubbed a webcam picture revealing her teeth as 'I hate double teeth'. See Yahoo Japan, 2007.
- ¹²³ Mulvey, 2006.
- ¹²⁴ Doane, 2003. Laura Mulvey also contemplates on this quote of Doane, see Mulvey, 2006, p. 164.
- ¹²⁵ Company, 2006.
- ¹²⁶ For introducing many of her YouTube clips, Magibon waves at a presumed audience and voices "Minna-san, Konnichiwa! Magibon desu." (Hello Everyone, I'm Magibon).
- ¹²⁷ For the occasion selected an introduction still, of a random YouTube clip featuring the trademark-introduction. Although the mise-en-scene might slightly differ in other versions of introductions are very similar to one another.
- ¹²⁸ For the differences between the types of documentary mode, see Nichols, 2011.
- ¹²⁹ See Chapter 1.
- ¹³⁰ Apart from her teeth, Magibon's ears were previously unseen since they were covered by hair in her pre-Japan period YouTube clips.
- ¹³¹ In favor of this YouTube comment, Austin Considine of the New York Times reasons in his 2011-article that Japanese men seem to find women with so-called 'yeaba' ('double tooth') attractive and endearing. Considine, 2011.
- ¹³² These and other similar comments can be found in the various episodes of the GyaO company featuring Magibon. See for example *Midtown TV*, 26 March 2008.
- ¹³³ By performing the brief search query on YouTube.com for 'Magibon' reveals numerous reactions that are still being posted as of today.
- ¹³⁴ Snow, 2008.
- ¹³⁵ Upon closer inspection, what appears to be an external ring flash is seen reflected in her pupils.
- ¹³⁶ *Weekly Playboy*, 25 February 2008.
- ¹³⁷ Marx, 1963 [2014].
- ¹³⁸ Solomon-Godeau, 1997.
- ¹³⁹ Metz, 1985, p. 81.
- ¹⁴⁰ See Macho, 2002 and note 33.
- ¹⁴¹ Rogers, 2012, p. 37.
- ¹⁴² Rogers, 2012, p. 38.
- ¹⁴³ As defined by Mulvey. See Mulvey, 2006.



Fig. 1: A depiction of four individual graphics Magibon used in her movies.
The Japanese text reads 'thank you' and is accompanied by a 'smiley'.



Fig. 2: Magibon looks into respectively the studio's off-stage camera (down) and the fisheye webcam situated in her parental home (up). Contrary to the webcam, the off-stage camera greatly rules out visual distortion by its eye-level angle and focal length (hence the *vérité* element). Magibon admits to initially using her webcam as an indirect mirror 'to see herself' - yet ironically sharing her experimental film clips on the World Wide Web. Within this narcissistic wish, the webcam operates as a self-image enhancer: the fish eye distortion and the fixed high-angle shot are cleverly used to obscure- or enhance certain character traits. For example, in the webcam still Magibon's chin seems shorter, while her eyes appear to be larger in comparison to the studio camera still.



Fig. 3: One of the self-portraits as featured in the February-edition of *WPB*.

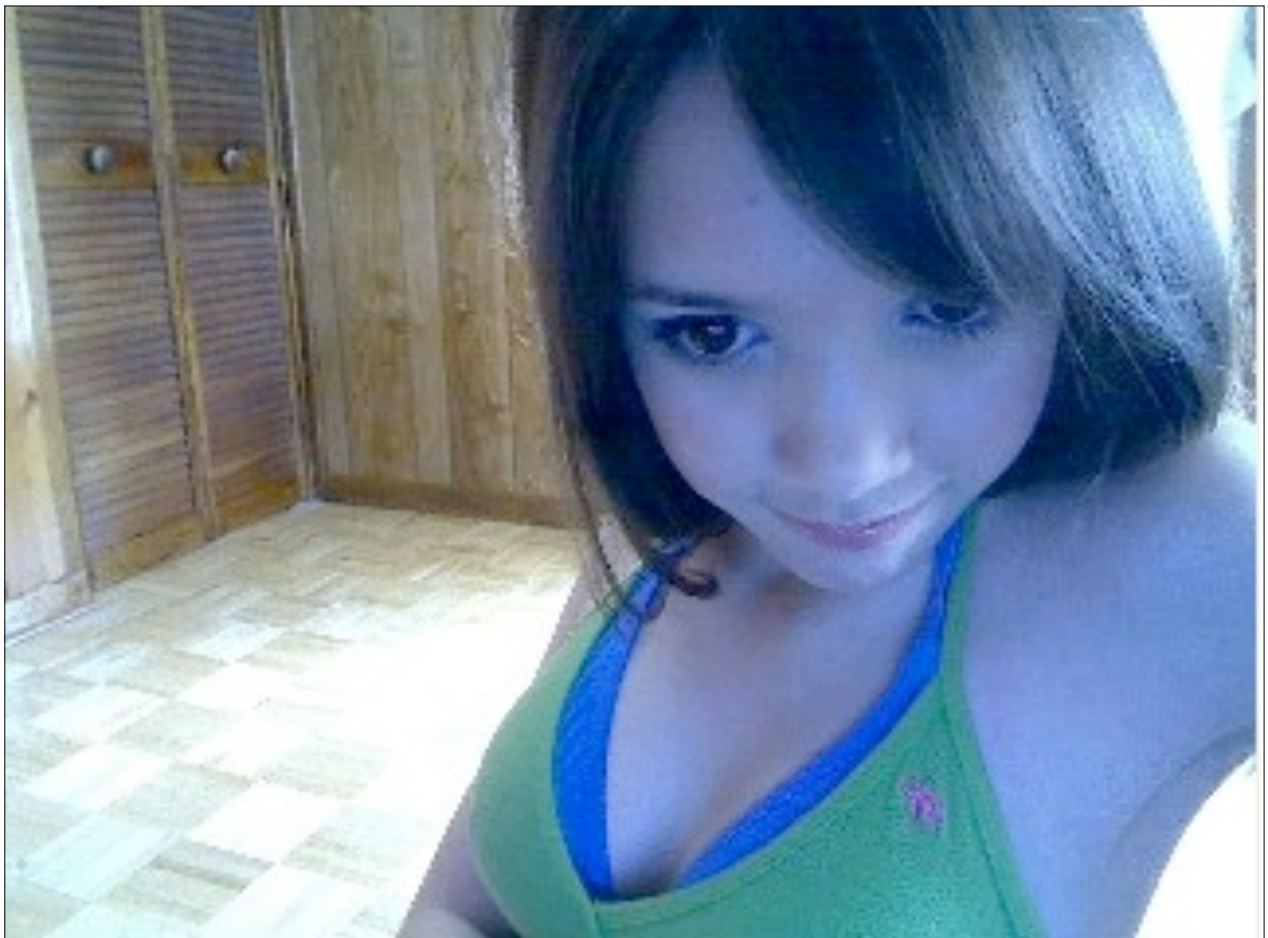
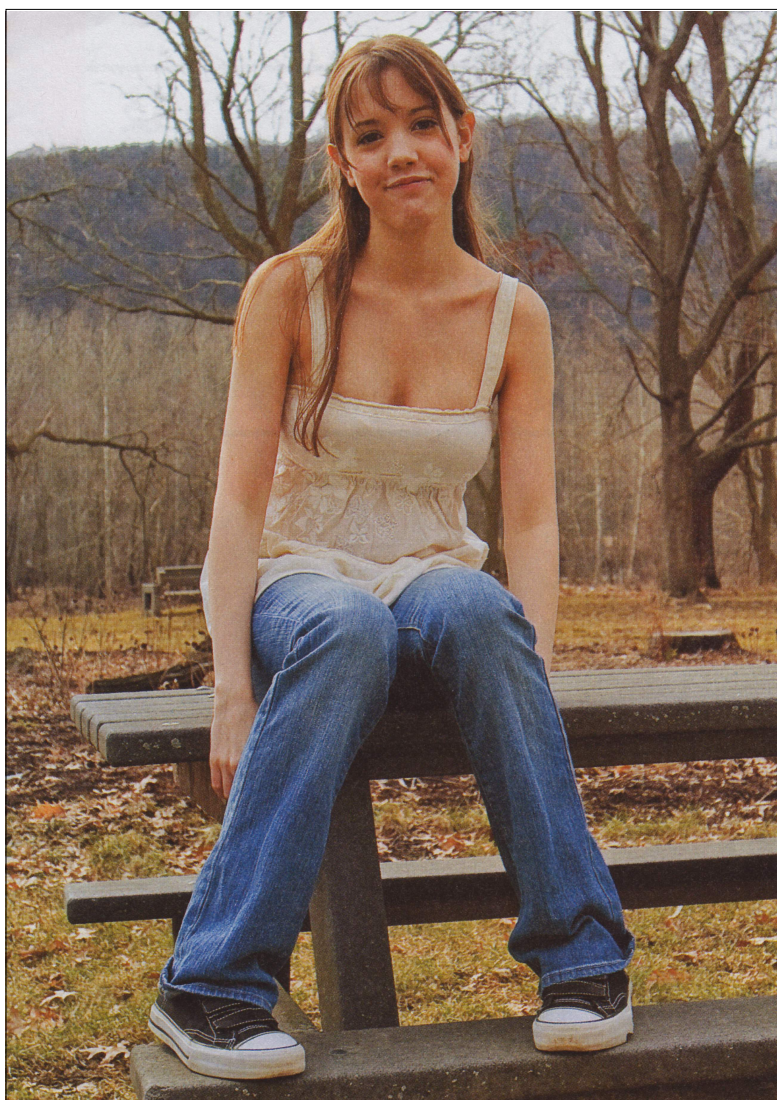


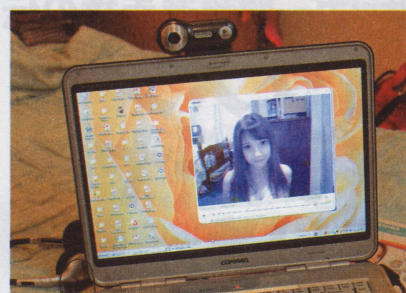
Fig. 4: Magibon reclining in a previously unseen room. Note the distorted perspective as Magibon forcefully poses to reveal her cleavage.



Fig. 5: Top image: Japanese crew member of the GyaO company knocks on Magibon's door. Bottom image: Magibon demonstrates her webcam stare in front of the Japanese documentary crew's lens.



(上)ベッド上にパソコンを置き、いちごポッキーを食べながらネットサーフィン。これがマギのお気に入り
(下)パソコンについたカメラが彼女を世界に発信する



←「今はまだ枯れ木だけど、夏には緑一色、秋には紅葉で真っ赤になるの」とマギ

冷蔵庫から取り出したのは、なんと「出前一丁」。通販で買ったんだって。恐るべし「日本マニア」ぶり！



マギボンが町を案内。「ここがこの町のメインストリートです」



お部屋のベッドの上で。かわいいぬいぐるみや小物がたくさん置いてある



Fig. 6: A scan of the WPB's April-2008 edition, featuring 'glamorous' documentary images of Magibon.

マジボン、

週プレ19・20合併号

変化球

アイドル

スクープ

袋とじ!!!

vol. 1

magibon

● マジボン

「You Tubeで
300万ヒットを記録!」
謎の大人気ネット・アイドル
“マジボン”との接触到
週プレが単独成功→
彼女を追いかけから
はや2カ月…。
ついにマジボン、
世界初水着を撮ったぞぉ~!!

飯塚昌太撮影

話題騒然の美少女、ついに初フラビアで衝撃的デビュー!?

日本初上陸!

Fig. 7: The first page of the WPB-article featuring Magibon in bikini.



撮影の合間にちよこっとひと眠り。こんな寝顔でいつもそばにいてくれたら...

「日本のみんな、やっと会えたね」

今回、ず〜っと憧れていた日本に初めて来ることができました。そして、初めてのグラビア撮影。あんなにたくさんの人やライトに囲まれて撮るなんて知らなかったから、とっても恥ずかしくて…。でも、たくさんの人にワタシを見てもらいたいな from magi



マギボン
緊張と興奮の
撮影舞台裏



リアもお気に入りの飯塚カメラマンが迫る！少し緊張気味のマギ



グラビア撮影、無事終了！不安も消えて、もう完全にアイドルの顔に...



Fig. 8: The fourth page of the WPB May-2008 article featuring Magibon in bikini.

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IMAGES:

Fig. 1: © Margaret Adams, 2008.

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Fig. 3: © Margaret Adams, 2007.

Fig. 4: © Margaret Adams, 2008.

Fig. 5: © GyaO Corporation Japan, 2008.

Fig. 6: © *Weekly Playboy*, *Shueisha*

Fig. 7: © *Weekly Playboy*, *Shueisha*

Fig. 8: © *Weekly Playboy*, *Shueisha*

NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR:

Further official audiovisual material, for e.g. episodes from the discussed program *Midtown TV*, is available at request. I am free to (re)distribute this material, since the GyaO-corporation no longer maintains this material. For more information, please send an email to [floothuis\[at\]gmail.com](mailto:floothuis[at]gmail.com).

