

Portrait of a Girly Girl: When Recording a Video Selfie is a Feminist Practice

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YouTube, Instagram and TikTok are increasingly used today as tools of resistance and environments of expression. This paper will focus on feminist video-selfies that address stereotypes of the female body, status and behaviour and propose to ironically dismantle them. The article will consider issues of female networked presence and creativity by referring to early attempts to create a personal video channel, documented by Elisa Giardina Papa in her video artwork *need ideas!?!PLZ!!* (2011). The undercover presentation of political content will be discussed as an activist strategy, as in artist Addie Wagenknecht's fake make-up tutorials, in which she actually gives instructions on how to protect oneself both online and offline. Video-selfies are widely shared on social platforms as a playful way to meditate on personal identity. This happens, for example, thanks to the social filters of the artist S()fia Braga, which allow users to freely experiment with unfathomable views of themselves and to interact with others in a performative way. All these examples use creative strategies to convey a critical message. While never discouraging physical protest, they offer another ground for activism and dissent, and the possibility of literally embodying them.

NO NEED FOR HOLLYWOOD

When I was at high school, my friend and I used to record videos of ourselves while studying together at home. We translated Ancient Greek and Latin into Italian in the kitchen, in my room or hers, while at the same time commenting on our everyday life, our friends, schoolmates, our crushes, sometimes also singing, always being loud and dramatic. At that time, around 2009, we were using a compact digital camera I owned, pretty much the same as Sadie Benning with their Fisher-Price Pixelvision. Obviously, there are a lot of differences between our videos and a piece of art. My friend and I had no artistic pretences, to start with, nor even wanted to produce a movie or a structured narration. However, as Benning famously did, we were using the cyclopic mechanical eye as a teenager's diary. In order to investigate stereotypes and expectations linked to love and relationships, in Benning's short movie *It Wasn't Love* (1992) the artist tells the story of a romantic encounter, acting, sometimes together with another girl, as female and male individuals on a date are expected to.

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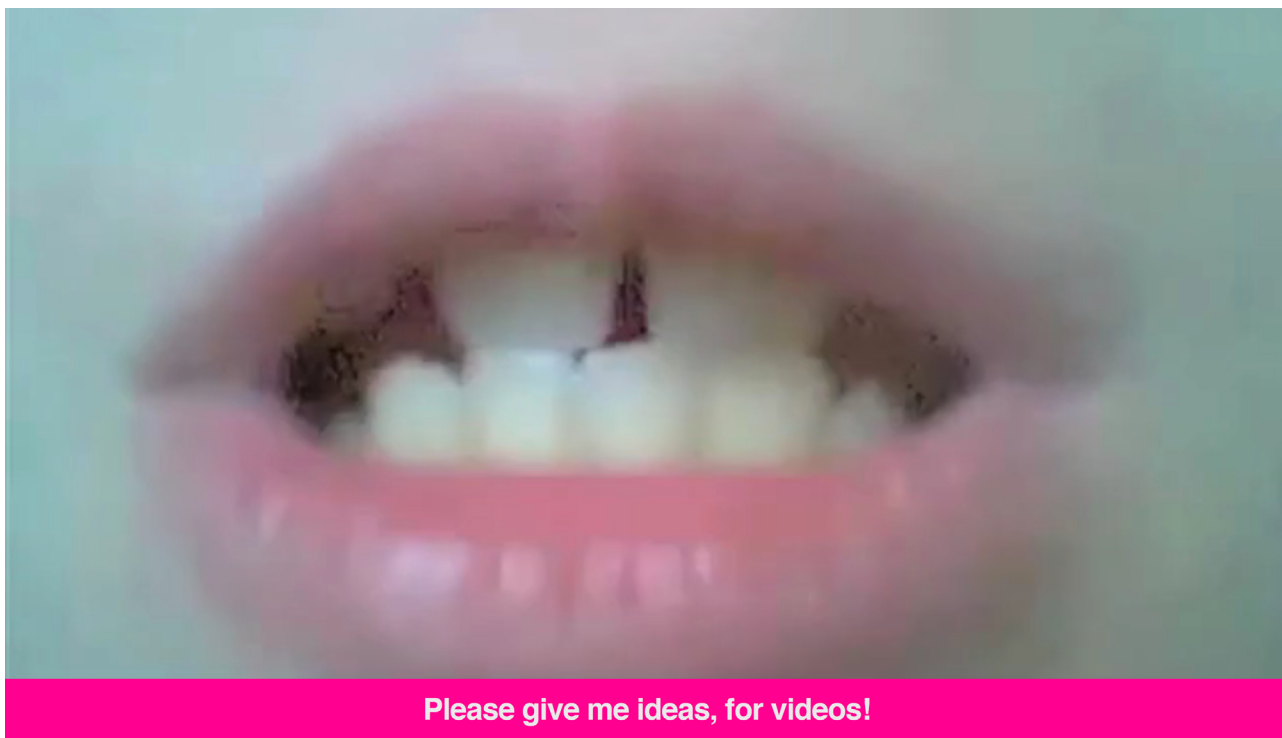
Giving and accepting a lift; offering each other a cigarette; dancing romantically, are presented as ambiguous actions that involve erotic, childish and violent traits. At the end of the movie, Benning says something that can be interpreted both as referred to the content and as a statement, which involves the medium she chose: "We didn't need Hollywood, we were Hollywood". Similarly, even though naïvely, my friend and I were fascinated by the camera, mostly because it allowed us to put on stage our friendship at its best, to perform ourselves and validate our identity.

Needless to say, we were not the exception. For the selfie is so widespread, both in picture and video, it has been repeated many times that the digital generation is the most narcissistic in history (Tanni 2021, 201). Interestingly, this practice is often associated with a typically feminine frivolous tendency, linked to self-monitoring and self-discipline, which is justified by obsessive self-care (see Storr [2018]).

However, the camera does not work like a mirror: it does not reflect our specular image, it rather looks at us from the point of view of a different gaze, which therefore sees (and lets us see) ourselves like an object (Dalmasso and Grespi 2023, 22). Even though nowadays personal devices permit the "mirroring mode", in order to see one's face as a specular image on the display, they still do not act as a real mirror because it is impossible to meet one's own eyes on the screen: we can either stare at the front camera or look at our image (id., 26). Furthermore, as is typical of recording in general, the selfie is always the re-presentation of someone who is not there, "resuscitated" as they will appear no more, at least because they will never be that young never again (Pinotti and Somaini 2016, 236). Thus, the magic of the selfie mode is precisely its transformative power, the possibility it gives of looking at ourselves as if we are facing another person.

In fact, the self-referential use of video as a critical tool has been explored extensively in contemporary art, even before Benning's video diaries. Joan Jonas, Martha Rosler and Dara Birnbaum, to name but a few, have chosen to make video performances in which they hand over their bodies to the camera in order to produce a series of images capable of critically examining the idea of "femininity" and the space of expression that art has traditionally afforded women. In this sense, Benning's work seems to hark back to pieces of art such as *Organic Honey's Visual Telepathy* (1972), Jonas' first attempt with a camera, in which the artist decided to film different versions of herself, including the seductive masked Organic Honey, who acts stereotypically, with gestures and behaviours that are often considered "feminine". Jonas's camera brilliantly demonstrates the constant self-surveillance that women undergo in order to conform their bodily habits to a culturally determined role, while also offering a way out of the traditional Narcissus trap thanks to the "telepathic" address to those watching (Fateman 2015).

To put it simply, self-recording works like a message in a bottle to establish a dialogue with strangers, the first being ourselves, as I said, and the second being the public.



“BROADCAST YOURSELF”

When social platforms for video-sharing, such as YouTube, created in 2005, and TikTok, first launched in 2016, became popular, the range a video-selfie could reach was incredibly amplified. Like my friend and me, many other people started to be attracted by the chance of giving details about their private lives and asking for help in moments of fragility. For many users, especially teenagers, the video-selfie became a way to both prove one's emotional intensity and authenticity and to connect with a global community of peers (Tanni 2021, 198–99).

A few years after YouTube first appeared, artist Elisa Giardina Papa decided to investigate this phenomenon, aiming at understanding how our hyperconnected world has changed human relationships and collaboration. The result of this research is her artwork *need ideas!?!PLZ!!* (2011), a collage of video selfies posted by early teens, who repeatedly ask the spectator for ideas to employ in the video itself, in order to start their own channel. As appears immediately clear, most of them are girls. Giardina Papa's teenagers seem to be so concerned about social appearance and expectations that they privilege productivity over originality: as some of them explicitly say, they have no time to think the structure of their project through, they just need an idea to please the audience (maybe singing or dancing?). They are not stupid, as one of the rare boys hastens to clarify. They simply do not know what to do¹ [Fig. 1].

Fig. 1:
Elisa Giardina Papa, *need ideas!?!PLZ!!*, 2011. Still from video. Video HD, color, 5 minutes and 28 seconds. Courtesy of the Artist and Galerie Tanja Wagner.

1 <https://vimeo.com/27488845>.

Indeed, Giardina Papa's teenagers understand self-recording is potentially a way to make money, but also that it is not easy and there is a lot to be learned². Even if still just in a raw, immature way, these videos contain a profound intuition: YouTube could be used as a space to be loud and to shine, to make every single moment of our life worthy of attention. The idea of making money by simply living before the camera is obviously not secondary. Posted on YouTube, during the first six years that followed the platform creation, these videos already reveal the pressure social anxiety could induce, especially in search for online celebrity. The famous YouTube motto "Broadcast yourself" promotes an entrepreneurial ideal of self-branding, which in this particular case could be read through the lens of the post-feminist discourse, according to which the neoliberal regime is the one in which equality has been fully achieved for all since everybody is free to fulfil themselves (Harvey 2023, 137).

These users were patently lacking in tech-literacy because when these videos were taken the digital shared space was still to be explored. If the internet was ever the people's medium, it was not very much so in the early 2000s, given that "in 2007, only 1.5 per cent of social networking users contributed to their content – the rest remained passive consumers" (Quaranta 2017, my translation). In 2007, most people did not produce content and/or were not ready to do so. For this reason, *VVEBCAM* (2007), by Petra Cortright, a masterpiece of the "vernacular ego-clip" (id.), is maybe the most representative work of art of that time. In the famous video, the artist filmed herself staring at the screen, static, her face completely apathetic, surrounded by cute digital additions such as coloured slices of pizza, lightning bolts and insects³. What Cortright shows is, in fact, a life lived largely in front of a screen, in which users are given, if anything, the opportunity to manage the ways in which they want to display their public image, albeit always within predefined functions and templates. In the words of Federica Patti, the multimedia performance "invites each of us to experience ourselves as a show" (2022, 159, my translation), in which even apparently empty moments seem interesting enough to be recorded and, above all, embellished. In this respect, Cortright became a mouthpiece for an entire generation, little by little meshed with non-human digital technologies and submerged by pictures and news from all over the world. Assailed, like all other users, by an excessive and not always verifiable barrage of information, Cortright responds with a reflection with a Cartesian flavour: I can record myself, therefore I am. On the one hand, the artist situates herself within the internet community. On the other, she suggests a possible critique to that same community, and therefore a self-criticism: she depicts herself as a not particularly active user, mostly looking for

2 As Alison Harvey rightly points out, focusing on the negative aspects of selfie and video-selfie production risks stigmatising only the users who take them, blaming them for wider social, economic and political problems, also without acknowledging their specific skills, which are absolutely necessary to produce a quality product that can be taken seriously by an audience (Harvey 2023, 215–7).

3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k50Mj8ZY-xY>.

content to alleviate the feeling of boredom, who remains mute and impassive (Quaranta 2010, 163). In this sense, *VVEBCAM* seems to echo Barbara Kruger's iconic work *Untitled (I Shop Therefore I Am)* (1987): she still mainly a consumer, albeit a 2.0 one.

As a process of familiarisation has taken place, the involvement of users has increased, and with it posting by women as well. While the latest statistics show still a vast majority of male users on YouTube (Ceci 2023a), on TikTok, which is the most popular app worldwide, the participation is almost equal (Ceci 2023b), or according to some statistics even mostly feminine (Howarth 2023). These data seem to confirm the famous comparison made by W. J. T. Mitchell (2005) between pictures and women, according to which they both want to be looked at. However, such a simplistic understanding, especially if applied to the practice of self-recording, fails to recognize the most compelling aesthetic and political issues involved in online sharing, and reveals a moralizing attitude towards individuals who are typically marginalized, both offline and online. Considering the material uploaded, it is more likely women on the social networks, just like any other user, do not want only to be an object of admiration, they rather want to be listened to.

What I am arguing here is that sharing a video-selfie is a political act. Indeed, connected self-recording implies embracing the feminist dictum "the personal is political", which is also connected with the strategy of publicly narrating the self as in the personal journal, extensively explored by the feminist oral narrative during the 1960s and 70s (Abrams 2019). This does not mean the content of a video-selfie is always inclusive and edifying, rather that it entails a certain vision of the world, more or less consciously pursued, always culturally and socially driven, and expressed by putting one's face out there. Sometimes the original message can be interpreted to the point that it is distorted: as *need ideas!?!PLZ!!* clarifies very well, exposing one's own body and life could be used not to raise a feminist consciousness, but rather for individual purposes, in economic and visibility terms. So-called neoliberal feminism is also a paradoxical form of political act, mostly concerned with personal happiness and success (Rottenberg 2020), which ends up weakening feminism as a social justice movement.

Certainly, being an expert user does not involve being a responsible citizen, just as being a woman is not enough to be a feminist. As feminist media theory has already pointed out, social media could be successfully used as contexts that can favour the self-expression of marginalised subjects (i.e. Rentschler 2014; Keller, Mendes and Ringrose 2016; Trott 2018), but at the same time they are exploited to reinforce gender stereotypes. Generally speaking, the internet is still largely tied to the *cliché*, which describes men, preferably white men, as technically and productively engaged with technology, and women as more emotionally and consumer-oriented (Harvey 2023, 191).

IRONY IS THE REVOLUTION: A MAKEOVER FOR STEREOTYPES

The stereotype that women on the Internet are mainly looking for products to improve their appearance, and are therefore constantly taking selfies to prove their beauty, is therefore one of the most common. The topic is nowadays variously debated on Instagram and TikTok. Some users, the so-called bimbos, have chosen to completely adhere to this stereotype, acting and dressing in a caricatured feminine way (abounding with glitter and pink, stressing care of hair, body, and general appearance) while at the same time asserting their right to freedom, well-being and power, sometimes also intellectual interests, in order to support the idea that "beautiful" does not mean "weak" or "dumb". However, it has been widely pointed out how the message of the bimbos tends to identify femininity with a very specific and restrictive aesthetic model (that is, white, blonde, skinny, well-off), that was originally conceived to satisfy heterosexual male desire, and, most importantly, that tends to exclude the majority of the world's population⁴.

Positive reference to stereotypes, however, especially that of the "vapid girl" one, is not new. For example, the political value of make-up, and specifically of related make-up tutorials, has been highlighted for it can be seen as a form of "feminine masquerade" with a disruptive power (White 2018). With respect to this issue, there is also another, more subtle, way of exploiting the stereotype, which does not imply accepting it but instead suggests ironically dismantling it. Given the belief that the majority of women are shallow, self-obsessed and therefore not interested in boring things such as politics, make-up tutorials are not normally a target for online censorship. Having realized this, in 2018 the artist Addie Wagenknecht started to post some YouTube videos in which she pretends to give make-up tips while actually offering instructions on how to strengthen one's own privacy, cybersecurity, and security in general. The series, entitled *Self care and crypto*, mocks the idea that women are not in control of their relationship with digital technologies, nor are experts in anything that requires technical or engineering knowledge. At the same time, it makes a concrete contribution to raising the awareness of her audience on these issues. In one video, she applies a moisturising mask to her face, while she suggests always giving a fake phone number at the club⁵; in another, she pairs advice on "hiding that we are human" with foundation and blushes together with the explanation of how to use bittorrent, in order not to need a boyfriend for practical activities⁶ [Fig. 2].

Just one year later, Feroza Aziz, a seventeen year old American with Afghan

⁴ For example, here: https://www.instagram.com/p/Cy8ORxwP9R3/?img_index=1.

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKQiGbmIH8U>.

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oE3sVBQdFVk>.



Fig. 2:
Addie Wagenknecht,
*korean sheet masks and
password management
for pore refining wins*,
still from a YouTube video
(2018).

roots, posted a video on TikTok purportedly explaining how to use an eyelash curler, while actually denouncing the persecution of Uyghurs in Chinese detention camps. A few seconds into the video, Aziz, still holding the eyelash curler, says: "Use your phone you're using right now to search what's happening in China, how they're getting concentration camps, throwing innocent Muslims in, separating their families from each other, kidnapping them, murdering them, raping them, forcing them to eat pork, forcing them to drink, forcing them to convert". She defines the situation as "another Holocaust" and pleads with the audience to spread awareness, then she comes back to make-up recommendations⁷. It seems that invisibility is not to be achieved exclusively by disconnecting oneself from the Internet: Aziz's video succeeded in escaping censorship enough to reach almost 1.4 million views. This happened mainly because make-up tutorials are labelled as "female", and therefore "safe", content, not worthy of institutional attention (Tanni 2020, 10-11).

Apart from making evident that content produced by new media artists and by those who are simply creative are nowadays virtually indistinguishable, what is most interesting here is that cases like Wagenknecht's and Aziz's put into practice a feminist ethic of care, turning a context of self-care *par excellence* (make-up tutorials) into an opportunity for gaining widespread attention. Their videos are certainly tutorials aimed at an audience, but they are not looking for fans or customers, rather they are asking for a community to react. Just like Benning and Jonas, the logic they apply is the opposite of narcissism, not trying to sell an idea of individual self-improvement and empowerment, and not wishing to advertise products. Besides, they do not focus on beauty as the most important political tool they, as women, have. Make-up tutorials become the perfect ground for collective confrontation and undercover action.

The connection between make-up tutorials and politics has become a

7 <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeLg8bca/>.

veritable viral trend (Newman 2021). A particularly striking example is the video uploaded by Sailor J. on YouTube entitled *GETTING A MAN 101* (2021), in which she comments on the habit of wearing make-up as a necessary step to gain a man's attention and companionship, no matter the effort and the time it takes. The video, which is conceived as a normal make-up tutorial that provides precise instructions for a look, is in reality an articulate and ironic critique of the beauty standards imposed on women and their underlying motivations, as clarified by comments (very reminiscent of the style adopted by Wagenknecht) such as "Men cannot know we wear make-up, it will be over for all of us [...] so if you are lonely and single just do as I say and you'll be fine and before you know it you'll have someone paying your bills", "Men cannot know that we don't sleep [...] if you don't look like a white beauty blogger it's over for you" and

Champagne is always a good colour to go with, a man is gonna find me and think "Wow, a woman born with gold eyelids". If a man marries you, it needs to be reapplied before bed as well because you don't want him to wake up in the middle of the night and realize that you were not born with golden eyelids⁸.

On the other hand, there are those like Clementine (aka Clem Babe), on YouTube, and Alex Maher on TikTok, who take make-up, hairstyles and clothing very seriously and use the vlog form to introduce a wide audience to general political issues or specific moments in the evolution of the feminist movement. Several American TikTokers apply their make-up in front of the camera accompanied by election signs supporting either the Republican or the Democratic party. In a video from 21st February 2021, user @marynjoyce interprets the challenge of recreating the typical "Republican make-up" in her own way. The video ends with a sign that says "The election isn't over yet! Real women vote for Trump"⁹. In contrast, in a video from 3rd February 2021, user @smallfairyygoth puts on make-up with a voice in the background explaining what it takes to be a communist, and ends her look with a hammer and sickle on either side of her eyes¹⁰. Finally, in July 2020, after the Democratic US congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez spoke out against the insults she had received from Republican congressman Ted Yoho, several TikTokers, such as @beautybysonalii, who normally applies her make up in front of the camera while giving her opinion on politics, began making videos in which they put on make-up while lip-synching to Ocasio-Cortez's speech, which can be heard in the background. The core message they stress is that "I'm here because I have to show my parents that I am their daughter and that they did not raise me to accept abuse from men"¹¹. In August 2020, Ocasio-Cortez herself agreed to appear in the Vogue video series

8 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJ4zzkl4CtY>.

9 <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeLbEdrn/>.

10 <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeLgL4dC/>.

11 <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeLgdSnw/>.

Beauty Secrets explaining her morning routine, showing viewers how she takes care of her skin and applies her iconic red lipstick. Paradoxically, her tutorial is less radical than those made by girls who felt inspired by her speech. As she applies her make-up, Ocasio-Cortez says she accepted Vogue's invitation because "femininity has power [...] just being a woman is quite politicized"¹². She therefore wants to promote the idea that femininity can be understood as synonymous with strength and political engagement. While the association of women with the political sphere is obviously not in itself problematic, and nor is the choice to wear make-up when performing a political role, the assumption that women have to adhere to prescriptions that can be achieved through cosmetics is critical (not least because Ocasio-Cortez's video incidentally advertises a range of products). From this perspective, to be "feminine" is to be "beautiful according to a restrictive standard", and seems to be part of (all) women's nature. On the contrary, a general call for "femininity" seems not suited to convey the multiple needs of women from different cultures, origins and backgrounds, while it reinforces the myth of perfection required of women, at home, at work and in their free time. Even though in the video Ocasio-Cortez states that self-care is an act of resistance in a world that tell us we are always wrong, consciously or not, she is in fact adopting an attitude towards "real beauty", which scholars such as Dara Persis Murray have shown to be driven by a neoliberal logic and to be oppressive for women (see Murray 2013).

It might come as a surprise that the disruptive effect of Wagenknecht's, Aziz's and Sailor J.'s videos is not to be found in that of Ocasio-Cortez. On the contrary, this proves that make-up tutorials are not themselves feminist, even when performed by a professional politician who claims to be part of the movement. What makes them count as a feminist act is the ironic subversion of a cliché pursued to meet a collective advantage. The pairing of make-up tutorials and politics continues to circulate: for instance, @danielaggarcia13 uses them to discuss the Mexican presidential candidates for 2024¹³ as well as, more recently, @museera, who comments on the current situation in Palestine¹⁴. However, this is not the only stereotype circulating widely online: on TikTok, another popular trend is the so-called "WitchTok". Hundreds of thousands of users follow the accounts of people who claim to be witches, experts in spells, curses, prophecies, potions, candles and crystals, and in a general art of well-being, which they teach to those who wish to try. Online witchcraft is mostly practised by young girls who record themselves while they discuss their gender, social, political and cultural affiliations, debating with others on the myths, characters and ideals through which they can refine their individual and group identities (Eugeni 2023, 51). In some cases, therefore, video-selfies of witches are not only

12 <https://www.vogue.it/video/watch/beauty-secrets-alexandria-ocasio-cortez-rappresentante-al-congresso-statunitense-gli-step-del-suo-iconico-red-lips-make-up>.

13 <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeLg8yqa/>.

14 <https://vm.tiktok.com/ZGeLgeCMp/>.

an opportunity to positively redefine a stereotype that has violently marked the history of women in general, but also to add layers of meaning to this reference in a more precise and intersectional way, giving rise to discussions that reflect on cultural colonialism and identity tourism. In this sense, some young witches are wary of other girls identifying themselves as such, as this would imply an undue appropriation of a craft that has historically belonged to specific territories and ethnicities: in several videos uploaded on her personal account, Imangelle TheUnfitMisfit reclaims the practice of hoodoo, the result of a mixture of European, African and Native magical practices that is typical of Afrodescendants, long-enslaved especially in the southern United States, from those who she believes are only spreading dangerous misinformation (id., 56). In some cases, TikTok witches' political engagement has gone beyond the platform, such as in 2020, when, during the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement protests, they participated by casting curses on police and protecting protesters with spells (Yalcinkaya 2020). The WitchTok witches filmed themselves instructing their community to help them in this operation, sometimes urging them to take advantage of a favourable full moon to physically take part in the protests, sign petitions and make donations to the BLM movement (Sung 2020).

NATURAL BORN ELECTRIC

The case of online witches helps us better understand a fundamental aspect behind the success of self-recording. Women's bodies have long been considered more susceptible than others to being visited by supernatural entities because of their "electric" nature: emotionally volatile and vulnerable, they would therefore be the most expert in all those practices involving occult and non-rational skills (Sconce 2000, 12; see also Grossi 2017). Regarded as mediums *par excellence*, either as bodies capable of receiving and transmitting information, or as messengers of the supernatural, women have often decided to take advantage of the authority granted to them in the spiritual realm to speak out in public about gender equality, universal suffrage and the right to self-determination (id., 14; 48–49). A similar mechanism is produced in the tutorials, where a *cliché*, be it that of the "girly girl" or that of the witch, is exploited to a community's advantage by lending oneself to the camera, literally "embodying an uprising" (Andén-Papadopoulos 2020, 5017). Sacrificed to the need to communicate with other worlds, the female body itself becomes a "fantastical space" (Berton 2019, 100, my translation).

In this sense, there is a final form of self-recording that I would like to analyse, making reference to S(ó)fia Braga's artistic work: social filters, those effects that change the image of the user's face (or background) while taking a photo or a video to be shared online. In her practice, Braga often experiments with social filters, each of which is considered a work of art in itself, but is also part of a larger project entitled *Forehead Vulva Channelling Research: Hidden Clitoris* (2021-), which is still ongoing and consists of lectures, videos and



Fig. 3.
S()fia Braga, *Forehead
Vulva Channeling
Research*, Still from video,
2022, courtesy of the
artist.

also installations. As the title suggests, the artist presents it as the work of a research group on the “mental clitoris”, to which we can all connect in order to achieve physical and psychological well-being. Braga sees this as the third eye of the Oriental tradition, the true appearance of which men have tried to conceal throughout history, in order not to spread knowledge and awareness about the power of female pleasure and the female body, fearing the obvious negative repercussions on the myth of masculinity. The instructions for embarking on this journey of awareness are quite simple: “Find a place where you feel comfortable, inhale and exhale, touch your body and rediscover yourself, take your time without rushing, possibly even with tools to help stimulate”, and can be practised either by lying on mats in front of a tablet during the project’s public installation, or wherever you want, downloading the filters from Braga’s personal Instagram account and trying them out¹⁵ [Fig. 3 and Fig. 4].

The filters are obviously not an end in themselves, but rather a way of intercepting those who spend a lot of time in front of their screens to encourage them to think about their own power and possibilities outside of the platform. For example, the caption of the Instagram post introducing the filter *Don't Kill My Vibe* (2021) explains how to download it, inviting users to “a little exercise and self-esteem”. To activate it, simply open the mouth. Your face then appears split in half, dominated by a fuchsia and chrome clitoris. Braga wants nothing more than for the user to contemplate this hidden part of themselves by repeating the operation twice a day in front of all their Instagram friends. This artistic filter is an amusing and rather explicit invitation to masturbate and experiment with one’s body, as well as normalising the sharing of such experiences with others. It suggests improving one’s inner awareness of one’s own pleasure by using the filter as a substitute for images of women’s naked bodies, which are often sexualised and overexposed. Moreover, it does so without using images that

15 <https://sofiabraga.com/projects/channeling/>.



Fig. 4.
S()fia Braga, *Forehead
Vulva Channeling
Research*, Galeria 17,
Pristina, Photo Credit
Majlinda Hoxha, 2023,
courtesy of the artist.

could be censored by Instagram's algorithms, which are designed to eliminate explicit content. In short, it is not important how you look, but how you feel. Finally, the filter also plays with the stereotype of women's difficulty in being rational: female bodily pleasure might be located in the head, usually associated with theory and reasoning. The user is therefore encouraged to adopt these discursive regimes by wearing them like a mask: by framing themselves with a handheld device, anyone can enter the scene and interpret the features generated by the filter in their own way. The aim is not just to show off, but to take a stand and invite others to listen and respond, opening up a participatory debate.

In addition, the *Forehead Vulva Channeling Research* highlights the storytelling that online projects generally undergo. Braga's followers frequently ask "How is your cult going?", demonstrating that it is often difficult to determine what is true and what is not when we make the bored scrolling through Facebook or Instagram our primary source of information (see Pirandello 2023). Braga reflected on these and other critical issues related to the practice of self-recording and video-sharing. Like Giardina Papa before her, she created a video installation, *Welcome to my channel* (2020), composed of a selection of videos found online on the main sharing platforms, this time focusing on the tendency of young people to make public their mental health problems. Again, the majority of users are women who talk about their conditions or film themselves directly during a crisis or a manic episode. Braga's video shows how, while

the sharing of video-selfies has provided an unprecedented opportunity for the creation of information and support networks for vulnerable individuals, the popularity of the phenomenon has also exposed them to the economic interests of companies that offer them benefits in exchange for promoting their products and services. The line between truth and self-fiction seems then to be blurred: the great freedom of expression guaranteed by social networks has consequently developed a tendency to exaggerate certain personality traits, and to fake others, so that an improvement in terms of mutual support is also accompanied by a gain in terms of visibility and profit¹⁶.

Apart from the ever-increasing technical sophistication of users, something else has changed since my friend and I used to enjoy filming ourselves. The video-selfie phenomenon on the net has become so popular that it has attracted the attention of private companies who have every interest in keeping the most-viewed vlogs alive: a cultural revolution is always welcome if it allows you to get rich. Self-recording is certainly an amplifier that has allowed historically marginalised subjects, normally taught to remain silent, to express themselves freely. As such, it certainly is an instrument of power. On the other hand, it is important to remember that having a form of power at one's disposal does not directly equate to having access to the exercise of power (Harvey 2023, 138).

As we have seen, self-recording can be used to raise collective awareness of critical issues related to the status of women, also trying to improve it, reaching millions of users. Never before have bodies, and women's bodies in particular, been used to incorporate a particular world-view to this extent. As the forms of protest associated with them evolve, so do the forms of their exploitation and taming, in order to diminish their revolutionary significance. Women's participation alone is not enough to overturn the current neoliberal system from within, which, it must be said, can instead take advantage of the opportunity to reshape and present itself in a different guise. In order to make the necessary distinctions in a jungle of videos that can look very much alike, it is then essential to analyse each of them with respect to the content, as well as the attitude towards the wider community of all those who lend themselves as a *medium* for a message.

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