For whom the Post Tolls

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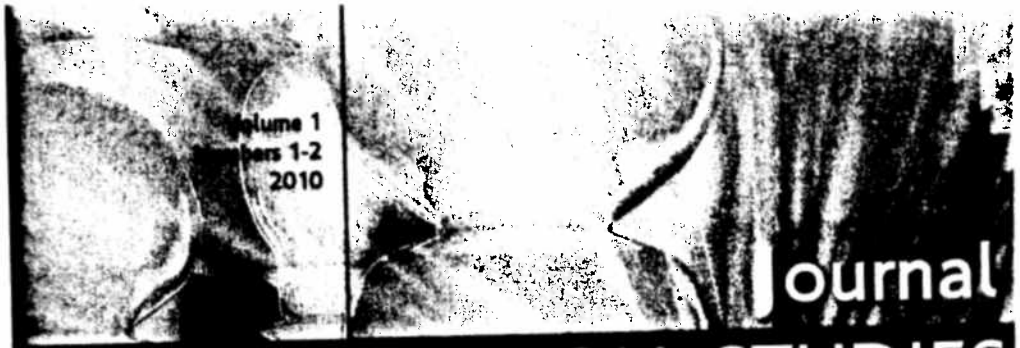


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# For Whom the *post* Tolls beyond Technologies of Feminism: Postmortem of Transnational Communicative Environments

**W. ANSELMI and S. WILSON**

All our knowledge merely helps us to die a more painful death than animals that know nothing.

As soon as we put something into words, we devalue it in a strange way...We delude ourselves that we have discovered a wonderful treasure trove, and when we return to the light of day we find that we have brought back only false stones and shards of glass; and yet the treasure goes on glimmering in the dark, unaltered.

Maurice Maeterlinck

It is so characteristic, that just when the mechanics of reproduction are so vastly improved, there are fewer and fewer people who know how the music should be played.

Ludwig Wittgenstein

questo è un buon rifugio in campo aspro, scosceso eroso ed addolcito d'acqua e vento bastione naturale in prospettiva ariosa

PGR

*The following is a* canovaccio *for a play. Adrift from its absurd origins, it postulates a meagre stage. Empty, except for a handful of symbols and characters. These are their names: Ann, Irshad, Silvio. A hybrid presence: the cyborg. Scarcity requires the three actors stand for a prop: a coffee-table. They are the legs it stands on. The malleable plot requires the coffee-table be possessed. The top of the coffee-table is the living room. There are no books on the table. There is no television in the living room. The play is divided into seven exercises in exorcism. The play is the present's game. The game is all there is.*



## I. Positing a frame

Of the various waves of feminism(s) that permeate the cultural landscape, one that has direct social, identitary consequences, unintendedly so perhaps, is the suspended spray of cybernetic residues hovering over the rocky ruins and half-deserted habitations of the humanistic project(s). This would be the snapshot, if we were able to capture such passages into Time.[1] Antagonistic, as any attempt at a paradigm shift is, this techno-organic vision finds its expression in a fundamental manifesto of the late twentieth century. Given the *cognoscenti* fact that in the early turn of last century the manifesto as a text acquires the epistemological status of an artistic endeavour as the *futuristi* intended, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" (1991)[2] by Donna Haraway will be herein considered genealogically as a challenging artistic work in order to evince from its context the consolidated ramification and practice under scrutiny. For what this reinvention of nature ludically entails in a few words is the erasure of gender differences through the embodiment of a structural-technological composition that attends to the sublimation of the organic body and its environments. However, what this theoretical project leaves behind, untouched, is the ontological detritus that language expresses as the body/mind problem.

Necessity dictates early on the stage of presentation, that as this critical play continues, the rules of the game must be made apparent, and so it shall be, by making reference to at least one fundamental rule: 'Trial and errors', 'trials and errors': yes, but if you continue in repeating the same error, you become the error's diabolical keeper (you understand me, *philosophus perennis*).[3] Be it that erring is human, these writers' attempt to here stage an existential play, being simple in its scope, should work to make propositions free of *repetition*, as it presents the following reflections: does sublimating the organic liberate the world of a particular type of oppression? Or, could it be that this project has backfired in so far as the present systems and environments of communication are concerned?

At the origins of this critical play, the **body** – *le corps propre* – as envisioned by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in order to dismiss the ontological duality that in the West from Plato, through Christianity, via Descartes, still conditions statements and positions about interactions with and in the world that ultimately lead to spectacular, solipsistic enchantments. As well, the working concept that technology per se is an ideologically-free extension into the world[4] has to be discarded as the illusion by which the implementation of an all-pervasive economic discourse (presently

neoliberalism) has been able to diffuse throughout all aspects of extant living and non-living manifestations. With this, we should then show how in the second, and possibly third wave of feminism a particular position occupied and originating in Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" contributes to the rise of an unknown, the uncanny (too well known by some cinema but, especially, television viewers) that erupts in the last decade of the last century as the phenomenon of *posthumanism*. As a chronically infantile development in history, the contextual apparatus that nurtures the integration of technology into the human body must be briefly delineated so as to engage with the *optic personage* (Anselmi & Wilson, *Performative*, 2009) derived from such environments.

Such framing will allow for a re-positioning of postpolitical, mediatic presences in the likes of an Irshad Manji or an Ann Coulter that spring about this sun-setting West, beachheads of the posthumanist discourse. Vanguards of their generation, they can be seen as the embodied derivatives of the cyborg manifesto in its seducing allure. The third leg that keeps in balance this possessed coffee-table (where the fake wood patterns, amidst the inevitable stains, resemble waves suspended mid-air), pogo-sticking the postmodern séance of(f) our staging, must be ascribed to Italian magnate, media-mogul and present Italian Prime Minister: Silvio Berlusconi, who farcically holds what the future knows of human beings. The man who back in 1994, descending into the political arena identified himself as *l'Unto del Signore* (anointed by God), today seems thanks to his communications empire, and much more, to have made all that surrounds him, living and not living, a never-ending reflection of his vision. Of the billions that constitute the dead and the living, few men have been able to shape a country in their image, as Silvio Berlusconi has managed to do.

How the play ends, if indeed it has a sense of an ending, will be contingent on the modern times we have come to inhabit: an imagined ubiquitous patina, exhilaration of sensorial pods trembling, entwined for rupturing apparitions throughout the global inlet.

## II. Circumscribing limits, looking for openings

The solipsist here is gendered a happy man given that the limits of his language are the limits of his world and that he inhabits the perfect *telos*. What leaks out of his possible world into our living spaces has a toxic aura glittering on the wall surrounding it that can be fatally mistaken for brilliance. Still, this perceived *empire of the senses*[5] is the sum of all forms of knowledge produced in the West since the inception of writing. The fragments that pertain to this world straddle between the sophists and



Socrates, the philosopher *sur*rendered us by Plato. And yet, this sensory phantasmagorical representation is discontinuous for it never fully materializes the total picture always being expressed: the lucid stratagem of containing differentiated fragmentary realities that we inhabit, in a mandate to reduce them to a common, visual denominator.

A combative strategy of communication has managed to absorb these fragments within a narrative of *instancy*[6]: to be present *hic et nunc*, immanently and ubiquitously, to the mediated world that harbors no history of itself. These fragmentary realities might be called identity, continuity, intentionality, conscious realization, even, given still-present cultural diktats, critical disposition. However, the many indicators that have been attributed to this practice of self-realization have necessarily been imbedded in a systemic exchange practice, guided by invisible hands. Language is that *quid*, however coarse, that has made the solipsist the manifest residue of an archaic world. In this fashion, according to Wittgenstein, there is no such thing as a private language. If civilly we were once all spoken to the world to be written into it, today – this ongoing contemporaneity, a *transitionism* (Anselmi 2010)[7] that has no end – we are expediently reduced to illuminated trajectories. Beyond the world of ideas, this ontological mechanism fails Turing's test: if the solipsist communicates, participating in the world, this nevertheless exposes self-referentiality. In this sense that all-too-private world becomes emblematically part of a necessary exchange within a shared language, whatever technology be at hand to shape that language. Determinate questions emerge out of this test: would *mechas*[8] not be of the same species as lions, in keeping with Wittgenstein's frame? Could we understand them were they to speak? Would the posthuman[9], whatever its consistency, retain humanness? Does the moving image as a representation express a degree of self-reflexivity?

Duplicitous by nature, technology, has been repeatedly characterized as the extension of the living into the world, – however erroneously – as transcendent to ideology, immune to the many pit-falls and fly-bottles of language.[10] Yet, what is the Tower of Babel if not berserk[11] technology? Those who refer(red) to the Bible as the source of understanding, must have intuitively realized the following: the advancement of systems capable of possessing the world inexorably carries within it multiplicity – of languages, and ideas about the world. If the mandate was to give order to the existent, then in controlling it the paradox erupts irremediably, not one system, but many processes pertain to this ordering. Not one law, but oscillating laws since language inhabits each tool, each instrument meant to keep Chaos at a distance. Not quite the Hobbesian exercise, the many cadences of *téchnë*

are ideally inscribed into a practice of domination through the auspices of the originating technology: culture, as the manifest realization of communicating, self-aware beings.

Of course, the paradox is dissipated latently by its sustaining *double* principle, ideology: whatever dominant vision acquires the means of control and inculcation of the Law. As the Tower of Babel imploded from its rigid cohesion, its scattered bits and non-terminated parts dissipate through the cultural *terra infirma*. From *golem* to Atom Bomb, modernity's finality, according to the apostles of posthuman redemption, is only a cyborg away. But, if humans in their dying prove to others not to be solipsistic, are machines so? For the following problem also rises: language frames any theory of understanding, and in this framing a social commitment is made, replete with its own ethics. Not a communal, but a social commitment, which distinguishes the contractual agency as the demarcation line in the passage to the nation-state. So that although the tendency is for solipsism to be self-fulfilling (the totalitarian aspect of the master narrative – transcendental self-reflexivity) the only possible affirmation of solipsism is a suspended state of communication: a quivering presence, static in its reptilian emotional state, apnea of the soul, more than animal less than human, or to borrow from Aristotle, not quite the political, yet. And, will this apnea of the soul still be capable of demonstrating changes like a mood ring of old? Indeed, since it is nothing else but *meat* in a living environment.

## III. The body that thinks itself living is not the music of the spheres

No matter the many Hypatia, which have been silenced throughout the history of Western thought, knowledge has been promoted as man-made, dependent on technology – language and communication media environments – at the same time self-referential and originating the Other/God. As a possible narrative, sweeping the horizon of particularized biases, the above statement is at risk of the postmodern sin of grand*ness*. Yet, the process of relativization itself, before falling into the fly bottle-trap of unlimited hermeneutics, can be reiterated and augmented in terms of the **body** as an incomplete, transitory state. Its openness, reductively its *orificiality*, is contextually constitutive of "liquid modernity", a concept elaborated in the works by Zygmunt Bauman. Perhaps a dream originated in the amniotic sac, this framing fluidity re-connects living species into an organic whole that somehow should encompass sentient prosthetic developments of the body in the guise of the cyborg. Yet, as one of the initial givens, technology is the visible hand of capitalism by which, if we



were to attentively re-read Giorgio Ceserano's body of work[12], capitalism emancipates itself from human intentionality. It could be said that the periodic economic crises that falter along socio-political divides are the nascent cries of immaterial arborescent capitalism, as it networks itself through our participatory senses. Of course, because one of the results of capitalism is its recuperation of all possible human discourses, it renders history obsolete, and capitalism ends up in a state of suspended infancy. After all, in following Michael Hardt and Toni Negri's reading of the Renaissance project and the development of capitalism, capitalism's transcendence is manifested early on in its gestation within modernity.

As we have indicated in our introduction, Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" must be considered as part of a specific genre, manifesto as artistic text. As a point of reference, we will use the *Manifesto del Futurismo* by F. T. Marinetti, which was published in Italy at the beginning of February 1909 and subsequently republished in French in *Le Figaro* shortly thereafter on the 20th of February 1909, giving it immediately an international stature. What this manifesto achieved, apart from its artistic intentions, was to delineate the limits and the scope of the 20th century, at the same time as it cut all ties to history and tradition. The main focus of the manifesto is the exaltation of technology and speed, something that French philosopher Paul Virilio would address in the later part of the century in his work on *dromology*, tying speed to politics. The normative aspect of Marinetti's declamations entail the machine or the car/airplane as the object(s) of speed and hence of beauty, so that the value of aesthetic now became firmly grounded on the machine: contained within technology and its versatility and ubiquity. This new aesthetics encompassed in its violent aggressive character, the infamous glorification of war as "the sole hygiene of the world." Coupled with war and destruction is the sense of obliteration of museums, libraries, academia, moralism and feminism. Ultimately, Italian futurism is certainly a phallocentric, pro-technology, pro-industrialization text that becomes understood as a genre and as an artistic work is allowed, through its poetic license, to make declamations that invariably tie it to a proto-fascist vision. It is not by chance that Marinetti is recuperated by the Italian fascist movement and made a member of *Accademia d'Italia*, which was founded in 1929 by Mussolini to promote Italian literature and culture. Marinetti's first manifesto becomes the palimpsest upon which the "Cyborg Manifesto" is inscribed.

Haraway's style combines irony with a prescriptive *modus operandi*, this post-modern *écriture* allows her to reconstruct Marinetti's idolatry of the machine into the metaphor of the cyborg. It is not only that through this

metaphor gender is superseded but this metaphor itself engenders the danger of genders' disappearance. For the tension that sustains Haraway's text is at once the naturalization process that she delineates in terms of the prosthetic technology which has been absorbed by the organic body throughout the 20th century, as well as what kind of future is entailed in this mechanization of the organic. The contradictions and finally the post-life ambitions inherent in a techno-scientific world that detaches itself from its creator, cannot escape Haraway's credo. In so far as Marinetti is concerned, the machine is still the joyful manipulation that men exercise on their external apparatuses, be it in the car's steering wheel or the plane's throttle shaft. The eroticization of the machine is still the controlling mechanism that at once displaces woman from the reproductive lineage and grounds sexuality in terms of copulation with whatever is external to man, to be conquered and dominated. In the end, sexuality is to be read as a simple exercise of pure power (which contains, in terms of power, the annihilation of the other).

Haraway's treatment of this phallocentric text is to use the cyborg, as she says, as a metaphor. "The cyborg is a condensed image of both imagination and material reality. The two joint centres structure any possibility of historical transformation" (151). Her placing this cyborg as a metaphor – "At the centre of my ironic faith, my blaspheme" (Haraway 150) – allows her construction to be detached from lineages of phallocentric power: culture, science and/or writing itself. In other words, the cyborg is a profound destabilizer in her hands. Yet, given the context, this theoreticisation must necessarily engage and fight against the *massification* of the representation of the cyborg: i.e. James Cameron's Terminator. The question that arises is: how far does theoreticisation carry in the postmodern world? In terms of what the postmodern has sanctified, that is the erasure of grand narratives or master narratives in favour of personal narratives, one elemental contradiction remains unresolved. That is, who formulates what the postmodern is? What discourses of power is this reformulation of the everyday life attached to? For, if we are to follow rationally this process, then Haraway's position is already an attempt at a master narrative and if this is not the case, then as a personal narrative it vanishes within the maelstrom of the massification of culture. So that, Haraway's cyborg cannot resist being swallowed up, recuperated, and finally annihilated within the gendered mediatic world of the cyborg as a mechanism of representation, as we shall elaborate in the next section.

To give credit to Haraway's attempt at resistance, we must indicate its elitisteliterian status, not just in terms of its academic credentials (for it has



been well received over the last two decades) but also in terms of its delineation of the problematics involved. If a resistance occurs, it is to be extrapolated from her list of antinomies which set up a binary that she seems, quite apparently, to be indicating as the limits to overcome through an ironic approach that entails a way out of the dichotomy, in as much as going beyond gender is a way out of a binary. However, the third way must arise from a critical reading and an encounter between a history of feminisms that she presents in an engaging way, as well as her belief in scientific progress. Is there an ironic detachment between Donna Haraway the cultural critic and Donna Haraway the scientist when she argues the following?

> Communications technologies and biotechnologies are the crucial tools recrafting our bodies. These tools embody and enforce new social relations for women world-wide . . . Furthermore, communications sciences and modern biologies are constructed by a common move – a translation of the world into a problem of coding, a search for a common language in which all resistance to instrumental control disappears and all heterogeneity can be submitted to disassembly, reassembly, investment, and exchange. (165)

This search for a "common ground" that could reconstitute the autonomy of the *different*, nevertheless falls prey of a reductive mechanism since it seems to posit techno-science as an ideologically free instrument. It is disputable that such is the case, if one were to contextualize the rise of capitalism with the rise of those technological innovations that have progressively and systematically reduced the human body to an instrumental extension of transcendental forms of domination. Merleau-Ponty's fundamental work "Eye and Mind", on the relationship between vision and being in the world, the experiential body, has these admonishing words about a still-familiar process:

> Thinking operationally has been a sort of absolute artificialism, such as we see in the ideology of cybernetics, where human creations are derived from a natural information process, itself conceived on the model of human machines. If this kind of thinking were to extend its reign to man and history if, pretending to ignore what we know of them through our own situations, it were to set out to construct man and history on the basis of a few indices (as a decadent psychoanalysis and a decadent culturalism have done in the United States) – then, since man really becomes the manipulandum he takes himself to be, we enter

> into a cultural regimen where there is neither truth nor falsity concerning man and history, into a sleep, or a nightmare, from which there is no awakening. (Merleau-Ponty 160)

Merleau-Ponty's fears about the specific process of representation indicated above, a process which incorporates, finally, the technological transcendence of human proper, can be accentuated by what Daniel Dinello in his reading of the man-machine in science-fiction films delineates as a prime motivator for technophiles:

> Technophiles view bio-enhanced, bio-engineered or even nano-constructed bodies as a temporary stopgap on the road to incorporeal resurrection and immortality – the central promise and propagandist lure of Christianity and other religions. Personal immortality will be attainable through supercomputers and robots, assert the techno-prophets of the posthuman future. (21)

The cyborg is then the naturalized bridge of a techno-scientific aided neoliberal strategy that invokes the transcendence of the body as the cocoon of a new, spiritual age, as the means by which to eliminate any resistance to the emancipation from human hands of the dominant economic discourse that permeates these modern times.

In other words, capitalism is the child of man affected by an incredible Oedipus complex. However, limiting such ironies, what is still critically valid of the metaphor in contemporary society, never mind the variances on the cyborg manifesto, is the position of how communications technologies and biotechnologies manufacture not only representations of women but also consumptions of their bodies as a space of transcendence. In other words, what had been auspicated by Marinetti's manifesto is now, as we shall see in the section on the *Berlusconi complex*, fully exploited and implemented in the Western lifeworld via media circuits' information massification. Haraway's manifesto, through her embrace of techno-scientific fluidity, seems to bypass Marinetti's fundamentalism: i.e. the quest for the absolute. What Marinetti stated is that we already live in the absolute because we are embedded in speed technologies.

The "Cyborg Manifesto" is central to our critique in terms of the acceptance of technological developments as the perceived means of amelioration of our everyday lives. When the manifesto appeared in 1985, the movie *The Terminator* was already a year old and was becoming accepted as a cultural icon, for what Cameron's movie did in the context of the 1980s



was to expose and explore fears and potentialities for hybrid organic-techno beings. The historical period is Ronald Reagan's second term in office, the consolidation of the depoliticization of the public sphere after the last wave of political and social engagement that bridges the sixties to the seventies in Europe, especially in Germany and Italy, culminating in the recuperable variance of spectacular terrorism. Some of the sci-fi parlance of Hollywood becomes appropriated by the American military in order to perpetuate notions of a perfect system of defense: in this case, air-defense. *Star Wars* becomes the encapsulation of the American Dream: cocooning America against the communist hordes of the "Evil Empire". In so doing, the tendency towards isolationism is rendered by a self-protecting system whose primary end is the *above unknown*, what lies beyond the Tower of Babel. During this period the U.S. was only involved in small manageable conflicts sustained by superpowers' détente mechanisms; also, the fact that Gorbachev enters (1985) into the spotlight, and with his leadership comes the opening up of a new dialogue between the superpowers that marks this period as relatively stable for American culture and politics. In other words, America can concentrate on itself and produce technological dreams for the always-at-hand utopic civilization – already indicated once before with Walt Disney's *Pinocchio* (1940) – the re-birth of an economy of innocence after the Viet-Nam debacle.

Yet, the first *Terminator* by introducing into common parlance the idea of the cyborg, also culturally destabilizes the dreamed-of security that this historical period in America expresses. Pinocchio gone wild, the Terminator as an intelligent machine is the surplus of a Star Wars-like system, rising as part of the good-evil binary and, ultimately, the expression of anxieties with regards to ever-increasing technological diffusion. Interestingly, the third installment of the Terminator saga, *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (2003), brings into focus an attractive, female cyborg, T-X as the ultimate gynoid killing machine. This should lead us to question the limits of representation in so far as the posthuman is concerned. Is the transcendence of the organic still to be sexually defined, though angels are reputed, in Roger Vadim's film *Barbarella* (1968), as being non-sexual[13], or is it the banal consequence that in naming technological devices they are invariably anthropomorphized? Is the de-genderization of technological apparatuses feasible? In other words, *Skynet*, the artificially intelligent network of machines in the four movies, though a gender-free mechanism chooses to assume male vestiges in the first two episodes and a female vestige in the third, when trying to dispose of humans. Why there is the imposition of a human mask can be perhaps resolved by bringing into play the subtext that permeates the saga: as man-woman

created by God betrays its creator, so is technology capable of lying to its creator(s). Underlying the fact that knowledge is deceiving, what is invoked is a return to a primeval existence: blissful ignorance. The fourth installment in the series, *Terminator Salvation Terminator Redemption* (2009), ironically enough, loses part of its allure by reversing the developmental process: *Skynet* creates the ultimate hybrid human-machine, a pseudo-monster of Frankensteinian descent, with a heart of gold.

If the cyborg is an exterminating machine, no gender designation is economically necessary. What is being communicated through this organic couture hides the fact that the machine possesses an ageless quality and that the Terminator, in a metaphorical sense, has been present and is constitutive of human culture: the *doppelganger* that accompanies human development is the machine, as Umberto Galimberti points out in his oeuvre. The third *Terminator* film, directed not by James Cameron this time, but by Jonathan Mostow, makes a non-critical attempt to promote gender equality by creating a female terminator. However, this attempt fails when it reinstates, within the context of the two preceding films, a vision of the world where *woman* is ultimately a destabilizing agent in a patriarchy. T-X, the female cyborg, is an agent of destruction, like the Terminator; she, however, comes replete with Christian history, in that she adds seduction to the equation. It is of note that developments in the Terminator films mean that by the second film, the Terminator is represented as fluid and mercurial; this particular characteristic carries over into the third film, *Rise of the Machines* (2003), and acquires a particular symbolic dimension. T-X is thus linked to traditional notions of female/woman as the culpable: menstruation as taboo, weakness, entry point for the evil spirits, which finds its ancestral origins reiterated in biblical notions of sin.

As we have come to witness since the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), and seemingly in contrast to the reflections above, neoliberalism thrives on and exasperates fluidity. This economic-power system erases the Atom Bomb induced stability of the Cold War, a period based on a temporary stalled binary of power, in favour, ironically, of fluidity. The contemporary period of, what Zygmut Bauman termed, liquid modernity is basically marked by precariousness, which can only lead to the contingent security provided by a system of objects deeply engrained in the economic process: the I-Pod, as a lifestyle example, reassures the listeners of the music of the spheres. Temporary life rafts for shipwrecked lives. In this sense, do *things* reflect and re-construct malleable identities, fetishistically absorbed in the process of a never-ending eroticized happiness of consumption? The neoliberal ideological apparatus is reinforced by intellectual endeavors that



have absorbed the naturalization of the dominant economic discourse. Here, Bauman's critique of liquid modernity is the necessary *détournement* that might show the fly a way out of the bottle.

If Haraway's cyborg was meant to destabilize assumed roles/identities via the technologization of the body, the Terminator movies, as an ironic parallelism, destabilize her metaphor in favour of the contingent plane of that metaphor: that is, the machine as a gendered entity. In other words, representations are inescapably gendered because they issue from gendered realities – those being the limit of our language.

## IV. *Optic personages*, a posthumanistic process and device

Quantum leaping from the 1980s to recent 2010 events in the cultural landscape (given that television is the mother of us all), events that swirl around the limits of our world, presents us with the indisputable Wittgensteinian-fact: the posthuman is alive and well and fights on our side, as *optic personages*.

Ann Coulter, an American attorney, called by some a political pundit, by others a comedian and a polemicist – a "'blonde she-devil' to the left, the 'American Voltaire' to the right" (Visser) – visited Canada in March 2010. More specifically, as an *agent provocateur* and optic personage, she called into question notions of "free speech", which are defined slightly differently in Canada than they are in the United States. When she began her crusade in Canada, her attempt was to solicit a negative backlash with regards to those rights that are seen as being constitutive of an established democracy.

The events related to this visit, which encompass North America and which have intermittently created ripples in the mediascape, have stimulated some public discourse pertaining to freedom, subjectivity and social participation, specifically in regards to linguistic aims: freedoms of speech. In so far as Canada is concerned, freedom of speech is guaranteed by Section 2(b) of the Charter that says: "Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms: ... freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication." However, this freedom, though a cornerstone of a democratic society, does not mean it operates unbridled, or unchecked, for according to the University of Ottawa website on the Constitutional Law of Canada:

> There are of course limits to free speech and free press guarantees, as the Canadian Supreme Court is quite ready to point out (see CBC v. A.G.N.B.). For example, even though the press enjoys core

constitutional rights of access and publication, they do not have protection for all operational means and methods the press may choose to adopt. The press does not, for example, enjoy immunity if they run a pedestrian down in pursuit of a new story under the guise of "freedom of the press". Nor is a violent attack on someone (however dramatic the attack may be) considered to be expression. Understanding freedom of expression requires not only understanding its place in the Canadian constitution, but also, understanding it within the context of society and society's competing values.

The event in question, which became national news in Canada, was grounded in Canada's capital, having at its center the University of Ottawa, where one of the best experts in the field of constitutional law—Prof. Joseph E.Magnet— teaches in Canada's largest law faculty.

For the moment, we shall bypass the narcissistic impetus that drives the *Coulterian personage* into the international spotlight and come back to it later by ironic analogy via the *Manji personage* and the *Berlusconi complex*. The use of personage is a reference to the term "optic personage" that we coined in a previous article on *performative radicalism*. The term is a reference to the practices of mediatic narcissism, whereby certain individuals perform politics through an a-historical reading of the lifeworld that promotes a rhetoric of neo-Conservative political structures, regardless of whether the personage fashions him/herself to be from the left or the right, due to the implications of post-political[14] implementations.

## V. Italy as case study

The *Berlusconi complex* refers to the entrepreneur who has preached a sexual form of prosperity gospel to Italian society. The ramification of this complex envelops all statuses of Italian society, from publishing houses to newspapers to television stations to radio stations to soccer teams to a supermarket chain, all brought together by the overextension of his image as successful tycoon and currently, Italy's Prime Minister for the third time. It has been a de facto enterprise since Guy Debord's exposition of the relation between the spectacle and society, that the thriving symbiosis between the spectacularization of the self as commodity and as instrument of communicative strategies has been naturalized in the public's mind as the state of things. It is quite apparent that the process instilled by the appearance of this personage – Ann Coulter – within Canada's mediatic borders, in March 2010, testifies to the paradigmatic aftershocks that have



reverberated throughout the Western World since 9-11. If, on one hand, this has grounded a post-political environment – and by post political here we mean the cancellation of the dialectical process in favour of *confusionary politicking* – this shift can be read as having brought out a pre-emptive attack on the fundamental rights of citizenship in the Western world. A pre-Westphalia (1648) dimension that is created and paradoxically enhanced by technological developments in the area of intercommunications, what we would call within the "spectacle" grid an always *on-spectacle* of *cybership in-agency*. The demagogical and rhetorical constructions surrounding the 9-11 event[15] – an image that becomes an archetype without any mediations – that particular event has been used with a determined political intent: to castigate, isolate, and further to this, silence and render oblivious those voices that came from a humanistic background calling for a critical distancing and reading of the event and its after-effects.

What has been pointed to, so far is a complex process in the mediatic sphere and how such a process brings into question specific cultural apparatuses and their responses to the narrative constructions around a particular nation-defining event. As such— and 9-11 was not the first or last— these situations always construct a diffused state of emergency. Giorgio Agamben in his work on the state of exception, criticizing Carl Schmidt's legitimization of sovereignty, unmasking its presuppositions, reveals how critical participatory rights can be easily removed by this process. Ironically, the solidification of post World War II neoliberal ideology, culminating with the Fall of the Berlin Wall as Fukuyama pontificated, has brought into play the state of emergency as a container for and cultural practice applied to any critical dialectical discourse about forms of social control such as the rise of surveillance of the human body and its activities, communication being a primary reality. Were we to glance back, à la Benjamin's Angel, to a time that is little more than a generation of productivity ago, any time that, in the West, neoliberal democracies have encountered resistance to practices that have disempowered the human body, be it under the rubric of internal or external extremism, the result has always been to bring into crisis the humanistic background on which democratic process developed.

Italy becomes a case study for social mediatic control when during the 1970s, *terrorism*, from the left and from the right of the political spectrum, as Debord indicated in his *Commentaires sur la société du spectacle* functioned as the semantic umbrella which covered all instances of critical resistance and served to reconstitute Italy as a neoliberal nation state. By flushing out its

critical excesses (those resisting) and framing these excesses (the armed spectacle), not only as anti-democratic but anti-progressive, regardless of their position on the political spectrum, the Italian nation-state became a testing ground for a series of repressive practices which had extraordinary power in eliminating the *different* from social reality. Not by chance did the *Berlusconi complex* rise out of this state of things, grounding itself on the new-found liberty of 'il look', the preening of extensive social narcissism through television first and foremost, as indicated by Erik Gandini's powerful documentary exposé: *Videocracy* (2009).

The end of the seventies in Italy was marked by a mediatic *coup*. On April 7, 1979 the Italian police arrested various leaders and participants of the Workers Autonomy groups, amongst which was the infamous Toni, a professor of Dottrina dello stato (State doctrine) at University of Padova. The arrests were executed according to a leftist substitute attorney's theorem, named after him – *Calogero's Theorem* – stating that the Red Brigades were the other side of the zipper of Workers Autonomy. The arrest of several university professors from the University of Padova and from other campuses and social spaces, had stringent implications in terms of the rights of expression, since according to Calogero's theorem it was possible to be condemned for having expressed subversive, or insurrectionalist ideas. As is, this is a specific national example, but served and still serves as a verifiable teaching tool to the Western World.

## VI. Canada and the United States as case study

In Canada, what became understood as a viable and justifiable social-political practice – the interrogation of individuals without cause under the War Measures Act[16] implemented by then Liberal Prime Minister Trudeau in 1970 – reappeared as a practice during the First Iraq War, in 1991 under Progressive Conservative's Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney. Without having to implement the War Measures Act, RCMP were able to go to the homes of profiled individuals (Arabs, Iraqis and look-a-likes) and question them without subjecting them to arrest. In this form, state harassment of individuals was accepted as a preemptive security measure giving the impression that the State had its eye on things. Of course, arrest comes with its own set of legal rights. These practices of surveillance, profiling and pre-emptive security measures, are later integrated into Canadian legislation – practices that undermine the Canadian constitution and notions of justice – (and they were integrated) with very little social or political resistance from the population at large who had already been naturalized by events here in Canada and the precedence set by the Bush administration. In



the United States and Canada, these laws were called the US Patriot Act and the Anti-Terrorism Laws (Bills C36, C22, C35, C42[17]), respectively.

What irradiates from the 9-11 aftershocks is the containment and attempted neutralization of global multiculturalism as an answer to, for example, the no-global movement (that marks Seattle in 1999 as the second and most durable wave): in other words, the transformation of closed societies into spaces of consumption of diversity within neoliberal practices. As indicated actually by Michael Hardt and Toni Negri in their work *Empire*, the danger of globalization for neo-liberal practices was and is, the proliferation of voices demanding their existence and inclusion into that system of rights and responsibilities that have marked real democratic development in the West. The innate danger in this process is what Negri and Hardt identified as that revolutionary aspect that Marx was calling for with the internationalization of the workers demands: i.e. a revolutionary tsunami unsettling capitalism's domination of the biopolitical. Empire, according to Hardt and Negri's reading, brings with it the mechanism of its own destruction: the unification of the exploited against capitalism's management (surveillance, control, commodification) of the biosphere, or what John McMurtry has identified as the cancer stage of capitalism (1999).

If the umbrella apparatus of the social control system used by governments and naturalized by media environments can be explicated through the criticism that we have indicated, it becomes commonplace then to identify those spaces which must be reigned in, those spaces that still possess a latent *critical* aspect and which are structured by the pluralities and potentialities of multicultural constituencies. Accordingly then, Canada can be interpreted as a dangerous, potentially subversive neighbor. In other words, it is not the Health system, or the possible legalization of pot-smoking, or the same-sex marriages that are dangerous to the American Dream, it is the whole structure that allows for diversity which is fundamentally problematic given imperialist visions of the absolute domain: an automated self-replicating bioeconomical system.

### Ann Coulter

What to do then with a socio-political system that encompasses both Multiculturalism and Biculturalism? Is passing a law stating that English is the official language of the United States, to make Samuel Huntington happy, containment enough? Ann Coulter's arrival in Canada towards the end of March 2010[18] shows that what is at stake in her attack is a certain form of "authenticity" or "lived reality' as far as Canada is concerned. And the way to protect the US from any contamination in communicating social

bodies is to build walls, be them physical as is the case with Mexico or mediatic as is the case with Canada. As such Coulter, in a simplified form, is the dynamic extension of Foucault's panopticon exercising its surveillance and control throughout physical and sovereign borders. Perhaps, a *panopticomical* prosthetic as media personage enacting the severe discipline of manufacturing consent at home and systematization and neutralization of differences abroad.

What we are engaging with is the attempt by a specific dominating paradigm, the American Dream, to recuperate Canada's multicultural system, through a testing mechanism so as to domesticate it to the point of final commodification. The pseudo-dialectical communicative dynamic that has been Ann Coulter's trademark in her visit to Canada has meant simply to solicit, as is apparent, a response to her actual presence, a recognizable brand: inflammatory, racist, homophobic etc. Given her particular mediatic history it was not a surprise that certain reactions were brought into play: i.e. the Provost of Ottawa University's letter which auspicated a certain code of civility in her conduct during her speech-performance. That the Provost fell into Coulter's polarizing trap, testifies to the power of democratic engagement in Canada. It was precisely this mechanism that Coulter was meant to erupt. Coulter succeeded in so far as she has managed to first, split and fragment the Canadian academic space, and as a ripple effect, the public sphere at large. For, if the category of free speech is not equally applied throughout the academic spaces, then the notion of free speech, as Coulter tempered with, is simply a vestige of oppression against those who speak his-her own mind.

However, each social space has its own code and context of engagement. In the academic arena, no academic would be permitted to continue to speak if the content of the discourse was constituted by racist jokes, promoted sexual stereotypes, homophobic rants, *ad hominem* attacks and an overall persecutory tone peppered with unsubstantiated personal claims. Such personages would be called to question and dismissed as non-reputable, possibly removed from their position as instructors if such was the case in their classes. Knowing this, is perhaps why Coulter, in an effort to control what had started as a negative media spin about her talk, recuperated immediately by invoking that a hate crime had been committed against her. A tactic of discursive control that, within a polarizing process, leaves no doubt as to whom the winner will be as Berlusconi has shown again and again throughout his three mandates since 1994.

The University of Ottawa students who showed up to protest against Coulter were, no doubt, part of her strategy: incited in order to give her a



reason to call off the next speech. This played out in the media with no real emphasis on the fact that it was by her choice and on the counsel of her host Ezra Levine (not that of the University of Ottawa) that her talk did not go forward. A prophecy self-fulfilled through the power of television media and a caustic sense of charm that seduced the cameras and kept expectant audiences enthralled. Ironically, the media speaks of Coulter as the American Voltaire. Voltaire, known for his expressions (to paraphrase), "I may not agree with what you say but I will defend to the death your right to say it." However, it was Coulter who said that her secret fantasy was to deny her gender the vote.[19]

Her orchestrated assault on Canadian academic space, the contentious and dangerous space of thought in any neoliberal democracy, is transformed into a public space that must question the very principle of democratic engagement in terms of the guarantee of free speech. Through the academic space then, Coulter manages to launch herself into Canadian public space and through her own physical presence to denounce it as, what she has claimed and been accused of, perpetrator/victim of a hate crime. What has happened then, through this process, is not only a mediatic joke but it has initiated a domino effect that transcends the particularity and which is meant to dismantle critical engagement through Canadian universities and as a consequence shame Canadians into reconsidering the whole process that deals with hate-laws in relations to their American neighbours. In other words, her efforts to both test out and polarize the Canadian system is meant to bring about its downfall, by quite simply, using the same process practiced by Roman Emperors: divide and conquer. Of course, there is no safe zone within this process. Everyone who inhabits these particular spaces is at once victim and victimizer, a fragmented monad in a system with an expiry date stamped onto it. The other aspect, which must be taken into consideration, is the speaker's body and personage. The body, as a mechanism of representation is not secondary to the Coulter personage since, unlike Voltaire, she mediates herself as a sexy, smart pundit whose intellectual credibility is given by her academic background. However, she does not adhere to the ethics inherent in academic discourses, but instead uses her knowledge of the genre to sabotage and implode critical debate in favour of performance. Her physicality is invariably part of the lure of the optic personage in our age of visuality, television and subsidiaries; as such, the body is a total spectacle (Reality TV *docet*) and a strong attractor for male and female audiences alike.

Coulter shares, in common with Sarah Palin[20] and others groomed for *reactionary politickings*, a certain austere and authoritarian/dominating

charm. Neo-Maggie's[21] of American politics these dominatrixes allow women, the lunch lady crowd, to feel represented and empowered by their political reflections, and at the same time, this style of female politician attracts a certain male demographic that, perhaps, John McCain was not able to lure into the fold. These conservative female politicians promote a certain brand of emancipated post-feminist: she who can retain her sexual charm, attraction, and hold on power, now by seducing, not the man in her life through whom she can exercise social power, but by manipulating the public at large, one that is seduced by media images of beauty. These pseudo-feminists also tend to think that they deserve a certain access to power that perhaps not all of their gender can handle.[22] If questions arise as to the justification for examining Coulter's appearance, an obvious answer is to be found in Berlusconi's media practices in Italy, whereby good-looking candidates are useful to the spectacular post-political apparatus. In so far as the candidates demonstrate to the world that their beauty confirms political credibility, entertainment as herd morality in a post-Kantian sense is sustained.

Yet, the paradox of grounding this sort of post-political enterprise on women's bodies produces a false sense of emancipation while reinstating a phallocentric power play. Stories about Berlusconi that appeared towards the middle of 2009, are ample proof of this constructed fluidity between the private and the public, the gossip and the political. The Berlusconi complex must be divested of its mask of buffoonery, as he has generally been perceived of out of Italy, in order to reveal the processes. He belongs to the same optic personage family as Ann Coulter, Irshad Manji, and others: a media savvy, media constructed personage in the process of bringing to fruition the post-human and/or the cyber-being. Because of the colonization of the lifeworld by communicative technologies per se, this has transformed radically the world as we know it and yet the alterations produced on the social body and the perceptions of the social body (since they are consumable) have not become factors/indications of radical transformations. This means that someone like Silvio Berlusconi, is still perceived as an actual human being, who through media in Italy is able to continue perpetrating his television spell on the viewing public, making people believe they are participating in democratic processes and choices at play within Italian public spaces. For Berlusconi is more than the actual 73 year old man with a penchant for youth in all its manifestations. The actual old-man is simply the organic residue of the *personage* which extends out of the media environment into everyday life. As a media-personage, Berlusconi illustrates the hybridization of the organic within the



technological communicative environments which have developed after the Second World War: television, once again, being the primary instrument.

When we talk about the cyborg, the public image that comes to mind is a Terminator-type creature: part mechanical, part human body. However, the mediatic world is dominated by cyborgs *who* have subsumed and colonized the lifeworld. **The entertainment media is able to address certain latent fears in the social body, but these constructions tend to be misleading in so far as the critical representations of the extended reality that we are forced to inhabit.** The mediatic resonance produced by such tools as cinema, television, internet, and the colonization of such fields as the sport world, the intellectual world and human sexuality have been subsumed by a level of *performative visuality*. If, at the metaphysical level, one can understand the processes at work as one more attempt at inscribing immortality in an entropic universe, this *angst* for conscious continuity beyond the organic, is nevertheless marked by the surplus of *thanatos* that paradoxically accompanies it. Transcending the organic, as far as human existence is concerned, is none other than the attempt to dematerialize the body into the absolute continuum of the world of ideas, the spiritual world, the paranormal world, the overbearing mystery, whatever term connotes immortality. Towards this ultimate end, the transformation of human life continues incessantly. This hybridization results in a displaced reading in terms of the fusion and amalgamation of new technological apparatuses in the communicative sector, with the actual physical bodies that act, speak and perform through these environments: the post-Haraway cyborg.

## Irshad Manji

Canadian media icon and New York University's founder and director of the Moral Courage Project, Irshad Manji, is yet another example of the *optic personage*. Like Ann Coulter, Manji is a malleable personage that serves the interests of the neoliberal communicative project in the West. Both are performers and spaces of performance. Performers, in so far as they are actively staging their own identity constructions for economic benefit with little interest in the greater good, concerned primarily with immediate inscriptions of the post-political screen aura. Spaces of performance, in so far as, (a) the body itself is sublimated in favour of a transcendental rendition that acquires virtual immortality; and (b) spaces where power conflicts are seemingly resolved; and (c) prescriptions of a determined spectrum of normative actions.

Irshad Manji, the Muslim Canadian lesbian "activist" and "liberal voice" has honed her optic personage as a radio and television host and author and guest speaker over the last two decades. The whole process results, finally, in self-promoting work – documentary film, contextualized by a website and two monographs – that is not meant to produce critical social change. After the events of September 11 2001, her presence has been socially necessary and this translates into cultural currency. Now, beyond what she claims about Islam or the responsibility of Muslims' today, Irshad Manji has become a hot topic in her own right – concern surrounding Manji's rhetoric is often focused, not on what is being said, but who is saying it. However, this reaction does not take into account that what she says is problematic, not for the forthright manner of its delivery, but for the sound bites that it promotes.

In her 2007 documentary film *Faith Without Fear*, she claims to promote a mission to reform Islam, in order to bring it out of the seventh century and make it applicable to contemporary life. Her film and her body of work – books, public speaking engagements, media appearances – have been positively received in a disparate variety of cultural circles, from social activists to neo-conservative ideologues. This incongruous response belies the fact that the current historical moment is steeped in a process where the general public does not have the necessary historical referents to engage in political and critical analysis with the world at large. *Massification* is the key frame that neutralizes active political engagement and agency, emancipation, empowerment, and transformation.

## Manji as heralded by the political left

Certain factions consider her to be a brave, forthright critic of Islam who has every right to criticize her own religious community; this demographic tend to see criticism against her as part of a Western conservative trepidation about the fact that she is not sufficiently politically correct and that her say-it-like-it-is attitude is the affront to public sensibilities at the root of any negative reception. The readers and commentators who have assessed any negative "mainstream" reaction against her to be positioned on the right of the political spectrum consider themselves to be, apparently, on the left of said spectrum. Here, for example, is one such reaction:

> Even if a very outspoken and intelligent MUSLIM human rights activist like Irshad criticises evil deeds done in the name of Islam, she is much too often labelled as a "bad Muslim" by the politically correct Westerners. I find this infuriating and really can't understand how any reasonable individual could see Irshad as a "bad Muslim" or "not a real Muslim". But this very often is the case. So, the atmosphere of political correctness has in fact turned into something resembling fascism. It's a form of censorship, . . . Spread the word, don't beat around the bush. It's very easy to show that there's not just one Islam, but many versions of it, and the one that fits the 21st century like a glove **is the one that Project Ijtihad (sic) (Niemelä)**



Project Itjihad, is a reference to Manji's vision for Islam in the 21st century. Readers and viewers such as Niemelä have been enchanted by Manji and in an effort to ally themselves with her and her status as a *refusnik*, they choose to see her, and by reflection, themselves, as open minded and politically and religiously leftist. Or should we say righteous? Ironically, this demographic that tends to see any criticism of Manji as a conservative reaction is falling into the fly-bottle of semantic confusion,[23] because what Manji has to say is, in fact, highly conservative and very acceptable to the American right-wing media, despite the fact that her personage is perceived and presented as a critical voice of the left.

## Manji as an ally of the American political-right

Manji, in her books, film, and speaking engagements, declares that the problem of Islam is Muslims. On the one hand, she says that Islam has been misinterpreted in ways that allow for the victimization of certain members of Muslim communities, namely women and other minority groups such as homosexuals (not a situation exclusive to Muslims)[24], and they[25] have adopted a victim mentality that has exacerbated any number of political-social-religious problems faced by Muslims around the world. These two criticisms of Islam – 1) that Muslims are living according to a misinterpretation of their religion that has lead to fanaticism and 2) that they must take control of their own social problems and not look to others to rescue them – are mantras that have been regurgitated and applied to any number of targeted communities over time. Manji is proposing nothing original in her criticism of an already marginalized group, whether she claims to belong to that group, or not. And, of course, the rhetorical strategy to claim a Muslim identity is very astute. In this way, she is given free license by the mainstream to criticize "her own community" on the pretext of trying to promote positive change, when, the practice of allowing Irshad Manji (and others like her) a space, ultimately provides credibility to conservative narratives of discontent regarding Muslim

religious fundamentalism. Furthermore, Manji's biopolitical position, as both female and lesbian, allows no space for any criticism from Muslims, especially Muslim men, as they are immediately put in a defensive position. Regardless of the informed position that Muslim men might be coming from, their protests are easily disputed as fundamentalist or as a conservative reaction. In much the same way, informed Western non-Muslim voices, who speak out against Manji, might also be considered conservative. The only defence against optic personages such as Manji is to be a critically informed reader or viewer able to assess for oneself that Manji is nothing, if not a master sophist, selling back to the West its own rhetoric of oppression and subordination, for personal gain. In her book, *The Trouble with Islam* Manji writes:

> Through our screaming self-pity and our conspicuous silences, we Muslims are conspiring against ourselves. We're in crisis and we're dragging the rest of the world with us. If there was a moment for an Islamic reformation, it's now. For the love of God, what are we doing about it? (2003, 3)

There are several clever rhetorical moves in these few lines. First, Manji positions herself as a Muslim, when she speaks derogatorily: "our screaming self-pity . . . conspiring against ourselves". She uses "we" when she claims there is a need to take responsibility, indicating that she is part of the problem. Then, of course, she invokes God, in order to drive home the point that she is a pious Muslim and that the current state of Islam is corrupt. She continues by defining herself in relationship to Islam:

> You may wonder who I am to talk to you this way. I am a Muslim Refusenik. That doesn't mean I refuse to be a Muslim; it simply means I refuse to join an army of automatons in the name of Allah. I take this phrase from the original refuseniks – Soviet Jews who championed religious and personal freedom. Their communist masters refused to let them emigrate to Israel. For their attempts to leave the Soviet Union, many refuseniks paid with hard labour and, sometimes, with their lives. Over time, though, their persistent refusal to comply with the mechanisms of mind-control and soullessness helped end a totalitarian system. (3)

Here, she allies herself with a specific Jewish community and history, something interpreted by many, no doubt, as a bold and very open minded



position. This rhetorical strategy is used to demonstrate a non-prejudiced attitude toward the historical enemy and to, simultaneously, suggest that Muslims are both militant and anti-intellectual: "army of automatons in the name of Allah." And while it was originally the Soviet Union that ran a totalitarian system determined to control thought and religious devotion and gave rise to the Jewish *refusnik*, in the allegory that Manji's narrative constructs, denouncing the Soviet's "mind-controlling soullessness", Islam now becomes a totalitarian system and she the synecdoche for all Muslims persecuted by their own religious affiliations/institutions (the irony being that her overarching declaration is that the major failing of Muslims is their victim attitude). [26] And, much of what she says throughout the book is a reinforcement of pre-existing stereotypes against Muslims, now given currency because a self-declared Muslim is speaking them:

> Not solely because of September 11, but more urgently because of it, we've got to end Islam's totalitarianism, particularly the gross human rights violations against women and religious minorities. [...] As I [Irshad Manji] view it, the trouble with Islam is that lives are small and lies are big. Totalitarian impulses lurk in *mainstream* Islam. That's one hell of a charge, I know. Please hear me out. (3-4)

However, by page four, where she makes this appeal, she will have alienated, if not entirely lost, many Muslim readers, and so her audience is quite obviously the domesticated spectator of the media circuit. Her 2007 film, *Faith Without Fear*, functions in much the same way: it is a poorly researched representation of Islamic history and belief that reiterates mainstream media stereotypes about Islamic cultures as being stuck in the dark ages, stagnating in tribal mentalities, rather than to encourage the community driven reform – enlightenment – that Manji declares as the necessary next step. Manji's rhetoric is complicit in reifying ethnicity to the social political margins.

The problems that derive from Manji's film are representative of practices of narcissism: the optic personage performs social activism so as to become a new point of aggregation for potential activists through an implementation of post-political strategy – predominantly rhetorical – that conflates the historical political dialectic. When the documentary is used as the echo-chamber for the optic personage, instituting a continual self-referential process, this alters the traditional documentary genre. The new format highlights an a-historical reading of the lifeworld, and promotes a spectacularized presence of the documentary filmmaker/ personage. The

process finalizes the infamous clash of cultures while professing social agency, so as to create an amorphous, seemingly involving space of denunciation. Ultimately, Irshad Manji's documentary and the larger media personage that she promotes are illustrative of how even a supposed voice from the left who is performing radicalism, finally ends up merely paralleling the rhetoric of neo-conservative Canadian / American political structures.

The optic personage is the invention, or the end result, of a mediatic process which started with the film industry, and bloomed under the proliferation of the television-world that has 'emancipated' itself since 2001. Since the optic personage is cocooned in media representations, its status is that of a phantasmagorical reality, living and performing for the mediatic circle. Its appearance and propagation denotes the leaking of the virtual world and its diffusion into the material world through the techno-scientific cyborg apparatuses that promote an engaged practice of reality. "Engagement" here designates the perfunctory aspect of agency and empowerment in progressive look-alike social interactions. In the post-political lifeworld these are the residues of attempts at changing and empowering others. It still bears the aura of activism and of social responsibility, assuming the status of the common parlance of hero/heroine of the people.

In reality, however, the optic personage is a vessel for public engagement by proxy, at a safe distance, where individual existences are voided of their critical potential. Further, the neo-activists, who use the optic personage to popularize their socio-political positions, are nurtured by the mediatic circle: a specific constellation of economic, social and political forces. Performances of activism recuperate their message so successfully that the dominant discourse(s) can appear to be in a dialectical engagement with other constituencies. Yet, any actual form of critical change remains suppressed: this repression of one's human potential can negatively manifest itself in pathologies and addictions that are easily exploitable by the economic market, such as drug addiction, sexual addiction and gaming addictions. The pseudo-dialectical tension formulated through the narrative of the activist documentary, however, is maintained so that there is never any synthesis, or progress; instead there is a constant tug-of-war, which gives rise to aesthetically pleasing mediatic performances. Louis Althusser would have integrated such process in his concept of 'ideological state apparatus', or how education, the family, the media, arts and literature, and religion work to contain any forms of 'real resistance'.



It cannot be denied that there is a process at work: across Canada, the US, and Europe, Pro-West Muslim-born optic personages have appeared such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali in Holland (now in the US), or a Magdi Cristiano Allam in Italy. They are the result of a mechanism of cultural production larger than themselves. These optic personages are interchangeable, new masks for a *Commedia dell'Arte* of the post-political. As characters, they are bound by their optic personage and yet they can improvise within the confines of their masks. The conditions and tensions within the contemporary world, represented as the natural setting for the clash of civilizations, nurture the evolution of the optic personage as the focal point for a performance of social engagement that presents no threat to the dominant western paradigm. The aura of activism or political engagement is merely a frozen performance of pixels breathing second-"Life" into the real world, preventing any actual intervention in the social sphere.

## The Berlusconi complex: erasing boundaries, the organic and technological

In terms of the *Berlusconi complex*, what is being indicated is a process of confluence between the organic and the techno-scientific which, finally resembles and transcends the Harawayian cyborg. As the perimeters that contain two distinct realities merge, what is being lost in this is a sense of the Real. It has become more and more difficult to distinguish between events that happen within the experiential sensory world and the fabricated fictions that are mirroring these processes while at the same time producing new experiences. Perhaps the best way to illustrate this process is by again making reference to Cronenberg's *Videodrome*. For what is most striking about this film is the way that the television screen extends into the lived reality of the viewer, illustrated by the moment in the film when James Woods' character, Max Renn, is actually seduced by the TV and absorbed into the cathodic. What this occurrence signifies is a reverse prosthetic dynamic whereby an inorganic communicative object consumes and digests the Real viewer: inventor, consumer, actor, participant. Unlike the cyborg, seen as an independent prosthetic apparatus, the depiction of this event points to not only the independence of a determined techno-scientific object, but its ability to swallow up the reality around it and reduce it to its own mechanics through displaced eroticization. More than a fetishistic commodity, this televisual bio-mechanism of the television is able to collapse two distinct erogenous zones: the breasts (the boob-tube) and the lips (the synecdoche of the lips of the vagina). In the film, the television comes to life: the screen that first shows a pair of talking lips, becomes a

pair of lips that protrude out of the screen in a way that makes them also look like a large nipple/breast or an engorged vagina, and the viewer – Max Renn – is seduced and enters into the lips/breast/vagina/screen of the television, in a reverse birth. The television screen is then more than a liminal boundary between performance and representation. It is actually able to displace the liminality by encompassing the actor/viewer and transforming him into a mechanism of sustenance for the program's continuity. As such, this is a more realistic portrayal of the cyborg metaphor than the actual cyborg/Terminator as we have come to understand it. In other words, what Haraway indicated with her metaphor and the futurists' overtones, is a displaced metaphor: it does not point to the actual transformative process in place but rather to its embodiment as a ludic exercise. Therefore the formulations surrounding the metaphor in Haraway are correct but ground themselves onto the wrong object because like Freud has taught us in his book on dreams, dreams work by displacement and condensation. It is finally television that Haraway should have addressed and not its bastard son, the cyborg. For, television is the actual cyborg that must be vanquished in order for human emancipation to occur. It is the televisual process that from the 1980s onward has become the established practice by which to depoliticize the human subject and surrender him into a mode of consumption that promised the transcendence innate in the capitalistic process and in its *doppelganger*: the technological advancement that the scientific world was developing at the time. Berlusconi, unbeknownst to Haraway, in the 1980s is not only formulating, but grounding a new human species. By precisely calling into play what the movie *Videodrome* has so fancifully illustrated for a select audience.

The recourse to the documentary by Erik Gandini *Videocracy* is not the final move in a play that is meant to unveil our transformation from the organic into this strange hybrid that has more reality on the screen than in the actual performances we execute daily in the lifeworld. What Berlusconi was able to do from the 1980s onward, as his empire was becoming established, was to promote and facilitate the passage into a world where the actual lived reality loses its realness and the techno-scientific representational apparatus acquires a transcendental power over the Real. Simply put, the representation on the television screen is more beautiful, more seductive, and more pleasant than our actual existences. It does not have any smells, fluids, and/or diseases. It is immortal and divine, in as much as Michael Jackson is not dead.

What sounds like a provocation is actually an illustrative metaphor, for Michael Jackson is the full hybridization of the techno-scientific and the organic that stands as a monument to the erasure of the Real and the land of fantasy. What symbiotically ties Michael Jackson to Silvio Berlusconi's



complex is precisely this development in human evolution that disengages the body from its lived materiality, transforming it into a pervasive phantasmagorical, transcendent manifestation. Berlusconi's empire is fundamentally based on television, through which it has achieved a diffused political consensus. By the most simple of stratagems, the transmogrification of a determined body: the female body. By precisely focusing on this body as a metaphor for all that which is possible, from seduction to production, it has elevated it to an idolized state having divine-like characteristics. It is ubiquitous, since it takes many faces but maintains the same form, and it is at the centre of the family proper, in the traditional sense, while also explicating its transgressive potentiality. Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* illustrates this aura and ambivalence in terms of the female body within the developments that combine the economic process with techno-scientific discoveries. In the end, this body is the model body of the future, which is happening right now, in every living room. It has become the center of the new logos: not the written word but the image. It conducts and regulates basic life rhythms. So that when we see a young sexy beautiful woman on television on Berlusconi's television (both in his own private channels and on Italian state television) it is the epitome of youthful immortality: the most sought after attribute that capitalism has been able to manufacture out of the process of consumption. In looking at the model the viewer is already in the process of transcendence, since it represents the infinite limit of his/her "experience." At once, the gaze that encompasses all possibilities and the gaze that manufactures all behaviours, this model has *de facto* established, ironically, Haraway's misplaced metaphor. It is the most acute genderization and at the same time the most valuable of identity tags for like in the case of Michael Jackson, we are not concerned with male-female binaries, but their actual transcendence into the androgynous existence of transcendental materialism. Androgyny is the sexual representation of choice for the full emancipation of capitalism, since as we have already indicated the body proper is the last step which must be overcome and that depotentializes Haraway's feminist appraisal. It sublimates procreation into the blissful state of *instancy*, i.e. youthful immortality, while titillating and desexualising the subject proper. For if the two basic aspects that Freud identified as motivators of existence – *eros* and *thanatos* – can be finally displaced from our experiential selves, then what is left behind is the realisation of the dream, the American dream.

## VII. Conclusion

The transformation of human life continues incessantly in the mediascape,

heralded by such beacons as Berlusconi, Coulter, Manji and other similar embodiments. Every time we are connected, in terms of entering into communicative technological environments, we are displacing ourselves into the improbable future of the *disorganification* of conscious experience. Though it would take a very able ventriloquist to make non-organic matter speak back, the narcissistic impetus that animates this immortalizing goal produces remarkable events. For, the process feeds precisely on the events that it creates. Silvio Berlusconi is beyond being simply the Nietzschean *Übermensch* read through Gabriele **D'Annunzio virility and the Futurist** engagement with speed, with the commercial instinct for survival to dominate *ad nauseam*. His personage has become a leading model for the process delineated above: for the absolute control of the technological communicative environments is first and foremost a must for anyone interested in entering into this transformation of the self for the acquisition of power and crypto-immortality. Perhaps, the ambiguity that has sustained this totalitarian project in its idealized format is in how to collocate the Berlusconi complex beyond the visual buffoonery, a remnant of a persisting stereotype in the Anglo-American vision of Italians that oscillates between Pinocchio and Tony Soprano. We must keep in mind, as we have mentioned in critically reading Coulter and Manji, the *Commedia dell'Arte*, or how the many masks that the Berlusconi personage wears serve to displace the critical gaze from reaching the complex that at once depoliticizes and eroticizes the instruments of communication by continuous titillation and the suspension of sexual engagement. Foretold, as we said, by Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1982), which clearly predates "Cyborg Manifesto," Cronenberg announces the envelopment of the electronic media-skin around our sensory body and the transplant of whatever consciousness emanates from the body into an artificial environment that reflects that organic body. This strategy would not be possible unless there was a general ideological consensus of the body-mind split, augmented by a reductionist yet **behaviouristically** implemented reading of the unconscious. This systematic continuous caesura of the thinking body away from the body proper is a violation of the integrity of Merleu Ponty's *esprit corps*: this primeval violence and splitting of the body is the most extreme form of ideological consensus created by power systems of domination. Therefore, the viable transference into a post-humanistic artificiality is rendered as a natural environment for the futurist-cyborg self. At once mirror and only possible world, the mediascape entraps the organic residue into the energetic subservience of the primeval homo **sacer:** the subject





body is a bridge between consumer and consumption. What we are left with is the transmogrification of humanity into parasitical subsistence.

As an absolute anomaly of the democratic process, this has not yet been properly decoded in the English-speaking world. The Berlusconi model, in a few words, is a form of transnational capitalism without borders: *capitalists sans frontiers*. Hence, the actual process at work vanishes mimetically into the background, because it resonates with neo-liberal processes throughout the world and is hegemonic to the system. What we see in Coulter is a refraction of the process where, like Manji, she allows herself to be an instrument in this system for the personal gain that comes at the cost of ethical social action and responsibility, regardless of claims to the contrary. Why else would a female pundit suggest that she fantasizes about the removal of women's rights to vote?

Both men and women whose identities have been grounded in a televisual reality are exposed to these technological communicative environments, and are encompassed in this space where their performance is a double-bind: the system encompasses both narcissism and the ability to achieve the goal of being a part of the visuality complex in order to affirm one's existence. This is the neo-liberal feedback to the nihilism that capitalism evacuated and that has swept through the 20th century. Existence without criticism results in mass lobotomy or **massification**. Wim Veen and Giovanni Sartori, with their theories of *Homo Zappiens* and *Homo Videns*, respectively, speak to both the positive and negative transformations that have taken place in the last 30 years – transformations that have revolutionized societal interactions without any protest. The end result is that television, from our perspective, has dis-educated the human subject from its ethical being in favour of producing narcissistic consumers: the happy slaves (Anselmi & Gouliamos) we see mirrored in our screens. Gandini's documentary clearly exposes this process by analysing the rise of what we have termed the media personage in Italian television since the liberalization of the Italian air-waves in 1975. Uncharacteristically, within the development of contemporary documentary format, as we have argued,[27] Gandini refuses the narcissistic impulse to appear in the documentary: he is merely an interrogating voice. His exposure of such cyber-beings as Fabrizio Corona, the image-parasite who defines himself as the contemporary Robin Hood who steals from the rich to give to himself, is the final case in point. Heralded by his activities, this post-Berlusconi intentionality is the not-so-invisible hand who stalks other media personages with his trail of paparazzi, catching them in situations that put at risk the image they have created in and for the public eye. By selling

incriminating pictures back to these celebrities, Corona has amassed a small fortune and opened the way to the next step in the realization of what was a latent, or hidden disposition in the cyborg metaphor: the rise of the posthuman celebrity. To have failed to realize that technology is not ideologically free is perhaps the tomb on which any discourse about progress can rest its humanistic soul. And, it is here, finally that the post has its toll.

The play would not be complete without an authorial slight of hand. *Deus ex machina*, the **body** appears on the stage, with one incantation: *quo vadis?* exorcising the three-legged coffee table. Work – a critical pragmatics – after all language is *poiesis*, names the table a prop again, subservient to an unfolded plot: its top, an empty stage.

This strategic move is solely based on an ironic series: one that allows for critical displacement to occur in continuity and to evaluate from an altogether different life-perspective the process underway. If what has been discussed still contains an open ended result, returning human agency its due, then the way out of the fly-bottle is not to be found in the solace of epistemological fragmentations: a particularized, limiting interpretation of what is at hand at best. Resistance to transcendence is not futile, yet resistance for it to be emancipatory, and to redirect the humanist project – humanity grounded in the body proper, a humanity that still necessitates the utopic in order to leap over this impossible impasse – must rest on a recomposition of energy, of *desire* contained within each shard. To do so as to reconstitute this determined double which has accompanied from the Renaissance via industrialization up to visualized Atom Bomb/Holocaust the work-in-progress of liberating hordes is the task of princely poets.

What can one say about a scenario that disperses and fragments into stagnant rivulets all critical positions – which are valuable as tools – and yet cannot offer a unitary response? To isolate and reduce the scenario's complexity to its basic language is necessary, so as to resist the swaying *thanatos* it emanates as an overcoming. Like other narratives of resistance and emancipation, feminism, in its many incarnations can reconstitute itself around the most basic of challenges: the over-taking of representation as the locus of power within capitalism, dispelling its techno-scientific skin. To do so – for the eternal present to fall back into history – what has to be targeted, from a conglomeration of fragmentary perspectives, is the solipistic drift that televisual language has instigated. Finally, it is here, in televisual language where the phallocentric, shipwrecked Law resides, not outside of it.

*There are no humans left on stage.*



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[1] "Passages into Time" refers to an awareness of "Time" as a lived experience set in an historical context. "Time" has finality: death is acknowledged as part of the human condition.

[2] The article in question is a re-elaboration of an earlier 1985 version of the Manifesto, which was itself a re-working of two papers presented in 1983 on the same subject, according to David Bell in *Cyberculture Theorists: Manuel Castells and Donna Haraway*.(2007)

[3] "'Trials and errors', 'trials and errors'. S , ma se continui a ripetere lo stesso errore, diventi il diabolico conservatore dell'errore (tu mi intendi, *philosophus perennis*)" (Authors' translation). Silvio Ceccato, philosopher and linguist, was director of the Cybernetics and Linguistic Studies Centre, University of Milan. The rule mentioned appears in *Un tecnico fra i filosofi. Come non filosofare. Volume 2.* (A technician among philosophers. How not to philosophize. Volume 2), Padova: Marsilio Editore, 1966. It can be found in the section 'Nuovissime "Regulae", p. 89. Like Wittgenstein, his rules of engagement for philosophical discussion are clean, succinct and precise. Unlike Wittgenstein, the playful element is fundamental, and governs his analytical approach. Ceccato built in 1956 the first Italian artificial intelligence machine, Adamo II, meant to reflect human mental states.

[4] However, it could be the case that the postmodern has not managed to capture the soul of our present conditions; thus, some agency might still wander the map of human critical thought quite aware of the ideological premises that govern technological operations.

[5] The reference is to the 1976 Franco-Japanese movie *L'Empire des sens*. It is used here to indicate two things. 1) Berlusconi as a *mediatic pervasion*. 2) In reference to Italian television: how the dominant programming has objectified, as a result of Berlusconi's vision, the female body, and rendered it a desexualized titillation.

[6] In another article, "Technologies of Memory, Identity and Oblivion in *Persepolis* (2007) and *Waltz with Bashir* (2009)" (forthcoming U of Athabasca Press), we coin the terms *age of communicative instancy* or, the *age of immediacy gratification*. These two terms refer to the current socio-cultural condition created by technology, on one hand, where we can be in multiple spaces simultaneously and, on the other, where the grand narrative of post modernism has transformed History into a plethora of diluted/deluded narcissistic performances/stories for commercial use.

[7] In this article, W. Anselmi poses a critique of postmodernism as an instrumental recuperation of the on-going period of a *transition* through modernity. As recuperation postmodernism grants without irony each personal story, after the refusal of history, to be free of the political.

[8] The term, indicating an android, as opposed to *orga*, indicating a living person, is borrowed from S. Spielberg's *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*, (2001).

[9] For a lucid presentation on the ongoing debates about what is the posthuman please refer to Cary Wolfe's *What is Posthumanism?* (2010). The acceptation used in our article is in parallel with transhumanism: evoking the transcendence of human beings proper by a technologically-induced mutation, the cyborg.



[10] The reference is to Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, (1978), who saw his aim as a philosopher "to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle" (103), that is, philosophy as language therapy.

[11] Ironically, Fred Saberhagen's *Berserker* series is one of the most successful science-fiction sagas and it deals with machines' intent to wipe out humanity.

[12] Especially *Apocalisse e rivouzione* (1973), a co-authored book which even in Italy has failed to attract its due attention.

[13] To clarify, angels do not have sex because they are sexless beings.

[14] Here, we are referring to a conflation, mainly rhetorical, of the historical political dialectic. Quoting from "Performative Radicalism in contemporary Canadian documentary film":

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 created a domino effect in terms of political thought throughout the world: the end of the Soviet Union made it seem as though ideological polarizations had run their course. Reconfiguring the geo-political realities throughout the world was informed, in part, by Francis Fukuyama's article 'The End of History' that appeared in *The National Interest* in the summer of 1989, subsequently expanded upon and published in book form as the bestselling *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). The general position pointed to the fact that the dialectical process was now exhausted since one vision had won the day: liberal democracy had triumphed over its exhausted opponent. The reconfiguration of the political habitat in the West started, within the category of post-modernity, to envisage a post-political discourse. It was now possible to transcend the old political categories of left and right.

What this has meant practically is brilliantly simple. What is identifiable as the post-political discourse is that the 'right' discourse won the day. It becomes a useful narrative script for politically naïve individuals and it manifests itself, for example, on the back cover of Manji's first book, *Risking Utopia: on the edge of a new democracy*, as what Michael Adams calls the 'all-too-common-sense notions of left and right' (Manji, back-cover, 1997). This is reflective of the 1990s right-wing parlance in Canada that recuperated 'common sense' as a social *Weltanschauung* of cohesion and integration of disparities. (Anselmi & Wilson, *Performative*, 2009, 44-53 )

[15] Here we use the term "event" in the acceptation that Marco Dinoi gives it in his *Lo sguardo e l'evento* (*The gaze and the event*, 2008).

[16] The War Measures Act was enacted in 1914, replaced by the Public Order Bill (1971–1985), and then by the Emergencies Act in 1988.

[17] In a speech delivered Sunday December 9, 2001 at the McLeod Auditorium, Medical Sciences Bldg., 1 King's College Circle, University of Toronto, Rocco Galati, a human rights lawyer, responded to a question about the Charter of Rights with the following: There is not one single right in the Charter that has been developed from the Magna Carta to the English Bill of Rights, to the French Declaration of the Rights of Man, to the U.S. Bill of Rights, to the U.N. Charter, to the Canadian Bill of Rights, and to our Charter that has not been urinated upon and buried [by the creation of Bills C36, C22, C35, C42]. There is not one right that it does not completely undo. You name me the right and I will tell you how it does it.

[18] Her first stop was Western University in London, Ontario on March 22nd. Her second stop at the University of Ottawa was cancelled by her organizers as a reaction to the protests that took place. Her third stop in Calgary, Alberta, took place on Thursday, March 25th.

[19] Ann Coulter has made numerous comments that indicate she thinks women should not have the vote. She has made them as part of her performance for at least a decade. Here is one such quote:

> Why does she think the franchise is too big already? Who exactly has the vote who shouldn't have? "Women," she says, laughing. "It's true. It would be a much better country if women did not vote. That is simply a fact. In fact, in every presidential election since

1950 - except Goldwater in '64 - the Republican would have won, if only the men had voted." (Guardian)

[20] Sarah Palin, vice-presidential candidate alongside John McCain in the 2008 American federal election race, is presently a leading symbol of the tea party movement and possible presidential candidate in 2012.

[21] Margaret Thatcher.

[22] In the article "Coulter: If we took away women's right to vote, we'd never have to worry about Dems" by Ron Brynaert (Wednesday October 3, 2007) Coulter's comments reprinted the following remarks about women and the vote that Ann Coulter originally made during an interview with the *New York Observer*:

If we took away women's right to vote, we'd never have to worry about another Democrat president. It's kind of a pipe dream, it's a personal fantasy of mine, but I don't think it's going to happen. And it is a good way of making the point that women are voting so stupidly, at least single women.

It also makes the point, it is kind of embarrassing, the Democratic Party ought to be hanging its head in shame, that it has so much difficulty getting men to vote for it. I mean, you do see it's the party of women and 'We'll pay for health care and tuition and day care – and here, what else can we give you soccer moms?' (Byrnaert)

[23] In another article on the correspondence between mainstream and documentary representations of post 9-11 Muslim realities, we indicate "the post-9/11 semantic confusion that has altered not only our relationship with language but also how we interpret certain facts through language, another post-political outcome resulting from the erasure between public and private realities" – a common current in the fluidity metaphor that rises out of Bauman's work (Anselmi & Wilson, *Empire Management*, 265).

[24] One of our main criticisms of Manji is that when she is making criticisms of Islam that can be validated by historical events (and here we must also note that the narrative she constructs in her film is not historically accurate, as it indiscriminately jumps around in time and space in order to support her arguments), the criticisms that she levels against Islam and Muslims could also be made of a number of religions or other social-political institutions. In other words, she is critical of Islam and Islamic history without providing the necessary information for readers to understand historical events, beliefs and/or attitudes in an appropriate context. Religious persecution is common to many major religions. It is not for Muslims alone to reform their behaviours or beliefs and all will be peaceful with the world.

[25] Another of our criticisms of Manji is the homogenizing rhetoric that does little to differentiate between the plethora of Muslim nationalities – with their diverse cultural and political interpretations of Islam – from around the globe. Whether it be the culpable "they" or the all encompassing "we", as Manji identifies herself as part of the community of Islamic believers, the process is the same.

[26] As Mario Perniola has indicated in *Contro la comunicazione*, communication today escapes any type of determination and creates contexts that erase opposing claims in favour of a totalitarian vision that seemingly grants everyone their due (8-9).

[27] We have previously argued that a current trend in activist documentary films, is for the filmmaker to take an active role in the documentary itself, becoming the actor or the aggregator focus: Irshad Manji, Michael Moore etc. (see Anselmi & Wilson, *Performative*, 2009).

# SECTION B

# et passim