

## TEXT ON PRACTICE 2023

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These last months I've been working on a 4 minutes video called "Are we having a conversation?", a synaesthetic work in which the visuals accompany the sound, resulting in a flickering, fast-moving image. In the video, an anonymous female voice-over addresses the spectator to tell him an experience about creation and sexual empowerment. This work condenses in a way the motivations present in previous works trying to find spaces for the female gaze and questioning the dominant modes of representation.

In "Are We Having a Conversation?" I wanted the audio content to refer directly or indirectly the characteristics addressed by the formal aspects, that is something **partially hidden or difficult to see**. I also wanted the image to respond the sound, to interact and intertwine, hence the synaesthetic condition. Content wise, I started listening to voice recordings from 2016 so far, sent by different friends and transcribing and making notes of them. I suddenly was captivated by the nature of the conversations and the topics we discussed, some of them were more spontaneous and others worked for me as "sound letters" in which we told each other stories and experiences that have happened to us. A **private message** remains hidden by nature, is not meant to be read or seen other than by the person addressed.

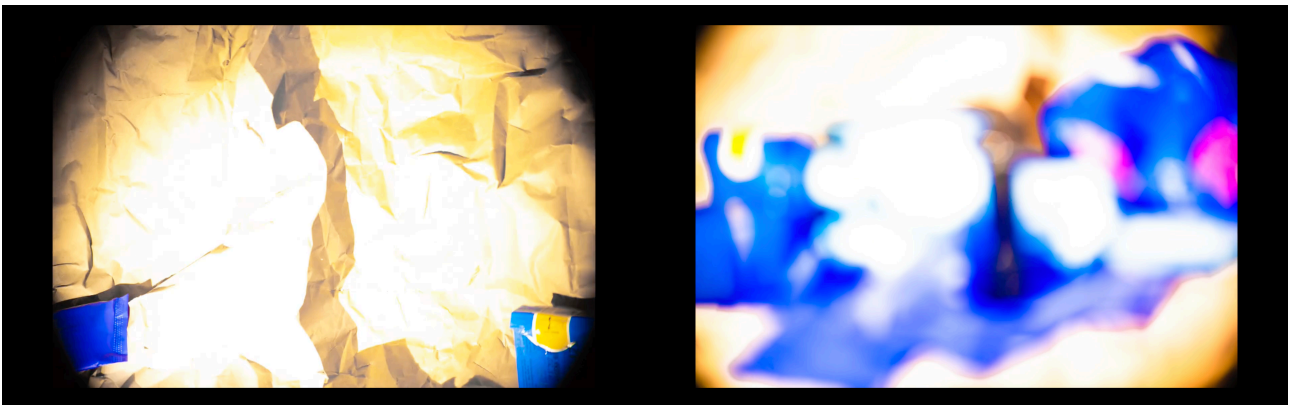


Aitana López, 'Are we having a conversation?' 2023.

In this process, I found a message sent from my friend Isa, who I haven't seen for years. We met in France when we were students; now she is a lyric singer and lives in the south of Brazil, in her hometown. We maintain our friendship by calling each other from time to time and also by sharing experiences and thoughts through voice recordings. In the summer of 2019 she sent me a message in which she shares an experience she had while reading a novel with her sister; after the reading, she felt a reconnection with art and creation and she linked this experience with sexual empowerment. I understand this connexion in a broad

sense, how body and mind wellbeing are related to creation, a feeling I deeply connect with in the present.

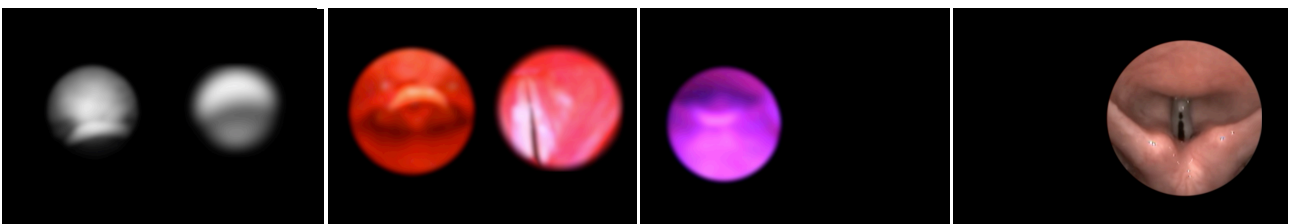
Formally speaking, the video starts and ends with visuals filling an aspect ratio of 16:9 but in the course of it, the images escape the format and appear round and fuzzy-edged, like light itself, taking up very little space on the screen. That is what I called for myself *a journey into format recognition*, as an awareness of the **formal conditions** imposed by the format<sup>1</sup>. The round shape gives the feeling of something secret, of something that is being hidden or that cannot be fully seen and positions us as **voyeurs**. This **pleasure in looking and discovering** is addressed in those elements as well as on the visual and audio content. “Catálogos Descompuestos” and “Fotogramas Desenfocados” two video works from 2020 also address these topics.



Aitana López, 'Fotogramas descompuestos' 2020.

Nevertheless, this voyeuristic feeling is **paradoxical**, because although images may look cropped, these small round images allude to the original ones captured by the lens, with its aberrant margins. By nature, images have blurred margins and round shape but the **devices** to capture and share them have never allowed these **margins** to be **visible**. Besides, the voyeuristic condition suggested by these round-little shapes is reinforced as well by the cinema's natural conditions: its contrast between the darkness in the auditorium and the brilliance of the screen (Mulvey, 1975), also present nowadays within other brilliant devices.

This point arises the question about the relation between woman and technology. In line with this idea, I am interested in creating a transversal work with intertwined **medium and meaning**. This formal approach interest is grounded in questioning Western culture's conception of Technology built under men's domination and inherently patriarchal (Wajcman, J, 1991 p.14). The identification between technology and manliness is the result of the historical and cultural construction of gender (Wajcman, J, 1991 p.145).



Yalou Groeneweg and Aitana López, "Yalou and Aitana: a Self Portrait", 2022.

<sup>1</sup> This formal restrictions format-wise are present in all the stages in the process of digital image making. Even if the nature of light and images have circular shape and blurred edges, format always imposes square or rectangular sharp limits.

Addressing Technology and the Medical Gaze, the video “Yalou and Aitana: a Self Portrait” reflects on the **otherness** through similar formal elements. Two voices in an unfussy and dynamic dialogue talk about beauty, representation and verisimilitude. Meanwhile, the visuals move from bright colours and abstract and playful shapes to progressively become a perfectly focused image of the vocal cords, showing the material source of the voice and its inner relationship with meaning (Dolar, M 2006, p.25). Laure Prouvost’s work is inspired by both the inner and outer world. She reflects on her practice as a process based on things that she finds amazing and she cannot comprehend, finding stimulation in the world’s activity. “Art may reflect life but the way a lemon is made is totally amazing”, she says (Prouvost, L, 2010).



Laure Prouvost, 'A Way To Leak, Lick, Leek,' 2016.

Going back to my work “Are We Having a Conversation?”, I chose Isabela’s recording for various reasons. First of all, I feel it doesn’t work as something I am using or creating on purpose for the video to achieve a goal, but something that was already there and I am taking back from my personal experience that invites me to reflect and **connect** with my self. **It is a way as well to pay homage to this friendship, a way to perceive art not as a solitary process, but something that is born from relationships, sensations, encounters and shared experiences. I perceive art as an holistic process rooted in the world and engaged with it.** This perspective opened up the question of collaboration as a process which my current work is tending towards and make me think about multiple future outcomes.

This project has left open multiple threads to follow and reflect on in the upcoming months. A very interesting one has been the problem opened up by the fact that it is an audio in French conceived for an **English-speaking context**. This awareness of the need of **subtitles** created an interesting detour in the creation process which lead me to a few considerations for future projects: to give them the relevant place they have as being one of the basis of **accessibility**; to consider them from the beginning as other visual element, language and content wise.

Besides that, Isabela's audio touches on themes that from the personal and concrete can potentially open up and address a wide audience.<sup>2</sup> Visuals conform a **fragmentary narrative** and try to arouse, induce and associate. I used random footage from different worlds: medicine, scientific, the body and the universe, among others. I didn't care about the content as long as it embraced and coloured the speech. Images get easily lost in the pace of the video and act as a resonance of the voice, as a subconscious visual impression while the speech goes on. The result is an attempt to approach the complexity of female desire.

I believe this video has been possible through the consciousness of feminism that has become more and more physical and present in recent years and ultimately echoes the slogan of the second feminist wave: "the personal is political". This made me think of the canvas, of the screen, as that space historically occupied by men to show their vision of the world as dominant and neutral. This work addresses the scopical desire and dismantles the male gaze (Mulvey, 1975) through an anonymous female voice and a creation experience providing sexual pleasure. The woman does not correspond anymore with an image-object of desire, bearer of erotic features coded by Patriarchy but owns the desire herself.

### **List of references**

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"Are We Having a Conversation?" (2023), Aitana López

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<sup>2</sup> This openness of the message was sought intentionally by modifying the script: I preserved the parts which seem more open to me and removed the most specific ones (for example she addressed the message to me, she talked about one specific book and also its influence in her singing practice).