

## Visual infrapolitics: gender performance in the Italian entertainment industry, between secret visibility and postfeminist resistance

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This article discusses postfeminist practices of resistance within contemporary visibility. Drawing on concepts used in visual and cultural studies, it describes and interprets the gender performance through which Giulia, a *velina*, challenges her own sexual and economic domination in her everyday affective labour and work. For this purpose, I report Giulia's account of herself, resulting from a series of interviews conducted in 2014 and 2015. In the first part of the article, I will describe Giulia's gendered etiquette, i.e. a complex of corporeal and behavioural prescriptions. Next, I will describe a set of acts of resistance performed by Giulia in her everyday social interactions in order to protect herself, to speak out and to build alliances against the violence implied by the stigma attached to the *velina*'s gender/class norm. Finally, I will apply the concept of visual infrapolitics to the open field of visual practices through which a female worker of the entertainment industry criticises the gender-based violence implied by her labour form and by the stigma attached to her gender etiquette. I argue that such a wide field of practices pertains to a postfeminist sensibility and materialises the possibility for collective acts of resistance.

**Keywords:** visibility; infrapolitics; television; postfeminism; gender; sexuality

'You came to me, you went looking for me, so it's you who needs me.'

Giulia (interview 4 February 2015)

'The spectacle [...] is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images'  
(Debord 1994, 12)

'Forces of production and social relations – two different sides of the development of the social individual – appear to capital as mere means, and are merely means for it to produce on its limited foundation. In fact, however, they are the material conditions to blow this foundation sky-high.'  
(Marx 1973, 706)

### Introduction

In the late 2000s, the sexual scandals marking the final phases of Silvio Berlusconi's last government began a public debate on the connection between media, sexuality and politics. In this context, mainstream media and feminist critique focused their attention massively on the anti-heroic figure of the *velina*. The term refers to the two iconic and eroticised young female characters who have appeared, since 1989, in the popular TV show *Striscia la Notizia*, a satirical news programme broadcast on Berlusconi's TV channel Canale 5. *Striscia la Notizia* consists of a series of videos reporting public frauds, introduced by a duo of stand-up comedians playing the role of

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fake journalists. The scoops are frequently interrupted by short interludes, where a couple of eroticised young women (the *veline*) perform sexy choreographies and teasing commercials. The term *velina* has become popular in mainstream media and has come to assimilate different counter-models of femininity, such as the hypersexualised female performers of *Striscia la Notizia*, or the women engaged in forms of sexual-economic exchange with Berlusconi and other masculine authorities of politics and media (Hipkins 2011). The expression of sexual-economic exchange refers to what Paola Tabet defines as ‘the relations between men and women involving some kind of compensation given by the man for the sexual services of a woman’ (Tabet 2004; 2012, 39; see also [Federici 2012]).

During the last decades, visibility has increasingly become a global political battlefield (Mirzoeff 1999; 2009; Buck-Morss 2007; Mitchell 2011). Political conflicts are progressively disputed with visual technologies, which have been used as weapons (Mirzoeff 1999, 3; 2011; see also Feldman 1991; Hippler 2017). This process corresponds with the neoliberal revival, in Western democracies, of older spectres of authority. As Michel Foucault writes in *Security, Territory, Population*, neoliberal forms of authority are ‘forms of power that do not exercise sovereignty and do not exploit but conduct’ (Foucault 2007, 200; see also Cohen 2011). The production of ‘docile bodies’ (Foucault 1979, 28) implies a ‘coercive link with the apparatus of production’ (153). Also, as demonstrated by Sandra Lee Bartky, the bodily processes of surveillance that characterise this production are based on ‘disciplinary practices that produce a body which in gesture and appearance is recognisably feminine’ (Bartky 1988, 27). These gender biased processes occur alongside the Western post-Fordist restructuring of capitalism, based on increasing human contacts and interactions (Marazzi 1995; Hardt 1999). In Western countries this has led to a progressive ‘feminization of labour’ (Morini 2007, 2015): traditional and stereotypical ‘feminine’ practices defining affective work become general models of exploitation (Mills 1951; Hochschild 1983; Bartky 1988).

Moreover, in the case of the *velina* I have identified a misogynist denial of the *veline*’s acts of resistance against the violence implied by their gender norm. The misogynist dimension of visibility (Mirzoeff 2017) is denied and therefore reassessed by media, and very often also by scholarship. In addition, contemporary feminist scholarship has barely analysed the interconnection between visibility, sexuality and politics in contemporary Italy, in the light of the political economy of governance and capital-labour relations. Elsewhere, I have attempted to explore resistance in the field of affective labour, from the viewpoint of visibility and specifically from the neglected viewpoint of a *velina* (Martinez Tagliavia 2016).<sup>1</sup> In this contribution I will look more specifically at the *velina*’s acts of resistance against symbolic violence enacted by Giulia, a former *velina* from the *Striscia la Notizia* programme, in her social interactions. She resists by using the weapons of the visual and by intertwining her class and gender positions. I will consider the moral and behavioural prescriptions attached to her gendered etiquette, to their transgressions, to affective mannerisms, and to other secret acts.

In the first part of the article, I will describe Giulia’s gendered etiquette in terms of a complex of corporeal and behavioural prescriptions. In the second part, I will describe a set of acts of resistance that Giulia performs in her everyday social and work interactions, in pursuance of, for example, revenge, protest, and protection of herself and her female colleagues and friends, against the violence implied by the stigma attached to the *velina* etiquette. In the third part of the article, I will apply the concept of visual infrapolitics to the open field of practices of masked conflicts, through which Giulia critically challenges her own subaltern position in visibility, in a constant tension between spectacular consent and ‘infravisible’ resistance.

### The ‘velina etiquette’

Giulia is not the most famous showgirl in the country (although at the time of writing this article, she was taking part in a popular TV show), but a girl who occupies a privileged position within the Italian entertainment industry, due to her role in *Striscia la Notizia*. At the time of the interviews that I conducted with her, in 2014 and 2015, she considered herself ‘a minor celeb’ compared to many of her colleagues, and relatively marginal compared to big business. That is why she is an excellent prism through which to observe the social production of visibility. Looking at the moral economy and the hidden text of Giulia’s image, it is possible to observe the overall rationality of its world.

Giulia belongs to the increasing affective labour force of ‘aesthetics workers’, whose whole person is put to work. As she said during one of our interviews:

Emotional labour is crucial. I always have to be up to the mark, trying to understand who the client is, so as to please him. It’s just a matter of a second, before he goes cold and takes away everything you have. Emotional and physical labour are more or less fifty-fifty. The body is at the basis of everything. First, you choose your personal physical way of being, then you engage in the battlefield [...]. (Interview 21 January 2015)

Giulia is involved in both forms of emotional management: emotional labour (which she is paid for), and emotional work (invisible labour). Indeed, the *velina* is engaged in multiple social interactions where she mobilises seductive skills with which the economic exchange between the agents is modulated on the basis of a sexual asymmetry, following the lines of a market asymmetry between the demand and the offer; and on the basis of a gender asymmetry between the authorities (clients, intermediaries, managers...) (Gandini 2009) and the women engaged in affective labour in the entertainment industry. The power system described by Giulia is therefore characterised by sexual asymmetric power relations in the form of what Paola Tabet describes as a ‘sexual-economic continuum’: the transversal diffusion of sexual acts, used as bargaining chips to obtain professional positions and favours (Tabet 2004).

Within this ‘sexual-economic continuum’, the *velina*’s image is made up of the intertwining of an *image capital*, an *etiquette* and a *character*. The etiquette, in particular, is important as it reflects a specific formalisation of social aesthetics (Carnevali 2012), made up of rules, and moral and gender norms, which the *velina* is subjected to and which concern both her corporeal appearance and her behaviour. Giulia’s image thus needs to conform to what she calls ‘the *velina* etiquette’. The etiquette rules are explicitly stated in the contract of employment of *Striscia la Notizia*, detailing the aesthetic and behavioural norms Giulia must respect: for example, it states that ‘you cannot modify your body during the whole period of the contract’ (Interview 20 January 2015). In a way the contract prescribes a life-form, similarly to the social-aesthetic treatises of good manners and taste of Moralistic literature, as in Baldassarre Castiglione’s 1561 *Book of the Courtier* (Castiglione 1994).

Giulia’s etiquette also implies implicit rules and characteristics, which, as she says, ‘everybody knows’. She further explains that, as a *velina*, ‘you must not trip over in public, so as not to give the idea that you are drunk, not go out with messy hair, you have to study diction, to be smiling all the time, to be nice and cheerful, and always wear makeup’ (Martinez Tagliavia 2016, 193). *Striscia la Notizia*’s director, Antonio Ricci is the master of the etiquette, but he doesn’t have full control over it. Indeed, during an interview, Giulia explains that during her daily interactions, she does not behave following the *velina* stereotype, but rather releases extensive interviews, showing that she can speak. Moreover, the etiquette corresponds to a stereotyped set of gendered norms, which Giulia experiences as stigmatising:

Your label [*etichetta*] is ‘*velina*’, end of story. This bothers me a lot... [...] On the contrary, to say ‘*velina*’ is stigmatising. People think it’s been a stroke of luck, that you don’t have any

professionalism. [...] I hate it when people call me that: 'velina'. (Interview 20 January 2015, See also Martinez Tagliavia 2016, 125)

The label is, however, not only a stigmatising gender norm: it is also a marker of the link between social domination and aesthetic appearance. Nonetheless, Giulia possesses a degree of reflexivity and self-awareness, which make her capable of choosing her singular way of conforming or distancing herself from the etiquette. One example of this was Giulia's performance during *Striscia la Notizia's* popular casting show called *Veline*, in 2012. Here Giulia chose to embody the image of an 'articulated doll':

And so that's it, I am the articulated doll, and I show my abilities. You see? Giulia can articulate herself, showing no emotions, because I am a doll [...]. (Interview 14 December 2014)

Giulia's performance engenders an image which seems indistinguishable from her person, even though it is contradictory:

I did that twice [...]. He says: throw away your shoes like that! And I'm like: 'OK'. I'm like that, a messy person, so I grab the shoes and throw them away. Indeed, it's a gesture they study... Very spontaneous. It characterises me. I did it again. He said: 'Grab the shoes like that and throw them like bricks'. 'OK', I said, 'I'll do that'. (Interview 4 February 2015)

Embodying the etiquette of *velina* means internalising a series of behavioural rules, conforming to the figure of the 'articulated doll'. The latter works as the visual form of the etiquette, sticking like a mask to Giulia's person. The Greek and Latin etymology of the word *person* refers to the *theatrical mask* and to the *face* (Lallot 2004, 23; Vernant 1973, 23–37). As Giulia says, usually nobody 'is curious to know anything about the person who hides behind the mask of *velina*' (Interview 4 February 2015).

In conclusion, the gendered stereotyping of the *velina* corresponds with her etiquette. Following a phenomenological viewpoint (Wacquant 2004), this embodiment requires material media or carnal flesh. In this sense, the *velina* etiquette is a 'feminine' sexual phantasmagoria, and an ideological visual product.

### The revenge of the doll

In the previous section, I have shown that Giulia's etiquette is a gendered complex of corporeal and behavioural prescriptions. In this section, I will describe some acts of resistance performed by Giulia in her everyday social interactions. As a cultural producer, Giulia negotiates a tension between critique and consent, during conflicting social interactions with other cultural producers of her world, such as TV producers and directors, agents and other cultural and aesthetic intermediaries.

Precisely because very little attention has been given to the everyday acts of resistance from the viewpoint of a female worker engaged in affective labour in the context of visibility, in this second section I will relate how, in the day-to-day relations of domination in her labour and work interactions, Giulia protects herself and speaks out, for herself individually but also building alliances with other women. Giulia traces her singular and specific pathway through a network of accomplices and enemies, intertwining individual and collective action, consolidating intimate ties between family and friends, and deploying a secret resistance. She explains:

My aim is to make him feel like an idiot! There are cases when I have to keep smiling when facing a bad game. Of course, I point out certain things and I make trouble for them. I know that my colleagues often do so too. (Interview 4 February 2015)

'To keep smiling', as we have seen in an earlier citation, is one of the gendered norms of the *velina's* etiquette, as well as a living product of her affective labour, as implicitly prescribed by the

work contract of *Striscia la Notizia*. It is implicitly suggested to Giulia by her intermediaries, in each and every life and work context, until its complete internalisation. When asked if her affective labour was also social, as well as corporeal, Giulia answered:

Yes, indeed. Like, every day I have to socialise with people: at work, but especially outside of it. So, besides work, I also have to manage meeting people in the street, who say: 'What?! You were... Did you like it?? Did you not??' and so on, always the same questions. At Christmas, with my parents, when I was working, some relatives would come to me, and ask what kind of person is Greggio, how was Iacchetti... Or Hunziker... After a while, I would go, like: 'Enough! Stop talking about all that, because each time... it's not even 'Hi, how are you?' but right away 'Tell me the truth, tell me what is Ezio Greggio like??' 'He's a person, with a face, a butt, a heart, the use of language. A person'. Of course, you cannot answer like that, you have to restrain yourself. Because people are very much aware of the fact that you have already answered this question a hundred other times during the day. You always have to stay calm and gently answer the question. (Interview 4 February 2015).

Giulia describes how she applies, in her free time, the rules of her etiquette, as they have been prescribed by the management of the show, and to which she has formally agreed the moment she signed the contract. But this is also a description of Giulia's everyday staging of affective mannerisms, used as masks to conceal her true feelings in an uncomfortable situation. In her own narration of herself (Goffman 1973), Giulia declares that she is engaged in a constant internal critique against the violence she faces daily, along with her female colleagues. This internal critique is regardless of the masks she decides to put on (the affective mannerisms she decides to perform), so as to convey the right emotion to her interlocutor, following the etiquette explicitly and implicitly prescribed by the contract. In common with other workers in the television industry, Giulia expresses emotions in her daily job, whether at *Striscia la Notizia*, during an advertisement, or when she interacts with the public. In all these cases, she must ensure the transmission of *good* emotions to convince the public. This means charging her image in accordance with the emotions prescribed by the management (Hochschild 2003). In the gaps between labour and work, she must repress emotions contrary to those that are prescribed, always making sure to keep her face concealed behind her mask. The power of the etiquette, what animates it, is Giulia's living labour: her emotions generate the persuasive effect of her image. If embodying an articulated doll is the performance she initially chose to demonstrate her ability to perform the gendered etiquette of the *velina*, inside the doll hides Giulia, its manipulator. The mask is seized, overturned, and used as a weapon, like a puppeteer disguising himself inside a puppet. By posing as an idiot through an eroticised self-infantilisation, she gives her clients the illusion that they exert total control over her behaviour and appearance. Through this illusion, she is able to gain a subtle advantage over them, as this extract illustrates:

If you ask me to show up and you say, 'Hey, how the hell did you dress up?!' and then you go, like, 'Next time, be sexier,' in my mind I think 'poor idiot', then I look at you and I say 'OK... then what? What are we up to tonight, what do you offer me?' and he brings me a bottle of a hundred bucks' worth of champagne, just for me: you are really an idiot. Because I am here. You are *paying me* to have fun in your club, dressed as I please, and next time you'll call me, I'll say no. I don't say it to you now, but you are an idiot. But he doesn't know it, because he feels like he's the master of the situation, because he is the club owner. As for you, well you are here and you grab his money! (Interview 4 February 2015)

The club owner believes in Giulia's staging of the *velina*'s gender etiquette, as if it were her true self. In other words, he believes in her self-representation as an articulated doll. Giulia is aware of the fact that playing the idiot doll confers on her the power to exploit her brand of *velina* – her income source – on the market, while affirming her subjectivity and without risks. The tactic seems to reflect the popular Neapolitan joke: 'I'm not a fool, but I act like a fool, because in so

doing, I fool you'. Following the tradition of the humorous inscriptions ancient Romans used to hang at their doorways (such as 'Beware of the dog!' when there was no dog), the phrase was popularised, in cinema, by the famous Italian actor and performer Toto, in the comedy *Toto d'Arabia* (de la Loma 1965). Famous for highlighting, with satire, the vicious habits of Italian society, at a time when Italy was ruled by the Christian Democrats, Toto plays the role of the one who plays tricks on the powerful, fooling and cheating them, aiming at reversing temporarily his subaltern class inscription in the hierarchy of authority. To play the fool means to play the role of someone who doesn't care to prove his or her intelligence to others; the role of those who pretend to be 'incapable of appearing differently from where and how they are' (Rosset 1977, 42). During a social interaction, the strategy of the fool consists in the staging of his or her own idiocy, in order to lead the counterpart to abandon her or his self-defence, and hence to fall into all sorts of dramaturgic traps. The revenge of the subaltern is therefore to make the dominant appear to the audience as an idiot. By disclosing this strategy during the interview, Giulia demonstrates a certain amount of self protection, using the very same but lucrative stereotype of the idiot doll that she doesn't acknowledge as hers, similar to Paola Bonifazio's account of the Italian TV stand-up comedian Luciana Littizzetto (Bonifazio 2014).

To sum up, I have described a set of acts of resistance performed by Giulia in her everyday social interactions, to protect herself, to speak out and to build alliances, against the violence implied by the stigma attached to the *velina's* gender/class norm (which I consider postfeminist, as we will see next). In the last section of the article, I will apply the concept of visual infrapolitics to the open field of practices that materialise masked conflicts, invisible resistances and consents, through which a female worker of the entertainment industry daily criticises the gender-based violence implied by her labour form and by the stigma attached to her gender label.

### Visual infrapolitics in the secret visibility

As Nicholas Mirzoeff has shown in his decolonial visual genealogy of modernity, 'visuality classifies by naming, categorizing, and defining [...]. [Visuality] separates the groups so classified as a means of social organization [...]. It makes this separated classification seem right and hence aesthetic' (Mirzoeff 2011, 3). Visuality is the process through which political authority represents itself as 'self-evident'. On the other hand, 'countervisuality', Mirzoeff writes, 'claims autonomy from [the] authority [of visibility], refuses to be segregated, and spontaneously invents new forms' (Mirzoeff 2011, 4). Also, contemporary Western visuality is characterised by a 'misogynist aesthetics'. Visuality 'is not just "masculine" or "heroic" but actively depends on misogyny for its ability to claim legitimacy' (Mirzoeff 2017). Still, as James C. Scott has demonstrated (and since then, many subaltern, feminist, cultural and queer studies), in his exploration of everyday forms of peasant 'infrapolitics', the dominant class does not exert 'total social authority' – to use Stuart Hall's expression (Hall 1980a, 331) – on the subalterns (Scott 1985, 1989, 1990).<sup>2</sup> In contexts where open rebellion is too risky, subalterns perform secret everyday practices of resistance: a multitude of offstage 'infrapolitical' acts, in 'invariably quiet, disguised, anonymous, often undeclared forms' (Scott 1989, 37). The genealogy of this specific set of acts of resistance to power can be found in Moralistic literature, and particularly in the literature on courtesans. In 1641, just to cite the most famous, the Italian Baroque Moralistic Torquato Accetto published the treatise *On Honest Dissimulation* (Accetto 1990). In the context of the Spanish domination, the author describes the behaviours one should adopt to defend his or her humanist values. Like the courtesan's dissimulation of her true feelings, the mask of the idiot doll is pure simulation. Every time she lets her mask down and *speaks out*, Giulia breaks the 'working consensus' (Goffman 1973),

without caring much about the consequences. This implies a subtle capacity to manage her own social aesthetics, with all the means of artifice. The aesthetic etiquette is a normative code of being, which implies its manipulation (Carnevali 2013, 29–48).

The production of the socially acceptable stigmatising semantics of the *velina* has had a considerable political weight. From a visual and feminist viewpoint such as that offered by Alessandra Gribaldo and Giovanna Zapperi, the Italian public debate on the intertwining of sexuality and politics has been fought out on the battlefield of the visual, as a sexualised and feminine dimension (Gribaldo and Zapperi 2012; see also Bonfiglioli 2010; De Simoni 2012, Morini 2012; Demaria and Sassatelli 2013). Sexually stigmatising semantics have mobilised and overlapped the following oppositional pairs: ‘real’ versus ‘fake’ femininity; feminine mystique versus uncontrolled sexuality (Ottonelli 2011); reality versus images. On the one hand, the stigmatising oppositional semantics fulfilled the need of the anti-Berlusconian press (such as *La Repubblica*) and mainstream feminist media critique (Zanardo, Malfi Chindemi and Cantù 2009) to defend a white, middle-class, moralistic and iconophobic decorum (Ghigi 2013).<sup>3</sup> On the other, the exploitation of misogynistic stereotypes has reinforced the general and popular masculine appreciation for Berlusconi’s virilist masculinity. The corollary to the mystical and moralistic iconophobia has been a postfeminist set of discourses celebrating the neoliberal spectacularisation of the self, and of a sexually active femininity, according to the values of freedom and individualism (Fraser 2013). In the Italian mainstream debate about the *velina*, the reaction to the anti-Berlusconian moralistic accusations against the *veline*, derives from commentators belonging to Berlusconi’s political area and media, which can be located within the broadest postfeminist constellation: they claim that the *velina*’s whore stigma is not an element of subjectification, but rather a tool of emancipation. As an example, the liberal journalist Annalisa Chirico’s polemical pamphlet is emblematically entitled ‘We are all whores’ (Chirico 2014) and celebrates the ‘power of erotic capital’ (Hakim 2011). Feminist intellectuals have replied that even if the *velina*’s whore stigma can be considered a tool of individual emancipation, it still does not question the structural nature of ‘masculine domination’ (Bourdieu 2001), because this is based on a sexual division of labour. Therefore, the emancipatory potential located in the ‘sex-factor’ cannot be confused with a collective liberation from the capitalist exploitation of women’s affective labour (Rossi 2014; Morini 2014; Busi and De Simoni 2014; Dominijanni 2014).

One of my interviews with Giulia took place in a café that she often goes to, located only a few metres away from ‘10 Corso Como’, a luxury concept store in Corso Como, Milan’s fashion street. Corso Como is a panoptical urban site, full of TV screens, walls as looking-glasses, camphones, visual technologies, surveillance cameras and paparazzi. Accordingly, the café reflects this prison-like environment. The interview lasted approximately four hours, and was recorded with a camera. I positioned the camera to hide Giulia’s face, exclusively recording the gestures of her hands on a computer screen, as she shows and interprets critically her visual performance in the *Striscia la Notizia* TV programme. This and three other interviews I conducted with Giulia show that in the space between her spectacular and her secret person, she acknowledges her stigma and criticises it, from within the panoptical male gaze of visibility, as an intersection between gender and class domination. Moreover, she speaks out, both for herself and for other women. Giulia can ‘enact’ and ‘re-enact’ the gendered norms implied by her etiquette (Butler 1988), momentarily escaping from their grip. Giulia’s narration of herself seems ascribable to a postfeminist sensibility and femininity, claiming that women are not just the objects of the male gaze (Mulvey 1975). As Rosalind Gill writes, this set of discourses ‘offers women the promise of power by becoming an object of desire’ (Gill 2003, 104). Sexual objectification can be considered ‘not as something done to women by some men, but as the freely chosen wish of active, confident, assertive female

subjects'. Postfeminist femininity is centered around 'sexual confidence and autonomy' (Gill 2003, 103), where the feminist rhetoric of choice and empowerment celebrates sexual female objectification, as a tool to achieve gender parity (Walter 2010). I would claim, rather, that women inside as well as outside the entertainment industry can seize their sexual objectification as a seductive weapon and challenge the labour/work gendered relationship implied by their work contract and working consensus. While fitting in her own etiquette, Giulia performs a moral detachment, and establishes a critical relationship with a world whose dominant logic doesn't conform to her choice, and in which she occupies a subaltern position. In other words, while submitting to the rules of the etiquette, Giulia can perform what Claude Lévi-Strauss referred to as 'bricolages' (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 11), and open up temporary space-times of freedom. As in one of Michel de Certeau's case studies on subaltern tactics of resistance in everyday life (De Certeau 1984), sometimes Giulia resembles a poacher, capable of tracing her own way in the visual battlefield:

If it is true that the grid of 'discipline' is everywhere becoming clearer and more extensive, it is all the more urgent to discover how an entire society resists being reduced to it, what popular procedures (also 'minuscule' and quotidian) manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them and finally, what 'ways of operating' form the counterpart, on the consumer's (or 'dominee's') side, of the mute processes that organize the establishment of socioeconomic order. (De Certeau 1984, xiv)

De Certeau's book was first published in 1980, five years after Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1979; see on this topic Perrot 1988, 117–121). Even though she is besieged by social control and by a massive quantity of stereotypes, Giulia acts 'on the wing' (De Certeau 1984, xix), tracing her singular pathway, poaching snippets of narration and images, here and there, and performing them at her will, following possibilities that do not coincide with the etiquette's norm. Although her clients have the power to control and influence the *velina's* public behaviour and aesthetic appearance, Giulia can expropriate, decode and recode (Hall 1980b) her mask in her own way, and uniquely perform her person on the spectacular stage of the everyday social interactions. This way, Giulia individually attempts to resist from within the panoptical surveillance of visibility. As John Berger writes:

A woman must continually watch herself. She is almost continually accompanied by her own image of herself. [...] From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. And so she comes to consider the surveyor and surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman. [...] Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. [...] The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. (Berger 1963, 46)

Such an infrapolitics of subtle visual intelligence does not pertain to the sphere of the open struggle with authority, but rather to the sphere of the 'quiet encroachment of the ordinary' (Bayat 2009). Its field of study pertains neither to the political iconology of the dominated (Boyd 2014), nor to the political iconography of domination (Theweleit 1987; Michaud 2003; Bredekamp 2007; Parotto 2007; Mitchell 2009; Coladonato 2014; Garofalo 2016), but rather in the grey zone crossing both fields. Such a 'secret iconology of visibility' would embrace the secret, off-stage and therefore *infravisible* forms of ordinary resistance, performed in the tension between hyper-exposure and spectacularisation, between self-concealment and invisibility, and intertwining individual and collective action.

Other than her secret activism, Giulia's staging of an everyday secret activism seems the prerequisite for her to *speak out*, openly, in public:

But there are others, like Marghe, who are goody-goody, and they let them do what they want. If I were there, next to her, I would defend her. Because it's the way I am, to always think badly, because a man



who manages a club looks at you in a certain way, and I assume the worst. But if in that very second, he confirms what I was already thinking about him, he has proved my point, then I cannot but speak out [*mi viene da difendere*]. (Interview 4 February 2015)

Giulia also affirms that she builds alliances with her female colleagues and speaks out for them, in contexts where they face symbolic violence:

[...] my feminism is a kind of fighting to protect women, other women. Because for myself, it comes naturally. When I notice that a friend of mine can be bothered by me speaking out for her, I shut up a little, but still at some point I can't help but shout out. (Interview 4 February 2015)

In our interactions, however, Giulia spoke out not only against misogynistic labour-work violence, either towards herself or other women. More importantly, we can see how the open acts of rebellion occur on the basis of a constant critique of everyday life, exerted in what I have qualified as a 'secret' visibility. Furthermore, the postfeminist sensibility (Gill 2007) that emerges in Giulia's own 'backstage' behaviour (Goffman 1973) demonstrates that visual culture is a political site of resistance, and we should take seriously into account the visual infrapolitics of the female workers of the entertainment industry. There are countless acts of resistance hiding backstage in the spectacle, as its off-stage prerequisite. From a strategic viewpoint, in these secret actions women craft the weapons they will seize to individually assert themselves publicly, but also to build open and collective political alliances.

In conclusion, we will see that such a wide field of practices performed by women pertains to a postfeminist sensibility, because they materialise the conditions for possible collective acts of resistance.

## Conclusion

Visibility is a crucial field where consent and resistance to authority take place through open conflicts and latent tensions (Foucault 1982), intertwining race, gender and class biased forms of domination. Scattered between formal, dominant, open and declared authorities, there are hidden, secret and quasi-invisible 'second authorities' (Cohen 2016, 204), which do not always want to be acknowledged as such. Giulia openly rejects her authorities, but she also practises psychological forms of self-distancing that allow her to protect her personal interests (Goffman 1961, 110) in the long run. Giulia's performance of her etiquette, in collaboration with other actors of her world, show the imbrication between forms of consent and forms of distancing, not only within a social milieu, but also within the individual. The dynamics of this interweaving can be grasped in social interactions, through the 'barefoot' study of the everyday life, i.e. 'from the bottom up' (Lüdtke 1995, 29), and at the intersection between different forms of domination, where a female subject can assert herself in spite of a work and labour situation for which she did not stipulate the rules.

My interviews suggest that, in her everyday life, although she does not always speak out, Giulia is nevertheless critical in respect to her subaltern position as a stigmatised female and affective worker of the entertainment industry. She sees herself engaged on a 'warpath' and performs her etiquette as a postfeminist set of visual infrapolitical acts of resistance against the very same conditions that characterise her affective labour and to which she has explicitly agreed to on entering the labour market. I have shown that, even if her affective labour materialises the misogynistic visibility she is subjected to, Giulia resists it. In other words, in the battlefield of visibility, a stigmatised female worker of the entertainment industry can critically challenge misogynistic visibility, using its own visual stereotypes and norms as weapons on the warpath of the weak. These acts and motives can be ascribed to a postfeminist sensibility and femininity, but they also materialise the conditions for a collective politicisation of the affective workers' labour conditions.

Even though the *velina*'s social network materialises the productive labour force of visibility, this social network also builds alliances to sabotage visibility from within. The study of these practices gives us the possibility to explore the behaviours through which female workers of the entertainment industry stage conflicts with masculine authorities, in solidarity with each other. This recalls the production of politics by the social groups generally excluded from politics.<sup>4</sup> In conclusion, albeit hidden, self-concealed, made invisible and stigmatised, the female affective workers of the entertainment industry are engaged in the reproduction of visibility and authority, as much as they are in their everyday secret sabotage.

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### Notes on contributor

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### Notes

1. I conducted five semi-structured interviews (each of about 3-4 hours) with Giulia, a young woman who performed the role of *velina* in *Striscia la Notizia* during the 2000s. Unless stated, all translations of Giulia's speech and of the cited authors are my own.
2. The Gramscian and Althusserian concepts of hegemony and ideology, respectively, have enabled us to consider the field of culture no longer as a superstructure, but as an 'articulated' dimension. Nonetheless, too often, in respect to other fields of social life (economy in particular), their *vulgatae* tend towards a smoothed vision of authority, rather than considering it as a field of struggle, crossed by contradictions, ambivalences and ruptures.
3. The term 'sex-worker', for instance, is absent from Italian public debate.
4. See for example Partha Chatterjee's notion of 'popular politics' (Chatterjee 2004; also Said 1978; Chakrabarty 2000).

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### Italian summary

Questo articolo discute di pratiche postfemministe di resistenza all'interno della visualità contemporanea. Utilizzando il punto di vista degli studi visuali, culturali e femministi sull'immagine e i media, si discute e interpreta la performance di genere attraverso la quale Giulia, una *velina*, ovvero una lavoratrice dell'industria italiana della televisione e dell'intrattenimento, affronta la propria dominazione sessuale ed economica nel suo lavoro affettivo quotidiano. A tal fine, riporterò il racconto di Giulia su di sé, grazie ad una serie di interviste che ho condotto insieme a lei a Milano, nel 2014 e nel 2015. Nella prima parte dell'articolo, descriverò l'etichetta di genere di Giulia come un complesso di prescrizioni corporali e comportamentali. Nella seconda parte dell'articolo, descriverò come postfemministi, una serie di atti che costituiscono la resistenza di Giulia, nel corso delle sue quotidiane interazioni sociali, per protestare, per proteggersi e per tessere alleanze, contro la violenza implicata dallo stigma dell'etichetta *velina*. Infine, nella terza parte dell'articolo, suggerirò di designare con l'espressione di infrapolitica visuale, il campo aperto delle pratiche che materializzano conflitti mascherati, resistenze invisibili e consensi spettacolari, attraverso i quali una lavoratrice dell'industria dell'intrattenimento critica ogni giorno la violenza di genere implicata dal tipo di lavoro che svolge e dallo stigma che pesa sulla propria etichetta. In conclusione, mostrerò l'importanza di osservare questo ampio campo di pratiche praticate dalle donne e ascrivibili ad una sensibilità post-femminista, perché in esso si danno le condizioni di possibilità degli atti di resistenza collettivi.