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Simona de Iulio, Carlo Vinti

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# The Americanization of Italian Advertising during the 1950s and the 1960s: Mediations, Conflicts and Appropriations

Simona De Iulio, University of Strasbourg, FRANCE  
Carlo Vinti, IUAV University of Venice, ITALY

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*This paper focuses on the americanization of European advertising in the post-war years as a phenomenon of cultural transfer. It aims at exploring the interaction between U.S. and Italian advertising traditions. The analysis is twofold. First, we endeavor to study the role of some cross-cultural mediators who have contributed to changing marketing communication strategies of many Italian companies during the 50's and the 60's. Secondly, the analysis look at the ways in which some U.S. advertising rules and patterns have been adapted or combined with the local tradition in order to fit the Italian context of the post-war years.*

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Since the 1920s and mostly during the post-war years the modernization of commercial practices, the introduction of marketing principles and the rationalization of advertising led to a radical transformation of communication strategies in many European companies. The changes that occurred during these decades have been caused by the progressive adoption by European advertisers of philosophies of business, forms of organization and working procedures that originally came from the United States. More precisely, the Americanization of European advertising has been characterized by the transfer of institutions (full-service agencies), business approaches (consumer-orientation), management solutions (division and specialization of tasks), research methods and techniques (marketing research), planning procedures (media-planning) and communication styles from the U.S. to many countries of the old continent.

During the 1970s, some communication and social scholars have interpreted the worldwide spread of American advertising in a critical perspective as one of the clearest manifestations and one of the most powerful engines of the U.S. capitalistic imperialism (Schiller 1969, 1973, 1976; Hamelink 1977; Mattelart 1977). At that time, some research carried out by international organizations such as the UNO and the UNESCO denounced the economic and

cultural risks produced by the transnational expansion of U.S. advertising (Centre on Transnational Corporation 1979; MacBride et al. 1980). In fact, from this point of view not only the americanization of advertising influenced the development of media systems in Europe and in Latin America, but it also brought about the consolidation of the monopolistic power of U.S. multinational companies to the detriment of local internal production of other countries. Moreover, American transnational advertising was considered responsible for the emergence of needs that were inappropriate to the economic conditions of less developed contexts. Most of all, critical theorists have seen American advertising as an instrument of ideological management aimed at spreading the ideals of consumer culture to the loss of national and local values and identities (Janus and Roncagliolo 1979; Janus 1981a, 1981b).

Indeed, in the post-war years, the arguments put forward by certain marketing experts helped consolidate the image of American advertising as a steamroller crushing customs and traditions rooted in national cultures. In fact, in that period, several practitioners shared the idea that modernization was an inevitable process leading to the emergence of the "World Customer" which could be targeted with standardized advertising (Elinder 1961, 1965; Dichter 1962; Fatt 1967).

On the one hand, this opinion was challenged by several marketing and advertising scholars and professionals who argued that the transnationalization of advertising was a more complex phenomenon that required subtler solutions (for a synthesis of this debate see De Iulio 2002). On the other hand, later critical studies have questioned the hypothesis of a process of cultural homogenization caused by the spread of American advertising. During the 1980s and the 1990s, critical research focused on the "revenge of specific cultures" (Mattelart 1990, 1991) and on the interaction between economic pressures that encouraged standardization and national socio-economic differences that implied diversification (Sinclair 1987; Kline 1995; De Iulio 1999).

More recently, in her study on the progressive construction of American hegemony in Europe during the 20th century, the historian Victoria De Grazia suggests that

## CROSS-CULTURAL FLOWS AND MEDIATORS

Americanization of European advertising has been a crucial event within a “transatlantic clash of civilizations”. De Grazia emphasized that “by virtue of appearing to be the natural, modern and good way to do things” marketing and advertising procedures have been an irresistible lever for the victory of the “Market Empire” over the European “bourgeois regime of consumption” (De Grazia 2005). Actually, as shown by several historical studies on the development of advertising in different European countries, the adoption of new methods and techniques coming from the U.S. did not take place without defensive actions and/or criticism from European advertising milieu (Martin 1992; Schröter 1997; Chessel 1998; Segreto 2002; Pouillard 2006). In a more general perspective, recent historical studies on the americanization argue that: “Any Americanization cannot be understood as an import from the U.S. as an untouched block, but as a national or even regional digestion of American influence” (Schröter 2002, 44). From her point of view, De Grazia highlights that the American procedures were “flexible enough to accommodate local knowledge, reworking them to foster trust, and making hyperbolic claims for their universal applicability” (De Grazia 2005, 7).

Our contribution tries to examine the americanization of European advertising as a phenomenon of cultural transfer. Recent theoretical developments in anthropological and cultural studies have demonstrated that cultural transfers are never one-way processes and never run uniformly (Lash and Urry 1994; Featherstone 1995; Appadurai 1996). On the contrary, they entail interactions between imported values and ideas and established cultural patterns in the receiving country. These interactions lead to heterogeneous answers, appropriations and different accentuations. In this perspective, cultural crossing does not imply the disappearance of the previous system of values and knowledge, rather the production of patchworks and hybridizations.

This paper presents the first results of a research project aimed at examining the interactions between U.S. and Italian advertising during the 1950s and the 1960s. The analysis is twofold. First, we endeavor to study the flows of people, concepts and ideas that characterized this process. In particular, we focus on the role of some cross-cultural mediators who have contributed to changing marketing communication strategies of many Italian companies during the ‘50s and the ‘60s. Secondly, the analysis looks at the ways in which some U.S. advertising rules and patterns have been selected, adapted or combined with the local tradition in order to fit the Italian context of the post-war years.

The discussion in this paper is based on the analysis of the main U.S. and Italian marketing and advertising literature of the post-war years. The study is also founded on the analysis of advertising agencies and companies publications and press releases. The change in strategies and techniques has been examined also through the analysis of some press campaigns and *Carosello* commercials.

After the Second World War, U.S. companies targeting the European market perceived the Italian advertising system as insufficient. In an article published in *Printer’s Ink* in 1955, Peter MacDonald, managing director of the Milan-based branch office of *Lintas*, wrote: “Even as recently as 5 years ago, when I first began my Italian advertising career, the most frequent description of the situation – by Italian advertising men themselves – was ‘jungle’” (Mc Donald 1955, 40). In MacDonald’s opinion, three factors were missing in Italian advertising business: there was no uniform standard for recognition of advertising agencies; agency commission was very reduced or denied by media; media rates were not fixed. The absence of these three factors, essential in the American advertising system, contributed to “haphazard, often amateurish and often unprofitable advertising practices” (MacDonald 1955, 32).

American businesses used to regard Italian advertising as underdeveloped and backwards, insisting on the necessity of catching up with the standards of U.S. advertising agencies. In fact, just five agencies (*ACME Dalmonte*, *Pubblicità Ricciardi*, *Enneci*, *IMA*, *ARC*) participated in the first meeting of Italian advertising professionals in Milan in 1945. Almost all the founders of these agencies, created during the 1930s, had previous work experience in the United States.

During the 1950s, the number of Italian advertising agencies remained low. In accordance with the opinion of U.S. professionals, there were many reasons for this phenomenon: the difficulty of collecting adequate commission, the poor demand for advertising expertise, a widespread lack of top executives educated to use advertising in order to stimulate demand. The weakness of Italian advertising agencies was increased by the fact that many Italian companies kept a firm hold on their publicity, as well as, on all kinds of promotional activities, relying on their own advertising or ‘propaganda’ departments. In 1942, the Italian firms which had an internal advertising department were at least 115 (*Guida Ricciardi* 1942).

Such company offices were for many years, in direct competition with the advertising agencies and from this point of view, represented a factor of resistance to the Americanization of Italian advertising. Nevertheless, since the end of the Second World War, Italy knew a progressive “advertising colonization”. In 1948, *Lintas* and *Young & Rubicam* and then in 1951, *J. Walter Thompson* opened branch offices in Milan. Next in 1952, it was *CPV* whose branch-office throughout the years, has been the most important advertising agency in Italy with a higher volume of business than that of the London headquarters. At the end of the 1950s, the growing import of U.S. chemical, pharmaceutical and cosmetic products kept up with the creation of new branch offices of U.S. advertising agencies.

During the 1960s, several Italian agencies were either bought by U.S. advertising networks or had established various partnership agreement forms with them. In particular, *Mc Cann Erickson* opened its Italian branch-office in 1959. *Masius Omnia*, *Lonsdale Brose*, *Euroteam*, *Colman Prentiss & Varley*, *Radar & Benson* followed two years later. In 1962, *BBDO* bought the Italian *SIRPI*. In the same year *Ogilvy & Mother* created its branch-office in Milan. *Foot Cone & Belding*, *Norman Craig and Kummel*, *Wilkins Pemberton Emmer* arrived in Italy in 1963, *Publicis-Gardner-Butler*, *Rudolf Färner*, *BC&S*, *LPE* in 1964.<sup>1</sup>

Since the post-war years, American advertising agencies have promoted their activities in Italian professional reviews in order to gain the budgets of local advertisers. In 1952, in *Panorama della pubblicità*, David James of *J. Walter Thompson* wrote that American agencies were the only alternative to the 'advertising' or 'propaganda' departments which were not professional and experienced enough to realize effective campaigns (James 1952).

Since the early years of the 20th century, Italian businesses have considered Italian advertising inadequate in comparison to American practices. American advertising was often regarded with admiration, not only for the amount of advertising expenditures, but also for the high level of professionalization and legitimization. Quoting an editor of *L'impresa moderna* - one of the first Italian advertising professional reviews - the United States was the country "where it is not the intuition that rules the creation of an ad, it is a real science [...] and the advertising man is not the advertiser himself, but he is a specialist who has studied this science theoretically and practically to the bottom" (Cases 1912, 226).

The transfer of competences took place through the intervention of cultural mediators who contributed to establish a contact between U.S. and Italian advertising traditions. During the post-war years, the spreading of knowledge of U.S. advertising and marketing techniques was accomplished mostly through the action of both American professionals operating in Italy and Italian advertising experts who were trained in U.S. literature.

In a book on Italian advertising published in 1956, Lorenzo Manconi underlined that a deep gap between two generations of advertising men had become apparent: the generation before the Second World War composed by "artists, autodidacts, improvisers" and the generation trained in American companies (Manconi 1956). In the 1950s, there were very few Italian schools offering an education in marketing and advertising. Moreover, the high-school education in these fields was almost nonexistent. As a consequence, marketing departments of U.S. multinationals such as *Colgate*, *Palmolive*, *Procter & Gamble* and branch-offices of American agencies played an important role in the dissemination of theoretical and practical knowledge of advertising. A real educational

mission was accomplished by the Milan-based branch-office of *Lintas*, which trained the majority of managers in the main advertising agencies in Italy (Watson Dunn 1964, 432).

Italian advertising practitioners and scholars trained at a U.S. business school, at the headquarters of a U.S. advertising agency, in a multinational company or simply in American literature played a meaningful part as cross-cultural mediators. As already stated, for the most part, the pioneers of Italian advertising, founders of the first advertising agencies during the 1930s, had professional experience in the United States.<sup>2</sup> During the 1950s and 1960s, the main players behind the transformation of Italian advertising know-how – professionals like the economist Guglielmo Tagliacarne, founder in 1954 of the Italian Association of Market Research (AISM Associazione Italiana Studi di Mercato), professor and author of many books on marketing techniques, the statistics expert Pierpaolo Luzzatto Fegiz, founder in 1946 of *Doxa*, the first Italian market research institute, Mario Bellavista, founder of the advertising agency *Studio Sigla*, as well as, the professional review *Panorama della pubblicità*, - have all had direct contact with U.S. marketing and advertising practices.

Cross-cultural mediators were not just single individuals but also groups and organizations such as professional associations, the Organization for the European Economic Co-operation (OEEC), market research institutes or the editorial staff of the leading professional reviews.

After the Second World War, professional advertising associations organized several meetings with the aim of presenting methods and techniques of U.S. advertising to Italian practitioners. Since the 1st Italo-American Sales-Management Congress (Congresso Italo-Americano per la soluzione dei problemi di vendita), organized in Milan in 1953, Italian advertisers and U.S. specialists have met regularly in order to debate the introduction of marketing tools and the growth of the internal market in Italy.

The contact between Italian and American marketing and advertising specialists was encouraged by the OEEC. This organization emerged in 1948 from the Marshall Plan and the Conference of Sixteen, in order to promote co-operation between participating countries in the reconstruction of Europe. During the 1950s, the OEEC had supported the organization of missions to the U.S. involving Italian managers, business representatives and scholars. One of the scopes of such missions, was to share techniques, methods and know-how in the fields of marketing and advertising by way of visiting the marketing departments of U.S. companies, advertising agencies and market research institutes. Italian teams participating in the missions contributed in the spreading of learned knowledge from the trip by bringing back these experiences and explaining how U. S. practices could be emulated.

In Italy, as in other European countries (Blondiaux 1998; Conrad 2004), the americanization of advertising is

also related to the development of market research institutes (Rinauro 2002). In particular, Doxa the first market research institute, provided advertisers and advertising men with information about consumer behavior, as well as, media rates and socio-demographical specificities of media consumers. Actually, thanks to the work of the statisticians of market research institutes, techniques such as media-planning and studies on the effectiveness of advertising gained ground in Italy.

Advertising and marketing professional reviews – such as *Panorama della pubblicità* issued from 1949 to 1966 or *Studi di mercato* created in 1955 - made crucial contributions to the innovation of Italian advertising methods and techniques by publishing articles and book chapters by U.S. marketing and advertising theorists and practitioners. Above all, since the 1930s and specifically during the post-war years, *L'Ufficio Moderno*, a Milan-based advertising and management periodical, played a key role as the driving force between the American methods and the Italian tradition. In 1931, the directors of this review Dino Villani and Guido Mazzali promoted the foundation of the GAR - Gruppo Amici della Razionalizzazione (Group Friends of Rationalization), a group of advertising practitioners and managers who pursued the study of new methods for the development of the Italian economy, a group rounded up by the fascist police in 1933. During the 1950s and 1960s, *L'Ufficio Moderno* gave a voice to the supporters claiming necessity to innovate Italian advertising following the American example. Yet, at the same time *L'Ufficio Moderno* did not exclude other ways to consider advertising. In particular, its openness to the formal research of graphic designers was evident in its covers realized by the most important authors of Italian graphic art.

## CRITICIZING AND REWORKING THE AMERICAN MODEL

In spite of their asymmetrical relationship, the dominant American model and local tradition interacted to create new and unexpected solutions in terms of business organization, working procedures, strategies and messages. The second objective of our paper is to locate places and moments in which the cultural transfer from American to Italian advertising culture was clearly characterized by phenomena of transformation and hybridization.

The persons quoted above as cultural mediators were undoubtedly the protagonists of a big shift towards a more americanized concept of advertising in Italy. Nevertheless, they did not fail to criticize the Madison Avenue model and its methods, arguing that a more independent and Italian line was needed. In 1960, at the 6th National Advertising Congress in Florence, Anton Gino Domeneghini accused Italian advertising as being too enthusiastic about the new American trends and of uncritically accepting foreign practices. In his opinion, the prevailing fault of the U.S.

model was paradoxically to diminish the role of advertising. In particular, he argued that at one time internal advertising departments used to be independent, or at the most, subject only to the approval of the head office. On the contrary, “now they are near other departments (sales promotion, merchandising and so on), at the lowest level of a hierarchy that from the head office goes down to the marketing department and the sales department [...] In this way they have lost not only their autonomy, but also the reason for existence of their creative function” (Domeneghini 1960, 27). The danger feared by Domeneghini was the loss of the artistic and creative character of the advertising. According to Domeneghini, advertising did not have to be dependent on marketing, but it had to collaborate with it. Imagination should not be crushed by market research: “Quantitative, statistical and motivational research are welcome, but they do not have to dispense us from thinking with our head and from acting according to intuition, imagination and inspiration” (Ibidem).

Some other individuals and organizations contributed more clearly to the processes of accommodation and adaptation of the U.S. advertising theories and practices in Italy. From this specific point of view, an interesting and controversial role was played by the advertising managers of some of the largest Italian enterprises such as *Olivetti*, *Pirelli*, *Motta*, *La Rinascente*, *Finmeccanica*, *Eni* and *Italsider*. Trained as any other Italian advertising expert in literature and procedures imported from the U.S., many directors of in-house publicity departments shared and defended a rather different view of advertising.

In 1957, Ignazio Weiss, chief of the Olivetti Advertising Division, responded to the harsh American critiques toward Italian advertising, showing very clearly his delicate position between two distinct cultural traditions. He confirmed that there was an urgent need to obtain reliable statistical data and remedy the lack of price regulations by media, yet invited his American counterparts to recognize the technical and aesthetic quality of Italian advertising, due mostly to the contribution of graphic artists and designers.

While stressing the necessity of pursuing a more “scientific” approach in advertising, based on planning and rationalization, Weiss proudly remembered that the exhibitions promoted by the *Alliance Graphique Internationale* had always reserved a “place of honour” to posters and printed ads realized by Italian graphic designers. According to him, the regulation of the advertising market and the adoption of more rational methods were not at odds with what he defined the “art” of advertising. This “art” was in his view, able to contribute in achieving not only strict marketing goals but also noble objectives such as the elevation of the average taste and the appreciation of visual arts (Weiss 1957, 438).

Weiss’ words demonstrate the resistance and vitality in Italy of a particular idea of advertising, with great importance placed on aesthetics or, at least, in perceptive devices and psychological suggestion: a much more

European tradition rooted in the work of the early masters of poster art and in the graphic experimentations of the avant-garde movements.

It was an approach to advertising expressed not only by the post-war Italian school of graphic designers, but also by some of the major companies in the country. In fact, despite the constant pressure from international agencies and from Italian partisans of the American model, direct collaboration between internal advertising departments and designers persisted as the most diffuse formula at least until the beginning of the 1960s.

This was what Adam Arvidsson, in a recent study on Italian advertising, has called, “Corporate art” (Arvidsson 2003, 92). Regarding it as a residual local tradition, bound to be replaced by the new marketing approach coming from the United States. From her point of view, Victoria de Grazia clearly speaks of a European way to advertise which – grounded on “a basically different set of economic resources, cultural traditions and aesthetic principles from the American” - appears doomed to be swept away by the U.S. aggressive imperialism (de Grazia 2005,345).

Nevertheless, in post-war Italy, this more European culture of advertising was not suddenly jettisoned backward or labeled as inappropriate in favour of American methods and strategies, as some scholars seem to suggest. Nor was it resisted in an unaltered form. More often, it was combined and reinterpreted in a constant process of negotiation that gave rise to interesting intermediations and hybrid solutions.

It was during the 1950s, that many Italian companies pursued an unorthodox route, if compared to the 'Madison Avenue' model, as was clearly seen by the architectural critic Reyner Banham (1961, 194). He noted that, in Italy advertising companies were “more commonly set up by the producer himself than by any agency” and were persistently product-oriented and grounded on “the ability to use Italian buon gusto as a style of mass communication”.

If this peculiar situation was just what U.S. experts criticized, managers such as Arrigo Castellani (*Pirelli*), Ignazio Weiss and Riccardo Musatti (*Olivetti*), Gianni Bordoli (*La Rinascente*), Giancarlo Buzzi and the young team of Bassetti succeeded indeed, in the difficult task of combining advertising know-how coming from the United States with a more intuitive approach and the graphic expertise of Italian modernist designers. In this respect, *Pirelli* can be viewed as a case in point.

In Milan – undoubtedly most important center of the advertising professions in Italy – the *Pirelli*’s “Direzione Propaganda” was renown for the freedom of experimentation accorded to graphic designers, photographers and illustrators. As in the *Olivetti* case, *Pirelli*’s name was broadly associated with the idea of excellence in design and graphic art (Facetti 1960; Johnston 1961).

Arrigo Castellani – who directed the in-house *Pirelli* advertising department from 1952 to 1969 - had always tried to defend an idea of advertising in which designers and

“good taste” played a central role. He did not hesitate to explicitly criticize the American model (Castellani 1958, 40). At the same time however, through his speeches and writings, it is clear that his professional training and background was basically grounded on notions and rules coming from the U.S. In 1958, for instance, when he was called to explain the *Pirelli*’s advertising strategy to the company’s managers and executives, he adopted english-american terms such as “national advertising” and “sales promotion”. By using these foreign expressions he alluded to the distinction between national advertising campaigns targeting a wider public and printed matter (letters, cards, catalogues, handbooks, folders and brochures) aimed at selected audiences. In fact, these “sales promotion” tools were addressed on the one hand, to “sales promoters” like any specialized worker in areas related to *Pirelli*’s production (electrical contractors, tyre repairers etc.); on the other, to the retailers, whose name had to be identified with *Pirelli*’s brand with strategic actions (Ibidem, 38-39).

Even when Castellani, from the beginning of the 1960s, found himself beset by the increasing affirmation of an advertising culture which was strongly based on marketing, motivational research and by extreme specialization of tasks (Sinisgalli, 1969) – his response was not a mere rejection.

On the contrary, he thought that a better defensive strategy could be, the creation of an agency inside the *Pirelli* organization structured on the American model, with a creative department managed by an art director and a team of copywriters (D. P., 1957; Noorda and Sheiwiller, 1990). This was called the “Agenzia Centro”, a name borrowed from the new *Pirelli*’s headquarters, the skyscraper designed by the famous Italian architect Gio Ponti, where the agency was located. Although that professional organization - a curious mix of the old in-house Uffici Propaganda and a full-service agency - was launched, in theory, with the idea of not limiting its jobs to *Pirelli* and in gaining additional clients. Probably Castellani had decided to follow certain suggestions from the Madison Avenue model in order to defend his particular approach to advertising and prevent possible critiques coming from both his colleagues and *Pirelli*’s executives. Additionally, another important motivation may have been the possibility to access to price reduction and commissions conceded by media to full-service agencies (Diritti di agenzia e uffici pubblicità 1964).

The famous Italian department store *La Rinascente* represents another important case of the syncretic relationship that could be established between American know-how and Italian/European advertising traditions. Actually, in this case one may even notice a cohabitation of modernist aesthetics and credos with advanced marketing principles.

In 1956, *La Rinascente* was reported to be “the first enterprise of its kind to rely solely on modern graphic art for its publicity”, emphasizing its courage in addressing an advanced language to social groups who may not have been prepared for it (Bordoli 1956, 48).

Moreover, in the post-war years, *La Rinascente* was decidedly involved in the promotion of industrial design, adopting a particular vision of its role as intermediary between producers of goods and consumers. Such an attitude - whose most famous manifestation was the launching of the “Compasso d’Oro” award in 1953 – was not in contradiction with the pioneering role played by La Rinascente in introducing modern marketing strategies into Italy. Indeed, managers of the Milanese department store such as Giovanni Bordoli (director of the advertising department) and Augusto Morello have often been considered at the foreground of market research in Italy (Francesconi 1994; Amatori 1989).

These two examples demonstrate that modernist graphic design and audience segmentation could occasionally coexist and European “corporate art” tradition was capable of merging with practices and notions imported from the United States.

If this is true, it would be misleading to deny that, from the early 1950s up until the years of the Italian “boom”, there were brimming conflicts and discussions opposing designers and advertising experts, managers of in-house advertising teams and partisans of the full-service agency approach.

In 1964, the president of *Young & Rubicam Italia* triumphantly affirmed that Italy, thanks to the economic miracle, was at last changing “from a producer to a consumer economy” (S.C. 1965, 953). This was the moment when many companies began turning to full-service agencies.

Until the mid-1960s Italian graphic design culture had been so much a part of advertising that it was difficult to discern a clear line of demarcation between the two. Throughout that period, phenomena of reciprocal coming together and hybridization had not been lacking.

In 1956, for example, the refined graphic designer Armando Testa transformed his professional practice into an American-style agency, which was to become one of the most important in the Italian market. Yet, he never lost his strong attachment to the tradition of European poster art and accorded special attention to the role of graphic inventions and spectacular solutions. In the following years, operations of this kind began to multiply.

American-inspired advertising experts had started very early to openly criticize graphic designers, who often worked without the strategic support that they provided. They berated both the cumbersome presence of offices dealing with publicity within a company and the practice of “entrusting an entire advertising campaign to a painter” (Benelli 1954, 528).

Yet the old-fashioned creations of painters and poster artists did not represent the real target of this sort of criticism. There was an increase in the barrage of specific attacks on “the modern currents of abstractionism and graphic hermeticism” (Rezzara 1954). From this point of view, if applied to monopolistic companies or industries

making no finished product, the prize-winning but substantially ineffective advertising created by graphic designers could be viewed as a “tolerable luxury” (Ibidem). It was, however, a grave error to imagine that it could be applied to products and services that needed to be put on the market and to think that “millions of consumers could be influenced by pure graphic signs” (Ibidem).

Considerations of this kind gave rise to polemics, which quickly focused on the old question: “is advertising an art or a science?” (Arte e pubblicità 1961). The pages of periodicals such as *L'Ufficio Moderno* became the forum for an intense debate that set technique in opposition to inspiration, planning to improvisation, reasoning to seduction.

Although discussion continued for some time and someone even spoke of a clear break between “agency advertising” and the “meagre platoon of graphic artists” who worked directly for large companies (Cappelli 1962) - attempts at mediation and compromise persisted.

It is interesting, for example, to look at the case of Giancarlo Buzzi, who at the beginning of the 1960s directed and coordinated the advertising campaigns for the young executives of *Bassetti*, a Milan-based firm producing sheets, duvets, towels and bathrobes. Although he worked with the modernist designer Bob Noorda, Buzzi tried to differentiate the advertisements’ languages in order to “establish a dialogue with different audiences, according to distinction of class and culture” (Cantaroni 1963: 126). Actually in ads published in popular weeklies, Noorda limited his intervention to a rigorous and clean lay-out, while messages addressed to sophisticated readers showed more audacity in terms of taste and creative solutions, alternating humour and intellectualisms, wit and severity (Ibidem: 130).

In order to locate other hybrid results of mediation, it may be helpful to look at two typical manifestations of Italian advertising of the time: The *Palma d’Oro*, a national prize assigned every year to companies for their advertising campaigns, and Carosello, the space that the Italian public television (RAI) reserved for advertising from 1957 until 1977.

The *Palma d’oro* – a prize introduced in 1950 and awarded by a jury consisting mainly of representatives from the advertising profession – always went to companies such as Olivetti, Barilla and Pirelli in its early years, thanks to the graphic designers’ inventive solutions and refined taste.

The 1955 edition of the prize did not take place, because of the profound disagreement emerging in the advertising professional community about the criteria employed in the jury’s decision-making. In particular, what was put into question, was the excessive importance accorded to “graphic forms and artistic values”, considered independent from any link with “advertising commercial goals” and with psychology, tastes, class provenience, cultural and social backgrounds of the audiences to whom the advertising message was addressed (Valeri 1954, 1654).

As a result of these polemics, in 1956 the rules of the prize were changed, giving more emphasis to the campaigns “efficacy in terms of sales and notoriety obtained by the product or service advertised” (Weiss, 1956).

Even after these changes - which did not fail to cause protest and opposition (Villani 1955; Villani and Weiss 1956) - the industries who turned to renowned graphic designers, even employing “an avantgardist expressive language” (Lane Rossi 1958) were still nearly always those who won. Yet the jury members tended to choose cases in which the advertising managers imposed restrictions on the work of the graphic designers.

In 1959, for example, the *Palma d'oro* went to *Necchi*, a firm at the forefront of “good design” for their sewing machines as much as for their whole house style. On this occasion the advertising experts did not fail to praise Franco Grignani's graphic work, as it had “never degenerated into abstractionisms that were inessential to the purpose of the advertisement or not perfectly accessible to its public of potential buyers” (D. T. 1959, 2259). While commenting on Grignani's graphics, attention was drawn also to the way in which the “form of the machine” was never isolated but constantly accompanied by the “human form” of a woman (Ibidem).

Actually - examining the advertising messages created by graphic designers who collaborated with in-house departments of large industries during the 1950s and 1960s - one can see that often it is the product itself which reigns supreme. The product inspires the texts and ideas of the advertisement; it prompts formal invention and, without any reference to a precise setting, it imposes itself on the viewer's attention. The graphic designers' creations tended to represent industry more than commerce, production more than consumption, and corporate attitudes more than consumer needs. In this particular case, it is evident that *Necchi's* advertising management was able to “correct” that tendency, without renouncing the prestigious contribution of Franco Grignani, one of the most avantgardist Italian graphic designers.

American-trained advertising experts increasingly tried not only to contrast but also to accommodate or force what they considered the limitations of a different culture of advertising, more linked to the European poster art and design tradition.

Something very similar occurred at the end of the 1950s in the broadcasting sector, which gave rise to one of the most original expressions of Italian advertising: *Carosello*. It was a program composed by a series of commercials broadcasted after the evening news. The structure of the commercials, regulated by the RAI, was entirely different compared to that of the commercials broadcasted in other countries, in particular, in the United States. In fact, every commercial could not be longer or shorter than one minute and forty-five seconds and the advertisers could dedicate just one third of this time to the real commercial message. In this way, the first part of the commercial was occupied by

a sketch without any connection to the product, the last thirty seconds were dedicated to the advertising message. Moreover, as they could not broadcast a *Carosello* commercial more than once, advertisers were forced to use the same actors and characters in order to lower costs and to simplify the production.

This singular solution was the result of a compromise. On the one hand, it tried to satisfy the demand of advertisers and advertising agencies who were asking for access to advertising in television. On the other hand, it was functional for the mission of the public broadcasting service: educating the viewer even through the “light” forms of spectacle and entertainment.

The rules imposed by the RAI were an incomprehensible solution for multinational companies, U.S. advertising agencies and Italian advertising men following the American model. As an editor of *L'Ufficio Moderno* wrote: “*Carosello* was something that they did not expect. Something monstrous, hybrid, made especially to frustrate their expectation and their meticulous preparation. Something that gives value to an aspect that the new generation of advertising professionals, trained on the standardized concepts of the agencies, always despised in movie advertising: the entertainment” (Giovannini 1967: 338).

The imposition of more than one minute of entertainment forced advertising agencies to create original commercials and to ask some of the most important names of Italian theater and motion-pictures industry – like Dario Fo, Eduardo De Filippo, Gillo Pontecorvo, Ermanno Olmi, Totò, Sergio Leone – to turn *Carosello* commercials. The argumentative schemas of U.S. broadcasting advertising were re-worked and combined with formal solutions and narrative structures typical of Italian theater tradition. So, Italian viewers could find in *Carosello* traces of the *Commedia dell'Arte*, suggestions of Neapolitan theater, stories and characters that had marked the history of Italian theater. In this way, *Carosello* had the function to root the new habits of the consumer society in the national tradition. As a result, *Carosello* employed a very fast and concise language in comparison with the rest of the TV programs, but it was very far from the U.S. model. In this regard, in 1962, Harry W. MacMahan, expert in broadcasting advertising, recognized that Italian TV advertising had great talent and skill in set designing, acting, music choice and humor. But he also commented: “It's just by coincidence that they call it advertising” (MacMahan 1962).

## CONCLUSION

During the post-war years, Italy assisted in the confrontation between various ways to regard advertising. A common effort to professionalize and legitimize advertising practices and knowledge was the outcome. However, behind this common effort, were also various conceptions of



working organization, of the quality of the messages, even of the scope of advertising.

The process of transferring advertising methods and techniques from the United States into Italy lead to the hybridization of logics and solutions, due to the inevitable differences between the original and local social, cultural, economical and legal environments. Without any doubt, new combinations have been the expression of resistance to the transfer process and the consequence of the necessary compromises in tailoring the foreign approach to fit local context. But, they have also represented an opportunity for Italian advertising to renovate its tradition without completely losing its originality.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In 1962, amongst the first top-ten advertising agencies in Italy, just two were Italian (in the 5th and 6th positions): 1. *CPV*; 2. *Radar & Benson*; 3. *J. Walter Thompson*; 4. *Mc Cann Erickson*; 5. *Sigla*; 6. *IMA*; 7. *Masius- Omnia*; 8. *BBDO-SIRPI*; 9. *Internationale*; 10. *Seller (Advertising Age*. 1963 (March): 52).

<sup>2</sup> Luigi Dalmonte, founder Acme Dalmonte, was in New York between 1919 and 1920 where he worked for the advertising agency *George Ethridge & Co*, (Dalmonte 1925). One of founders of *Balza-Ricc* (1928), Giulio Cesare Ricciardi had working experience at the advertising office of Macy's in San Francisco. Nino Caimi, founder of Enneci in 1931, had lived in the United States and directed Erwa, the Milan based branch-office of Erwin Wesley's. Also Anton Gino Domeneghini founder of *IMA (Idea-Metodo-Arte)* in 1933 had worked for *Erwa* and in 1933 took over *IMA Erwa's* account for *Coca-Cola* and *Gillette* (Valeri 1986).

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