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Abstract: This paper focuses on *Non è la Rai*, a TV show aired on Silvio Berlusconi's broadcasting channels between 1991 and 1994. Through the analysis of the program a connection emerges between three macro-phenomena: postmodern aesthetics; Berlusconiism (as a specific and national embodiment of larger concepts like capitalism and neoliberalism) and the fundamental role of “girlhood” in the first two. In particular, it proves that the neoliberal strategy could not have been effective without an unprecedented increase in the importance of the symbolic category of girlhood in Italian society, both in terms of an exploitation of the category of “girl” in cultural and entertainment production, and of an increasing “girlification” of the cultural and social landscape.

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Non è la Rai, or: On the Becoming-Girl of Late Capitalism

ELISA CUTER

Introduction

I believe this is what heaven must look like.

*Silvio Berlusconi on Non è la Rai*¹

“Cento ragazze, un palco, una piscina: il divertimento è assicurato” (“One hundred girls, one stage, one swimming pool: guaranteed fun”): this is a caption from the online database of *Non è la Rai* of Mediaset, Silvio Berlusconi’s mass media company.² There is apparently nothing more to be said about the concept of the afternoon program that aired for four seasons on the Mediaset channels, first on Canale 5 and after on Italia 1, from September 9, 1991 to June 30, 1995. The concept was brilliantly simple: in the first live recording of the network’s daily show, a group of half-naked underage girls naively played games, lip-synced to popular songs and danced on the studio set. The show originated with writer and director Gianni Boncompagni and co-writer Irene Ghergo and soon became a cultural phenomenon whose broad popularity has been shown by audience interest³ and ratings and by its enduring presence in Italian cultural, critical and narrative discourse.⁴ The program was something unprecedented, and hardly conceivable after. Every afternoon, right after lunchtime, one could turn on the television and watch its most blatant example of “the highly visible dissemination of feminine adolescence.”⁵ In fact, what differentiated the program from many other variety shows was solely the studio presence of exclusively teenage girls.⁶

My goal in this paper is to use the show as the lens through which to read and understand a central phase of Italy’s recent history on a cultural, political and economic level; in other words, I am to read *Non è la Rai* as a paradigm of Berlusconiism.⁷ More precisely, I intend to propose an understanding of *Non è la Rai* as a privileged position for an investigation of the relationship between three macro-phenomena: Berlusconiism (as a specific and national embodiment of larger concepts like capitalism and neoliberalism), postmodernism, and the fundamental role of “girlhood” in the first two. Through an analysis of the show I wish to demonstrate that the neoliberal strategy could not be effective without a massive exploitation of the symbolic category of girlhood, that

¹ Quoted by Gianni Boncompagni in Roberto D’Agostino, “I migliori Gianni della nostra vita,” *Dagospia*, February 25, 2011. Web. Accessed 29 August 2017. http://www.dagospia.com/rubrica-2/media_e_tv/boncompagni-migliori-gianni-nostra-vita-ora-gettonatissimo-23125.htm.

² “La sigla,” *Non è la Rai*. Mediaset on Demand. Web. Accessed 25 October 2015. <http://www.video.mediaset.it/video/nonelarai/clip/399580/la-sigla.html>.

³ In 1992, press reported that “before changing channels, average shares of viewership were at 17%, with peaks of almost 3 million spectators” in “Dall’11 gennaio il suo ‘Non è la Rai’ Boncompagni trasloca ‘retrocesso’ su Italia 1. Dice il regista ‘il programma va bene’. Al suo posto Dalla Chiesa con ‘Forum.’” *La Stampa*, November 11, 1992, 22. My translation.

⁴ See, for example, Aldo Nove, *Superwoobinda* (Turin: Einaudi, 1998); Enrico Brizzi, *La vita quotidiana in Italia ai tempi di Silvio* (Rome – Bari: Laterza, 2010).

⁵ Catherine Driscoll, *Girls, Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 9.

⁶ There were a few exceptions: showman Davide Mengacci, who curated the show’s fan mail segment; conductor Paolo Bonolis (who started a relationship with one of the girls, Laura Freddi) in the second season; the cameramen, often present in the frame; young boys who participated as competitors in some games in the third and fourth seasons; and “Bob” (Roberto Tron), a bodybuilder with the task of throwing the losers of the competition in the studio pool.

⁷ See Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, trans. Luca D’Isanto and Kevin Attell (New York: Zone Books, 2009).

made it become a form of subjectification with unprecedented historical importance and ambivalent consequences.

Part 1: A Postmodern Paradise

Popular Surface

In an overtly fake studio designed to mimic the four seasons, a set is invaded by young girls singing: “How beautiful it is here, / how big it is / We really love it, but / it’s not the RAI / [...] magical, / not at all historical fall / Kisses and hugs, but / it’s not the RAI / Four seasons that last as long as drinking a soda / [...] and then diving into an ocean that, like in America, goes “splash” / [...] we love it very much, but / it’s not the RAI (well, I mean, let’s not get carried away...)”⁸

It's hard to say something not obvious or broadly acknowledged in analyzing the cultural side of the Berlusconi era in Italian history. When it comes to its aesthetic, it seems as though everything is already “out there,” with not much going on below the surface, so that simply watching is enough, and every attempt to make a formal analysis of the dynamics involved clashes with vague observations about its gross and trivial popularity. I would like to argue that precisely this transparency, the very obviousness of Berlusconi’s media empire and project is indeed quite significant and revealing.

Jean Baudrillard has famously defined the late twentieth century as a period during which images became more real than reality, suggesting that we should talk about the postmodern epoch in terms of “hyperreality.” The images, he says, “fascinate us so much [...] not because they are sites of the production of meaning and representation – this would be not new - [...] on the contrary because they are *sites of disappearance of meaning and representation*, sites in which we are caught quite apart from any judgment of reality.”⁹ Therefore, hyperreality is the realm of simulacra, which stand on their own without requiring recourse to real objects or reality elsewhere.

Shows like *Non è la Rai* seem to attest to the televisual medium’s feeling of being the only and actual reality. Frances Bonner observes this tendency in all ordinary television, which appears to be celebrating the medium itself ignoring the “actual reality” of outside world “because watching television is so much an ordinary part of the lifeworld.”¹⁰ The feature recalls Umberto Eco’s ideas concerning neo-television, a kind of TV that talks less and less about the external world and increasingly about itself and about the contact that it establishes with its own public.¹¹ Under the heading of “ordinary television” (a television which insists there is “nothing special” about itself), Bonner includes the many afternoon programs which rely primarily on their quotidian consumption and secondarily on the appearance of mostly ordinary people in such shows.¹² Through these two elements, the shows achieve an unprecedented proximity with and affection from their spectators, contributing to their huge success.

⁸ “Non è la Rai Estate-Sigla,” Vimeo Video, 01:33, Sigla utilizzata per il periodo estivo del 1992, posted by “NonELaRai,” April 20, 2016. Web. Accessed 29 August 2017. <https://vimeo.com/126623693>. My translation.

The original lyrics, written by Cristiano Minnello and Gianni Boncompagni, are as follows: “Ma com’è bello qui/ ma com’è grande qui/ci piace un sacco ma/non è la Rai/[...] autunno magico, per niente storico/abbracci e baci ma/non è la Rai/Quattro stagioni che durano il tempo di bere una bibita/[...] e poi tuffarti giù in questo mare che come in America fa splash/[...] ci piace troppo ma non è la Rai (beh, insomma, non esageriamo eh)”.

⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Evil Demon of Images* (Sydney: Power Institute of Fine Arts, 1988), 29.

¹⁰ Frances Bonner, *Ordinary Television, Analyzing Popular Tv* (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE, 2003), 56.

¹¹ Umberto Eco, “A Guide to the Neo-Television of the 1980s,” *Conflicts and Culture in Postwar Italy*, eds.

Zygmunt G Baranski and Robert Lumely (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1990).

¹² Bonner, 3.

The use of amateur participants is a specific strategy in ordinary television, as Bonner observes, asserting that “for the most part [...] the people who appear on ordinary television seem just like those who watch it, just a little better looking, a little more articulate, a little luckier. It is being on television that makes the difference, and given how voracious the medium is, surely we can all achieve that.”¹³ Not by chance was *Non è la Rai* a sort of talent show *ante litteram*, with several showgirls, dancers, actresses and comedians first appearing on the show and then starting to lead some of the games due to their talent for being in front of the camera. As observed by Lasch, in the society of narcissism, “men [sic] seek the kind of approval that applauds not their actions but their personal attributes.”¹⁴ This is why, while public life and even private life take on the qualities of spectacle, “a countermovement seeks to model spectacle, theatre, all forms of art, on reality – to obliterate the very distinction between art and life” in order to obtain, in the words of Giovanni Gozzini, “a *mise-en-scène* potentially even more attractive than fiction because it is able to be ‘bi-directional,’ to better activate the processes of ‘mimesis’ and ‘methexis’ of identification and participation of the spectators.”¹⁵

It does not surprise, then, that *Non è la Rai* was recorded live. Recording live not only made it possible to involve the spectator through the option to phone in, making him or her a sort of protagonist of the show, but was also the only way to justify the otherwise unbearable amateurism of the girls through the cult of spontaneity. Because of that, the structure was often repetitive, even boring. Boredom is another typical feature of ordinary television, says Bonner, since it “allows performers to do their well-known turns, to tell the stories that we have heard before, sing again their famous songs and promote their latest products.”¹⁶ According to Baudrillard, banality and even boredom are not to be seen as an attempt to “domesticate” the fantasy of escape, which is the “necessary evil” of such programs, but rather as the authentic goal and the authentic *pleasure* of the viewers in watching it: “How could we suppose that people were going to disavow their daily life and look for an alternative to it? On the contrary, they’ll make a destiny out of it: intensify it while seeming to do the opposite, plunge into it to the point of ecstasy, seal the monotony of it with an even greater monotony. This hyper-banality is the equivalent of fatality.”¹⁷ This explanation, which recalls the well-known problem of voluntary servitude, testifies that the real genius in *Non è la Rai*, like other TV shows produced in the same context, was that it made banality become a daydream.

Ironic Parody

In the summer of 1993, the famous Italian pop-rock songwriter Vasco Rossi dedicates a song, Delusa (“Disappointed”) to the girls of Non è la Rai. The lyrics are overtly critical and allude to both the sexual provocation that the girls intend to achieve (“it’s you when you dance like this, you want to provoke me, and you know what you set free inside of me!”) and the inappropriateness of the game of seduction given the age of the participants (“how proud your dad must be”), as well as to parental exploitation (“Do you always dress like this? At home too? There are no spectators there, you know. / And your dad is jealous, he doesn’t let you go out like this, but on TV he does, who knows why...”) and even sexual intercourses between the writer and the girls (“but what does that Boncompagni with you... maybe...”). The song becomes a hit. The third season of the show, which begins in September 1994, introduces a new theme, called Affatto deluse (“Not at all disappointed”). The lines are an open response to the critiques of the

¹³ Ibid., 97.

¹⁴ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), 59.

¹⁵ Ibid., 86; Giovanni Gozzini, “Siamo proprio noi” in *Berlusconismo. Analisi di un sistema di potere*, eds. Paul Ginsborg and Enrica Asquer (Rome–Bari: Laterza, 2011), 25. My translation.

¹⁶ Bonner, 19.

¹⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies* (London: Pluto Press, 1999), 184.

song and, more generally, of public opinion as a whole. “Se non vi piace il programma vi prego non lo guardate:” “if you don’t like the show please just don’t watch it.” Right after, in the first episode, on 20th September, 1993, Ambra Angiolini salutes the public screaming “le streghe sono tornate,” a slogan from a ‘70s Italian women’s movement (“shiver, shiver, the witches are back”), and right after, she performs (dancing and lip-syncing) a cover of Vasco’s *Delusa*, with the line saying “I know what sex and rock ‘n roll are,” changed to the more chaste “I know what Barbie and rock ‘n roll are,” and the line referring to Gianni Boncompagni changed to instead nominate Vasco Rossi.¹⁸

Reflexivity emerged as a style in modernism, with the goal of offering the spectator the chance to understand the dynamics of production of the work of art or leisure. It had an effect of critical awakening on the spectator. This idea of self-reflexivity was embraced and enhanced by a postmodern aesthetic, although at the cost of every critical aim. In a way, self-reflexivity became ludic.¹⁹ There is no implied criticism in this reflexive process anymore, which is nothing but pleasurable, relying on the compliance between a shrewd spectator and the forms of media he or she is so accustomed to being immersed in. In postmodernity, this discourse permeated not only the world of art and entertainment but also that of politics. This has especially been the case with movements and fights for social and civil rights. Despite the importance gained by these movements in the political environments of the last decades, this does not coincide with a serious or intransigent register. In order to appear more *à la page*, appealing and fresh, they adopted the same ironic and a-critical language used in the broader context. This is especially the case with feminism, as famously observed by Angela McRobbie: so-called third-wave feminism or postfeminism aligns precisely with the broader cultural “process that says that feminism is no longer needed, it is now common sense, and as such it is something young women can do without.”²⁰ Just as parody, a massively used strategy in postmodern style, which assumes a viewer who is familiar with many different texts, and who enjoy guessing references and getting the joke, postfeminism is not a discourse which ignores or forgets what came before it: indeed, it is a (more or less conscious) reaction. Its objections tend to be targeted at second-wave feminism rather than the mainstream with which it merges. The key to the whole strategy is, in fact, irony: every objection is pre-empted with irony, and “a spectre of feminism is invoked so that it might be undone.”²¹ The whole set of *Non è la Rai* exposed precisely the two sides of this strategy: “provocatively ‘enacting sexism’ while at the same time playing with those debates in film theory about women as the object of the gaze,” turning these old moralists who do not know how to enjoy life into polemical targets and simultaneously affirming that “it is permissible, once again, to enjoy looking at the bodies of beautiful women.”²²

¹⁸ “Prima puntata- 13 giugno,” *Non è la Rai*. Mediaset on Demand. Web. Accessed 28 July 2017. http://www.video.mediaset.it/video/nonelarai/full_ambra/prima-puntata-13-giugno_628694.html#

Author’s note: The Mediaset website incorrectly states that this episode aired June 13, 1993. The air date was, in fact, September 20, 1993.

¹⁹ See, for instance, Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn* (New York – London: The Guilford Press, 1997); Christopher Butler, *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking – an Introduction to Visual Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

²⁰ Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermaths of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (Los Angeles – London – New Delhi, Singapore, Washington DC: SAGE, 2009), 8.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

²² Note that the two-sided mechanism cannot work without an appearance of free, “playful,” but deliberate choice: “this new masquerades constantly refers to its own artifice. Its adoption by women is done as a statement, the woman in masquerade is making a point that this is a freely chosen look.” *Ibid.*, 16; 66; 17.

Weak Pluralism

30 June 1995, the series finale. Ambra Angiolini performs her song *T'appartengo* ("I belong to you") (one of the few songs she actually sang and recorded for an album). She seems desperate and starts crying, faltering in her lip-syncing. During her performance, she hugs one of the girls known in the show for being her "rival" (one of the few other girls who also recorded her own voice when performing, in this case Pamela Petrarolo), who also begins to cry. In the meantime, the camera intermittently cuts to the girls in the audience crying and hugging each other, particularly including and indulging in the season's token non-white performers (mostly African, Indian and Chinese). Eventually, all the girls join Angiolini on stage and merge into a collective hug while "The End" appears superimposed over the image.²³

In her book *After La Dolce Vita*, Italianist Alessia Ricciardi uses categories of sweetness, softness and weakness in order to blame "the supposedly leftist Italian intellectual establishment" for allowing Berlusconi's cultural victory.²⁴ According to Ricciardi, writer Italo Calvino (who, in Ricciardi's categorization, represents the idea of "lightness"), philosopher Gianni Vattimo (the thinker of "Weak Thought," who correspondingly represents "weakness") and art critic Achille Bonito Oliva (the inventor of *Transavanguardia*, exponent of "sweetness") were especially influential during the so-called second economic miracle of the '80s in preparing the way for Berlusconi's subsequent achievement of cultural and political hegemony.

I think weakness can be a productive category to apply here as well. Self-proclaimed "pensiero debole" ("weak thought") is famously the Italian version of postmodern philosophy, coming in the form of clear praise for postmodernity and postmodernism.²⁵ In its anti-metaphysical and nihilistic aim, Vattimo's philosophy was essentially based on the typically postmodern idea that there is not one but many truths and that the notion of pure truth is an illusion. According to several critics, despite his emancipative attempt, Vattimo's position led to a radical moral relativism. Renouncing any critical position with respect to society, Ricciardi insists that "weakness [...] could in this sense be said to reflect the ideology of a nation that throughout the 1980s identified itself with the uniquely spectacularized model of capitalism branded 'Made in Italy.'"²⁶ In Vattimo's framework, "the ultimate enemy that must be kept at bay appears by implication to be the specter of political totalitarianism," and his aim was simply to extend the democratic rights of the West, supposedly already accomplished, to all those excluded. The civil rights of minorities were therefore of particular interest to him, as is the case with many poststructuralist theories: "poststructuralism and its postfoundational ontology are characterized by a preponderance of categories, such as difference, pluralism, becoming, etc., that appear vulnerable to being co-opted by the mutational logic of capitalism."²⁷ Fredric Jameson expressed similar perplexities: "pluralism is [...] the ideology of groups. A set of phantasmatic representations that triangulate three fundamental pseudoconcepts: democracy, the media, and the market."²⁸ These pseudoconcepts are also reflected in television's minority quotas: "Are minority quotas not to be understood first and foremost as the allocation of

²³ "'Non è la Rai,' La fine del programma 21 anni fa: in un video le lacrime dell'ultima puntata," *Giornale di Sicilia*. Web. Accessed 18 July 2017. http://gds.it/2016/06/30/non-e-la-rai-la-fine-del-programma-21-anni-fa-in-un-video-le-lacrime-dellultima-puntata_533215/http://gds.it/2016/06/30/non-e-la-rai-la-fine-del-programma-21-anni-fa-in-un-video-le-lacrime-dellultima-puntata_533215/

²⁴ Alessia Ricciardi, *After La Dolce Vita. A Cultural Prehistory of Berlusconi's Italy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 3.

²⁵ Several works do not hide an open praise of mass media, the most blatant example by Gianni Vattimo, *La società trasparente*, (Milan: Garzanti, 1989).

²⁶ Ricciardi, 143.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 170; 144.

²⁸ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism. Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 320.

segments of television time, and is not the production of the appropriate new group-specific products the truest recognition a business society can bring to its others?”²⁹ It is not enough to notice that the presence of non-white people in television always relies on “exoticism” or on the necessity of demonstrating “political correctness;” it is important to recognize that postmodern logic “emphasizes ideas of pluralism and multiplicity” at the price of a complete depoliticization of the obtained visibility.³⁰

The same dynamic exists for women, and even more problematically so. The idea of weakness seems to recall the famous Deleuzian invitation to become a minority, especially to become female, or “becoming-woman.”³¹ Nonetheless, in the above-quoted clip, we can see the co-opting and the obliteration of the subversive power of what becomes (or remains) nothing but a sort of “appealing vulnerability.”³² Scenes of crying were a trademark of the show. There was even a polemic about the possibility that the girls might be crying on purpose in order to obtain the attention of the camera and enhancing their chances of appearing on TV, which led the channel to confirm that the girls were being furnished with eye-drops in order to be able to cry at opportune moments. Angela McRobbie explains the compromise demanded of women in exchange for their emancipation, an emancipation accorded to *girls*, and not to women: “girls are defined in terms of an intersection of qualities which combine the natural and authentic, with a properly feminine love of self-adornment, and the playfully seductive with the innocent, so as to suggest a sexuality which is youthful, latent and waiting to be unleashed.”³³

Consumerism

*Season 2. Girls wearing swimsuits in a row at the poolside dance, mimicking swimming, while the superimposed graphic shows Dietorelle (a brand of sugar-free bonbons) and the small disclaimer “promotional message” appears at the border of the frame. A woman from home calls and plays a game: A chosen girl has to push a lever associated with a type of bonbon and see whether the bonbons or cold water come out of the shower. At the end of the game the conductress encourages viewers at home to send in their receipts for Dietorelle in order to win swimsuits like the ones worn by the girls.*³⁴

In the postmodern era the consumer is fragmented and dispersed into a myriad virtual worlds of consumption, the first of which is, of course, television. As Bonner observes, certain specific discourses and topics are strongly present in ordinary television, the first of which is naturally consumption (followed by family, health, leisure and sexuality, whereas the absent or disguised ones are work, race, education and economy). As can be observed in the cited clip, the products advertised in *Non è la Rai* were connected to the feminine world and marketed towards a female public. The reason is to be found, of course, in the show’s overt target, which, as it aired in the afternoon, was mostly composed of housewives and schoolgirls. At the same time, this draws attention to the deep connection that links consumerism to womanhood. If the modern subject was the free-floating *flâneur* who observed the new consumer spaces and spectacles of the city, the postmodern subject is epitomized by the shopper in the suburban mall. As Miriam Hansen (et al.)

²⁹ Ibid., 320; 325.

³⁰ See McRobbie, 132 and Bonner, 160; Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 252.

³¹ See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

³² McRobbie, 22.

³³ Ibid., 89.

³⁴ “The Best of Non è la Rai,” Facebook Video, 10:28, Dietorelle promotional game, posted by “Marko23v-The Best of Non è la Rai.” Web. Accessed 8 June 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/255161387827839/videos/4072401844711/>.

have shown, shopping malls and film theaters were the first public spaces to allow entrance to unaccompanied women and could be said to have basically given birth to the independent American New Woman.³⁵ Although it came much later, women's empowerment began to emerge in Italy precisely through their appearance in the public sphere as a new class of consumer.

"As consumers, women had a new set of social prerogatives in which their social powerlessness was crossed with new paradoxes of subjective power," observes nevertheless Friedberg.³⁶ In fact, "the flaneuse-as-shopper may have had a new mobility in the public sphere and may have been enthralled with the illusion of power on consumer choice, but these freedoms were only possible at a price. Power was obtainable only through a triangulated relation with a commodity-'fetish.'"³⁷ The freedom of movement finally permitted to women thanks to the shopping mall gradually ceased to be central, due to the implementation of virtual *dispositifs*, causing the importance of visibility in postmodernism. What remains is instead the feature of commodity fetishism, whose first target is indeed women, especially those who, after having worked during the world wars, returned to being domestically confined. According to John Hartley, the genesis of daytime television catered towards housewives engaged in domestic labor by teaching them to "resolve anxiety about their status as housewives with desire for products."³⁸

The relationship between women and consumerism, though, should of course not be thought only in terms of compensation. As observed by Lasch, modern advertising seeks to promote not so much self-indulgence as self-doubt: "It seeks to create needs, not to fulfill them; to generate anxiety instead of allaying old ones."³⁹ Therefore, "the individual is compelled to be the kind of subject who can make the right choices," especially the female individual, and especially in choosing what to buy.⁴⁰

Part II: *Girls*

Male Viewers

March 1995. During a group scene in which all the girls are dancing to techno music, Pamela Petrarolo's top unties for a few seconds, revealing her breast. She hides behind the other girls, and her "accident" nearly went unnoticed. Host Ambra Angiolini brings the audience's attention back to what happened, apologizing for the "inconvenience" but also winking to the happy mishaps of live shows.⁴¹

In the first chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate how *Non è la Rai* can be seen as a central example of a postmodern aesthetic in television, as all of its aesthetic categories are heavily employed in the show. In the background there is the importance of women (or, more precisely, female adolescents) to this strategy, which, not coincidentally, is also the most striking feature of the show at first glance, and also that which provoked the most bitter critiques at the time of its airing.⁴²

³⁵ Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon, Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

³⁶ Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping, Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 35.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

³⁸ John Hartley quoted in Bonner, 16.

³⁹ Lasch, 180.

⁴⁰ McRobbie, 19.

⁴¹ "The Best of Non è la Rai," Facebook Video, 10:28, Ambra Angiolini apologizes for Pamela Petrarolo's dance floor breast exposure March 31, 1995, posted by "Marko23v- The Best of Non è la Rai." Web. Accessed 10 June 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/255161387827839/videos/2924510468144/>.

⁴² See, for instance, Giuseppe Marco, "Le donne contro *Non è la Rai* negli anni '90. Arriva il corteo della protesta l'8 Marzo," *La Nostra TV*, March 8, 2011. Web. Accessed 10 June 2016. <http://www.lanostratv.it/2011/03/le-donne-contro-non-e-la-rai-negli-anni-90-arrivava-il-corteo-della-protesta-l8-marzo/>.

I will now take a more in-depth look at this close relationship to the category of women; starting from the more obvious and acknowledged type of use and exploitation of the female body in neoliberalism and in *Non è la Rai* as examples of such mentality, I will later identify a much more radical, deep, and less visible logic hiding behind it.

Titillating the male gaze, as demonstrated by this excerpt from the show, was a hallmark of the entire Mediaset strategy when it came to women, as observed by Norma Rangeri, who asserts that “the gynecological framing [referring to how the camera was often set in a low position in order to reveal the frequent “upskirts” of the female protagonists] punctuated the whole show schedule.”⁴³ As Ginsborg and Asquer explain, “What prevails is an idea of women vilified and flattened in their physical appearance, and therefore in the only possible function: their being sexual objects for men.”⁴⁴

I therefore propose a closer examination of the kind of woman the show claims as desirable (and disposable). One of the (few, compared to all the covers “sung” by the girls in the series’ four seasons) songs actually written and recorded for the participants was called “Non sono Lolita,” or “I am not Lolita.”⁴⁵ Beyond displaying once again how self-conscious and ironic the writers could be, such a declaration is an interesting starting-point for reflecting more deeply on the protagonists of the show, or, in other words, to try to answer the question: why teenage girls?

A sort of “pedophilia” was not written into the DNA of Italian sexual culture. The presence in the tradition of so-called the sex comedies of the ‘60s and ‘70s (known locally as *commedia pecoreccia* or *commedia scollacciata*) or of figures like Gloria Guida, famous for her role in *La liceale* (literally “The High School Girl”, even though the international title was *The Teasers*), who embodied the trope of an immature eroticism, was more a niche product of Scandinavian influence.⁴⁶ In the televisual mainstream, the “maggiorata fisica” (a type of pin-up woman with generous curves) was all the rage.⁴⁷ In light of this, the strategy of *Non è la Rai* seems more strikingly not to be exploitative and encouraging of an existing trend but rather one of wittily forcing the limits of what was considered acceptable by showing young girls. Ambra Angiolini, the host of the two last seasons, was only sixteen years old at the time, but the production decided to lie about her age, declaring her to be one year younger. Under the constant direction of the writer Gianni Boncompagni, Angiolini captained a large group of underage girls that got even younger in the fourth season. Despite the dismay of fans, who were attached to the “older” girls, the girls of the previous seasons were all replaced in 1994 by girls averaging 14 years of age, selected during a casting call in Cinecittà that drew more than 3,000 aspiring soubrettes.

One could categorize the operation as a simple attempt to offer “something new” in an already very liberal phase for private channels regarding the representation of the female body (with some pornographic moments that now seem inconceivable, like the variety show *Colpo grosso*, in which the prize for in-studio games was strip-teases by girls who ended up fully topless), but I believe this is not enough. A hypothesis that sheds light on the need to eroticize adolescent bodies

⁴³ I mean it quite literally, but of course I refer to Laura Mulvey’s thesis in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975).; Norma Rangeri, “Le mani sull’informazione” in *Berlusconismo. Analisi di un sistema di potere* (Rome–Bari: Laterza, 2011), 127. My translation.

⁴⁴ Paul Ginsborg and Enrica Asquer, introduction to *Berlusconismo. Analisi di un sistema di potere*, eds. Paul Ginsborg and Enrica Asquer (Rome–Bari: Laterza, 2011), xviii. My translation.

⁴⁵ Originally written by Peppi Nocera and Franco Bracardi for the first solo album of Ambra Angiolini *T’appartengo*, but then used in the TV show. In the compilation *Non è la Rai novanta5* (RTI Music, 1994) it is sung by professional singer Alessia Marinangeli but attributed to *Non è la Rai*’s girl Maria Teresa Mattei who performed it in the show.

⁴⁶ Michele Massimo Tarantini, *La liceale*. 1975. Dania Film/Inter Record cinematografica.

⁴⁷ See Daniela Brancati, *Occhi di maschio: le donne e la televisione in Italia. Una storia dal 1954 a oggi* (Rome: Donzelli Editore, 2011), 118.

could instead be proposed, starting with Ida Dominijanni's *Il trucco*.⁴⁸ According to the Italian scholar, the hypersexualization of the Berlusconi era serves to hide a generalized deep insecurity, even a fear of impotence, generated by the threat of feminism. Berlusconi, in this case, not only embodies the perverse father who (from a Lacanian perspective) gives the injunction to enjoy, but also a self-aware resistance on the part of the patriarchal order against the menace of the feminist and minority movements that emerged in the '60s. According to Dominijanni, Berlusconi would in fact come to impersonate the typical macho male in an exaggerated attempt to recreate a masquerade of traditional and over-the-top sexual roles: hyperfeminized women and hypermasculine men. Dominijanni insists on the figure of the escort, of completely surgical modified bodies, which during Berlusconi's time in office would testify to the presence of an "exasperated, exaggerated, subordinate and degraded femininity."⁴⁹ Instead, I think that the point of the age gap must be seen as more significantly instrumental in order to sustain her thesis. The biggest scandal involving former premier concerned the minor "niece of Mubarak," Karima El Mahroug, known as Ruby Rubacuori. It would be odd to define her body as a typical teenage one, as with the bodies displayed in *Non è la Rai*: despite these bodily differences, they shared (along with their young age) the naïveté and childishness they had to embody. Everything was framed as a "game," even when they were being openly sexy, as evidenced by most of the nostalgic fans' recollections of the show: "There was Mary Patti, who *played* the role of the vamp sitting on a high stool and conducting the game 'Il nome della nonna'," "Ambra *played* the jerk," and so on.⁵⁰ The variety of bodies on display assumes, then, a precise and univocal meaning: they are not turbo-females but rather *untbreathening girls*. The calculated rivalries between the girls of the show (for example Ambra vs. Pamela, or Ambra vs. Mary Patti) become the mark of the availability of a vast array of choices. In the supermarket of *Non è la Rai*, each male viewer can choose his Barbie doll, or rather the fantasy that most suits his personal type of fear of women. There is the sweet, maternal one; the naïve, barely developed one; the tomboy, who seems to negate the threat of sexual difference; the noticeably developed one, who embodies typical traditional sexual difference, so that if she represents the Real Woman, you, the male spectator, can be the Real Man. The female threat having been established, we have all possible types of women—but all of them are young and, in essence, inoffensive.

What was so threatening about women? I suggest here that the threat of feminism is not enough. Of course the appearance of women in the public sphere has had its consequences, but not necessarily as a danger for the status quo. As Giomi observes, spectacularization has encountered an increasing feminization through the years of Berlusconi, since practices of simultaneous "normalization and mythopoiesis" applied to bodies "now regard men as well as women," as increasingly exemplified by the television makeover genre.⁵¹ The gendered discourse on the body, the rhetoric of the real self supposedly disguised, bound, hidden, or even possessed by physical imperfections and flaws, is now an increasingly pervasive discourse for women and men, because of market reasons.⁵² Therefore one sees a recreation of a typically feminine combination of low and high self-esteem, narcissism and a seductive need to be liked, appreciated and *freely* chosen (just like a commodity in a supermarket, but also like an individual craving for love and sexual desire).

⁴⁸ Ida Dominijanni, *Il trucco. Sessualità e biopolitica nella fine di Berlusconi* (Rome: Ediesse, 2014).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 189. My translation.

⁵⁰ "Seconda edizione (92/93)," www.nonelarai.it. Web. Accessed 17 July 2017. <http://www.nonelarai.it/trasmissioni/seconda-edizione/>.

⁵¹ "Journalism and television, are actually now female-domination spheres, or rather spheres of recent feminisation," McRobbie, 126; see also Bonner, 160.

⁵² Elisa Giomi, "Da 'Drive In' alla 'Makeover Television' Modelli femminili e di rapporto fra I sessi nella TV berlusconiana (e non)" in *Studi Culturali* IX no. 1 (2012) 5. My translation.

Interestingly, one can see this tendency even in the leader himself.⁵³ In contrast to the of machismo and cult of masculinity of Fascism, and to the asexuality of Democrazia Cristiana and the PCI, Berlusconi's political and subliminal message is full of feminine erotic content.⁵⁴ His use of *seduction* is therefore to be seen both in his (factually as yet unconfirmed) claims about his sexual life (he famously replied to the accusations of exploiting prostitutes with the phrase that he "has never had to pay anyone for a sexual service: for someone who likes seduction, the biggest satisfaction lies in the conquest") and in his political strategy.⁵⁵ Berlusconi's power itself is more seductive than coercive. Is that a more productive strategy in what one assumes to be democratic times, or is it an acknowledgment of diminished power? Could *this* be the real threat *and* the deep reason for preferring a kind of childish woman?

Female Viewers

*Season 3. Miriana Trevisan hosts a game. Most of the players phoning in are women between 30 and 60 years old. Miriana asks them about their children and assumes they are married, always addressing them as "Mrs." One woman calls and says she is 23 and not married; finally Trevisan asks about her job and the woman replies that she is a 'housewife,' and the girls in studio laugh.*⁵⁶

In addition to the male gaze, we must consider the opposite one. I believe the not-so-obvious meaning in proposing a sexually suggestive show based on the eroticization of young female bodies to a female public had to do with the introjection of a self-surveillance regime, in a bio-political sense: i.e., the promotion of autogenic and internalized control. Just as the camera, according to Lasch, is the perfect means of self-surveillance, "not only because it provides the technical means of ceaseless self-scrutiny but because it renders the sense of selfhood dependent on the consumption of images of the self," television likewise becomes a sort of mirror for the female spectator, promoting identification with unattainable models and contributing to the transformation of women as a group into a sort of extension of the surveilling power.⁵⁷ This kind of self-regulation can also be seen in recent studies regarding identification with and reflection on female models and bodies as transmitted through television. Women express their need to be "accepted by the group, which could be, for example, the group of mothers outside of the school, or the female colleagues with whom one goes for a coffee break."⁵⁸ This, explain the focus group researchers, demonstrates an ongoing process of self-regulation—i.e., a process "through which single subjects conform while introjecting social expectations."⁵⁹ This is yet another case in which power in the postmodern era proves itself to consist of encouragement rather than prohibitions. Dominijanni reads mutual surveillance among women as a consequence of feminist upheaval: "despite the idea of a perennial submission of the female body to male desire, the metric shifts from the male gaze to that of the female."⁶⁰ I hesitate to be this optimistic: feminism had certainly brought about major changes in

⁵³ Marco Belpoliti, *Il corpo del capo* (Milan: Guanda, 2009).

⁵⁴ Stephen Gundle observes that the chauvinism of Berlusconi is a strategy adopted indeed to counterbalance such excess of femininity. "Berlusconi, Sex and the Avoidance of a Media Scandal" in *Italian Politics: Managing Uncertainty*, eds. Marco Giuliani and Erik Jones, (Oxford-NY: Berghahn Books, 2010).

⁵⁵ See Dominijanni, 95; Belpoliti, 64.

⁵⁶ "Quarta puntata- 15 giugno," *Non è la Rai*. Mediaset on Demand. Web. Accessed 15 June 2016. http://www.video.mediaset.it/video/nonelarai/full_ambra/quarta-puntata-15-giugno_628713.html

⁵⁷ Lasch, 48.

⁵⁸ Elisabetta Camussi and Chiara Annovazzi, "Vedere le altre: rappresentazioni del corpo femminile e influenza mediatica," *La Camera Blu* 8, no. 8 (2012), 10. My translation.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 14.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 192.

society and in women's lives (let us not forget, for example, that giving teenage girls the opportunity and responsibilities of hosting a TV show alone was something unprecedented in Italian TV), but such new victories came at a price. Naomi Wolf's polemic *The Beauty Myth* anticipated how central to neoliberal capitalism the preservation of a youthful and beautiful appearance would become for women, and how damaging that could be for them.⁶¹ Wolf argued that their increasing participation in the public sphere involved *work* on the body. Such work is perfectly compatible with the dictates of new neoliberal subjectivity; namely, that of the self-made man, of "free" subjects who are in charge of their own health, their own performativity, their own choices, their own beauty, their own discipline and happy adherence to the system. As Rosalind Gill observes, such role does not feel imposed, but rather actively chosen and embodied, since "it is clear that the autonomous, calculating, self-regulating subject of neoliberalism bears a strong resemblance to the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism."⁶² Literally "from an aesthetic of liberation to a new ethic of endosurveillance," the changes brought on by feminism become a Trojan horse, the perfect vehicle for proposing a new form of control introjected by the subject, perfectly suited to new technologies.⁶³ Therefore, the proposed model of introjection contributes to the construction of the image of an object who is happy to be such, and in order to offer herself as an object, the woman needs to conform to a precise body type as the "ideal feminine prevailing in the media shows women everyday younger, thinner, flawless and sexually attractive."⁶⁴

As Elisa Giomi observes, the exhibition of female nudity and the production of a pornified gaze on it stopped being felt as transgressive, progressive and erotic, but became simply ornamental in Italian TV of the 90s, despite its explicit and exaggerated obscene features. As argued by the scholar, it is not only eroticism that is at stake in the representation of hypersexualized females: "In the fake breasts, in their hyperbolic fictionality, the essence of an economic system that celebrates abundance just as the decline is beginning, all the arrogance and bulimia [...] and the hedonist and neoliberal imperative of individual enjoyment can be detected."⁶⁵ Through the embodiment of the suggested way of life, nudity, eroticism, and even pornography ceased to be related to sex and private life, but instead became part of a mentality that could even be sold, if opportunely disguised, to families.

To quote Lasch's powerful phrasing, the point in postmodern society is that its "hedonism is a fraud; the pursuit of pleasure disguises a struggle for power."⁶⁶ The basic point of the exploitation of female bodies in Berlusconiism is in fact much more connected to power than to sex, as the sadly notorious "bunga bunga" scandals that contributed to its downfall will demonstrate. In all these legal proceedings, the woman no longer assumes the role of a commodity (an end), but rather that of a bribe, a promissory note, a means to an end that corrupts others in order to expand one's own power. Sexuality then becomes a sort of "reflecting surface, but also an unavoidable indicator of the trick, or better said, the fundamental phantasm [in its Lacanian sense] that supports it: an illusion of

⁶¹ Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991).

⁶² Rosalind Gill, "Postfeminist Media Culture: Elements of Sensibility," *European journal of cultural studies* 10, no. 2 (2007), 164.

⁶³ Stefano Dughera, "Per una lettura deleziana del capitalismo cognitivo. Sul divenire-donna del lavoro contemporaneo," *La Deleziana* no. 2 (2015): 70. My translation.

⁶⁴ Camussi and Annovazzi, 2 My translation.

⁶⁵ Giomi, 5. My translation.

⁶⁶ Lasch, 66.

power (and of potentiality), both sexual and political, which covers for an unspeakable phantasm of untreatable impotence.”⁶⁷

As Berlusconi “uses bodies and sex as a political ace,” it follows that women can also take hold of themselves in order to obtain power and recognition.⁶⁸ Signorelli has rightly observed that

there is nothing immoral or illogical in the fact that a woman treats her body as a commodity and sells it, trying to obtain the best price for it. With or without the wedding. In this sense, according to this world- and life-view, all women are prostitutes [...] but, and here lies the novelty of Berlusconi, this does not reveal any inferiority in women. Nor the sign of social violence enacted on them. On the contrary, from his point of view, being entrepreneurs of their own bodies is a good thing, a choice of freedom and autonomy.⁶⁹

This is perfectly in line with the ideology of the self in neoliberalism: the subject is no longer the partner of an economical exchange as it happened in classic capitalism, but becomes the entrepreneur of he or she who perceives his or her own life – body, skills, affect, and relationships – as his or her own capital with which to invest or to value, intertwining the gain/loss standard with his or her libidinal economy. As observed before, “being, as Butler would have it, culturally intelligible as a girl” proves in *Non è la Rai* to be a weapon in the hands of power on three different levels: first and foremost as a commodity, because women are “living set decorations [...] objects to be consumed visually;” secondly as a consumer, since “no market is more precious to contemporary capitalism and its consumer culture than that of young women.”⁷⁰ There is, though, a third figure of female exploitation that I believe somehow sums up the other two, which I will now direct our attention to: the “figure of the total integration into a desegregating social whole [...] the model citizen.”⁷¹ As observed by the collective Tiquun, the woman, and particularly the young girl, has become an aesthetic trope that threatens to absorb the whole face of Western society.

This means that the young girl is then to be read as a typical product of capitalism’s latest incarnation, namely post-Fordism: as observed by workerism-connected thinkers, technological progress permits for an immediate valuing of living knowledge and what has been defined as “immaterial labor:” affective and relational work, a significant part of the tertiary sector, meaning not only that which is directly involved in care and reproduction of labor, but also that which concerns branding, marketing and advertisement.⁷² As observed by Tiquun, female “liberation” did not consist of emancipation from domesticity, but rather in the extension of a domestic sphere to society as a whole. Within this model one can observe the obliteration of a separation between life and work, as indeed new social spaces become increasingly “feminized.” The society of a post-Fordist organization of labor, then, at least obtains an ostensible fill of the gender gap: while women are asked to invest more in themselves, as more suitable for the new kind of required jobs, than in

⁶⁷ Dominijanni, 28. My translation. The role of young girls (or of the *daughter*) as monetary exchange in a male-dominated economy has already been stressed by Luce Irigaray (who in her turn took the concept from Claude Lévi-Strauss), another aspect that connects young girls and the kind of femininity they embody to this central aspect of their symbolization. See Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n’est pas un* (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1977).

⁶⁸ Rangeri, 129. My translation.

⁶⁹ Amalia Signorelli, “Le ambigue pari opportunità e il nuovo maschilismo,” in *Berlusconismo. Analisi di un sistema di potere*. eds. Paul Ginsborg and Enrica Asquer (Rome–Bari: Laterza, 2011), 214. My translation.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Dominijanni, 97; Bonner, 80; McRobbie, 121, respectively.

⁷¹ Tiquun, *Preliminary Materials for a Theory of the Young Girl*, trans. by Ariana Reines (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012): 15.

⁷² Sandro Mezzadra, “Operaismo” in *Enciclopedia del pensiero politico*, eds. Roberto Esposito and Carlo Galli (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2000): 497-498;), *Gli operai. Autobiografie di cattivi maestri*, eds. Francesca Pozzi, Guido Borio, and Gigi Roggero (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2005); Regarding, in particular, the hypothesis of immaterial labour, see Carlo Vercellone, *Capitalismo cognitivo* (Rome: manifestolibri, 2006).

male desire, men start to invest on their bodies just like women once did. At the same time, other boundaries collapse between life and work, between production and consumption, to the point that the subject is already subsumed by capital simply by virtue of existing, no matter what her profession. Therefore, here self-valuation and post-Fordist valorization can become synonyms: the obtained woman, the *jeune fille*, embodies “the wildest fantasy of capital, its prehistoric dream.”⁷³ To this real fulfillment of a total subsumption must be added also a supplementary psycho-symbolic plus-value: a stock of collective imagination that creates the symbolic conditions for the realization of value. The young girl becomes the model of the perfect citizen, the happy endorser of the last permutation both of capitalism as well as of its subjects. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari, “the girl is the first victim, but she must also serve as an example and a trap.”⁷⁴

Conclusion

They have offended the thing I hold most dear: my image
Silvio Berlusconi⁷⁵

Postmodern aesthetics, connected to a deep mediatization and causing a form of de-realization of cultural experience made possible a widespread penetration of consumerism into daily life. On the one hand, it included a larger ongoing series of minorities and subjects beforehand excluded by the social sphere. On the other, a more efficient subsumption of not directly productive work contributed to an accomplished evolution of capitalism in a post-Fordist direction. In both senses, this meant a massive influx of women into social life, who revealed themselves to be in actuality the fittest subjects for this kind of cultural fruition and production.

Turning to a theory that casts the masses as irrational, mass culture has historically been understood as intrinsically feminine, as Huyssen has noted.⁷⁶ Postmodern culture, recuperating what had been neglected as “mass culture,” an effect of the “*Kulturindustrie*,” or simply “pop,” coincides on several levels with a series of concepts traditionally connected to “the stereotype of femininity which inhabits the male imaginary.”⁷⁷ In Huyssen’s view, postmodernism’s celebration of mass culture is a celebration of feminization. Postmodernism entails feminization, and means both the distraction and disempowerment which are associated with the feminine, but also the importance of the feminine as the new dominant force in contemporary culture. Such feminization, in fact, connected to the celebration of an idea of the feminine closer to the figure of the daughter rather than to that of the mother, namely its “girlification,” has proved necessary to the establishment of a neoliberal mentality and therefore to the continued support of capitalism’s contemporary form, as exemplified by the relationship between Berlusconi and his electors.

In an epoch in which girls are seen either as “sluts” or as sly social climbers (according to moral panic), as victims (according to traditional feminism), or as self-determined subjects (according to third-wave feminism), I think tracing the history of a fundamental part of Italian discourse regarding girlhood such as *Non è la Rai* proves all these interpretations wrong. The subject that arises from the show is that of the *jeune-fille*: a dialectically empowered *and* disempowered subject that seems to apply to society as a whole. Visible evidence of this figure was traced in the show’s quite literal “becoming-Ambra” of Boncompagni himself, the writer and creator of the show that

⁷³ Dughera, 71. My translation.

⁷⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateau* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987): 272.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Tiqqun, 59.

⁷⁶ Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide. Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986).

⁷⁷ Dominijanni, 183. My translation.

directed and hinted what to say to the host through an ear-bud, doubling his own personality in both the powerful and unscrupulous puppeteer *and* the twee, irreverent, naughty, playful female teenager.

Dominijanni observes that the becoming an object of consumption, while it has historically been a way for women to empower themselves in a way (twisted though it may be) for males constitutes the end of their supremacy.⁷⁸ Despite cleverly embracing the mean of power traditionally connected with femininity by the constituted power, the aggressive attempts to counterbalance this kind of metamorphosis by mimicking a deeply sexist and offensive patriarchal order, as most traits of *Non è la Rai* clearly show, seems to testify to a perceived and conscious threat. In other words, “here lies the dark, deadly side of Berlusconi’s regime of pleasure: the ghost of impotence that hides behind its sexual compulsion.”⁷⁹ This sort of impotence reflects on several levels. It is a literal sexual impotence, in the case of the Prime Minister, as reported by his lovers during his late sex gates; it is a general fear of loss of power by the patriarchal order, which corresponds to the need for young girls as a survival strategy; but, it is also a sign that the whole capitalist system is in danger: in its becoming-woman, *every subject* becomes a historically submissive category. The impotence, therefore, is not only that of the patriarchal system, but rather that of the whole capitalist system, a point of view that allows it to downsize any conspiratorial drifts on the figure of Berlusconi, recognizing his responsibilities but also acknowledging that he was a symptom before being an actor: if not even Berlusconi is to blame, then, it is because, as Debord would have it, “the controlling centre has now become occult: never to be occupied by a known leader, or clear ideology.”⁸⁰ This weakening of power seems like the ultimate fulfillment of the prophecy according to which relations are maintained by commodities and no longer by humans.

Although it was not my intention to understand whether the show contains the potential for a subversive or empowering reading, I would like to quote once again Dominijanni, who explains how the figure of Berlusconi came to be dismissed from the Italian political scene: precisely through the testimony of the escorts with which he used to surround himself. Women are thus confirmed in being “the most invested from the market strategies of submission, but also the most able to engage in subjectivation practices.”⁸¹ What is now absent, says Dominijanni, from the real critical power of second-wave feminism is the *collective* aspect of the female bond.

If this is the case, there is a fundamental aspect which I excluded from my research: namely that maybe the fascination with the show experienced by many female viewers (myself included) had to do with its being a sort of (perverse and parodic) utopia of a world made up of girls only.

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⁷⁸ Ibid., 194.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 18. My translation.

⁸⁰ Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1970): 9.

⁸¹ Dominijanni, 28. My translation.

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