

MARTA AVERNA E ROBERTO RIZZI

Transatlantic Transfers. Tools and methods for an integrated approach

Transatlantic Transfers. Instrumentos e métodos para uma abordagem integrada

Transatlantic Transfers. Instrumentos y métodos para un enfoque integrado

Marta Averna

Arquiteta doutora em Arquitetura de Interiores e Design de Exposições, é professora auxiliar no Departamento DASTU do Politécnico de Milão, onde leciona para o mestrado internacional. As suas atividades didáticas e de investigação centram-se no significado e nos métodos dos interiores, explorando projetos contemporâneos e históricos, concebendo habitações em contextos marginais e reutilização do património. Faz parte do grupo de investigação Transatlantic Transfers. The italian presence in post war America 1949-1972.

Architect with a PhD in Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design is an assistant professor at the Department DASTU of Politecnico of Milan, where she teaches for a master's degree in international track. Her didactic and research activities focus on interiors' meaning and methods, exploring contemporary and historical projects, designing housing in marginal contexts, and reusing heritage. She is part of the research group Transatlantic Transfers. The italian presence in post war America 1949-1972.

Arquitecta y doctora en Arquitectura de Interiores y Diseño de Exposiciones, es profesora adjunta en el Departamento DASTU del Politécnico de Milán, donde imparte clases para un máster internacional. Sus actividades didácticas y de investigación se centran en el significado y los métodos de los interiores, explorando proyectos contemporáneos e históricos, diseñando viviendas en contextos marginales y reutilizando el patrimonio. Forma parte del grupo de investigación Transatlantic Transfers. The italian presence in post war America 1949-1972.

marta.averna@polimi.it

Roberto Rizzi

Arquiteto doutor em Arquitetura de Interiores e Design de Exposições, é professor associado no departamento DASTU do Politécnico de Milão, onde leciona para o mestrado. As suas atividades didáticas e de investigação centram-se na relação entre o espaço interior, circunscrito e habitável, e os seus equipamentos fixos e móveis, verificados na reutilização de edifícios abandonados. Faz parte do grupo de investigação Transatlantic Transfers. The Italian Presence in Post-War America 1949/1972.

Architect with a PhD in Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design is an associate professor at department DASTU of Politecnico of Milan, where he teaches for a master's degree. His didactic and research activities focus on the relationship between Interior space, circumscribed and inhabitable, and its fixed and movable equipment, verified in the reuse of neglected buildings. He is part of the research group Transatlantic Transfers. The Italian Presence in Post-War America 1949/1972.

Arquitecto doctorado en Arquitectura de Interiores y Diseño de Exposiciones, es profesor agregado en el departamento DASTU del Politécnico de Milán, donde imparte clases para un máster. Sus actividades didácticas y de investigación se centran en la relación entre el espacio interior, circunscrito y habitable, y su equipamiento fijo y móvil, verificado en la reutilización de edificios abandonados. Forma parte del grupo de investigación Transatlantic Transfers. The Italian Presence in Post-War America 1949/1972.

roberto.rizzi@polimi.it

Resumo

Após a Segunda Guerra Mundial, a Itália era um país profundamente marcado, onde a devastação, não só material, causada pelo conflito e pelo fascismo, tinha minado gravemente o patrimônio construído e a capacidade de se reconhecer numa comunidade nacional, e onde se tornou essencial reconstruir o que tinha sido destruído, redesenhando não só as infra-estruturas, mas também uma nova identidade nacional. Com as suas diversas competências e capacidades técnicas, todo o país está empenhado neste projeto de relançamento da economia e de reintegração na cena democrática, graças também às relações internacionais, nomeadamente com os Estados Unidos da América. E assim, um fluxo de vetores (como pessoas, acontecimentos ou meios de comunicação) de vários tipos (incluindo arte, literatura, cinema, design, moda, cultura visual, arquitetura, gastronomia e cultura popular) capazes de transmitir algo de Itália, atravessa o Atlântico, influencia a cultura americana e depois regressa à pátria. Como descrever e reconstruir este processo, que envolve papéis e capacidades profundamente diferentes na sua transversalidade? É necessário não só envolver diferentes estudiosos, mas também sistematizá-los, partilhando linguagens e métodos de análise. Esta proposta apresenta e discute os métodos, instrumentos e resultados de um projeto de investigação de quatro anos, PRIN Transatlantic Transfers. A presença italiana na América do pós-guerra 1949/1972, que envolveu competências profundamente diversas (entre o design e a arquitetura, o cinema e a moda, a literatura, a indústria e o artesanato, e até as infra-estruturas de intercâmbio cultural, político e económico), procurando sistematizá-las no desenho de um mapa complexo e ponderado, deformado pelo peso de certos grupos de contributos, para que possa descrever a complexidade dos anos a que se refere, relacionando centros de produção, desembarques, atitudes, meios materiais, patrocínios políticos e relações diplomáticas. O interesse do projeto reside não só no resultado, que, graças a esta cartografia, permitiu reler as relações ítalo-americanas, pondo em evidência não só a influência dos EUA, tradicionalmente reconhecida pela crítica desde o pós-guerra, mas também a influência paralela da Itália na cultura de uma classe americana média, culta e abastada, mas também nos instrumentos do seu desenvolvimento e divulgação, o Atlas digital e a exposição. O Atlas é simultaneamente um arquivo e uma ferramenta de investigação; recolhe itens individuais e as suas relações e pode ser organizado de acordo com tópicos pré-definidos ou livres, dependendo dos interesses de investigação e de um estudo aprofundado. A exposição, por outro lado, propõe algumas chaves de interpretação, espaços temáticos que exploram formas inéditas de influência cultural italiana nos EUA: o desejo de um lugar sonhado ou de uma forma (por vezes) imaginada de entender a vida, ou mesmo o uso do passado e da história, ou a tensão e o desejo de modernidade, numa narrativa que é construída principalmente em solo americano. Esta experiência examina não só a evolução e as personagens de um episódio da modernidade, mas também o sentido e o modo próprios de uma investigação verdadeiramente multidisciplinar e as ferramentas que permitem a sua partilha mais eficaz, capaz de questionar e aprofundar a leitura crítica de um processo.

Palavras-chave: Transatlantic Transfers. Atlas. Multidisciplinaridade. Mapping. Abordagem integrada.

Abstract

After the Second World War, Italy was a deeply scarred country, where the devastation, not only material, caused by conflict and fascism had severely undermined the built heritage and the ability to recognize oneself in a national community, and where it became essential to rebuild what had been destroyed, redesigning not only the infrastructure but also a new national identity. With its various skills and technical capacities, the entire country is engaged in this project to revive the economy and reintegrate into the democratic scene, also thanks to international relations, especially with the United States of America. And so, a flow of vectors (such as people, events, or media) of various kinds (including art, literature, cinema, design, fashion, visual culture, architecture, food, and popular culture) capable of conveying something of Italy, crosses the Atlantic, influences American culture, and then bounces back to the motherland. How does one describe and reconstruct this process, which involves profoundly different roles and capacities in its transversality? It is necessary not only to involve different scholars but also to systematize them, sharing languages and methods of analysis. This proposal presents and discusses the methods, tools, and results of a four-year research project, PRIN Transatlantic Transfers. The Italian Presence in Post War America 1949/1972, which has involved profoundly diverse expertise (between design and architecture, cinema and fashion, literature, industry and craftsmanship, and even the infrastructure for cultural, political and economic exchange), seeking to systematize them in the drawing of a complex and weighted map, warped by the weight of certain groups of contributions, so that it can describe the complexity of the years to which it refers, relating centres of production, landings, attitudes, material means, political patronage and diplomatic relations. The interest of the project lies not only in the result, which, thanks to this mapping, has made it possible to re-read Italian-American relations, highlighting not only USA influence, traditionally recognized by critics since the post-war period, but also the parallel influence of Italy on the culture of a middle, educated and affluent American class, and in the tools of its development and dissemination, the digital Atlas and exhibition. The Atlas is both an archive and a research tool; it collects individual items and their relationships and can be organized according to pre-defined or free topics, depending on research interests and in-depth study. The exhibition, on the other hand, proposes some keys to interpretation, thematic spaces that explore unprecedented ways of Italian cultural influence in the USA: the desire for a dreamed place or for a (sometimes) imagined way of understanding life, or even the use of the past and history, or the tension and yearning for modernity, in a narrative that is primarily constructed on American soil. This experiment examines not only the evolution and the characters of an episode of modernity but also the meaning and the manner proper to truly multidisciplinary research and the tools that allow its most effective sharing, capable of questioning and deepening the critical reading of a process.

Keywords: Transatlantic Transfers. Atlas. Mutidisciplinarity. Mapping. Integrated approach.

Resumen

Tras la Segunda Guerra Mundial, Italia era un país profundamente marcado, en el que la devastación, no sólo material, causada por el conflicto y el fascismo había socavado gravemente el patrimonio construido y la capacidad de reconocerse en una comunidad nacional, y en el que resultaba esencial reconstruir lo destruido, rediseñando no sólo las infraestructuras sino también una nueva identidad nacional. Con sus diversas competencias y capacidades técnicas, todo el país está comprometido en este proyecto de reactivación de la economía y de reintegración en la escena democrática, gracias también a las relaciones internacionales, especialmente con Estados Unidos de América. Y así, un flujo de vectores (como personas, acontecimientos o medios de comunicación) de diversa índole (como el arte, la literatura, el cine, el diseño, la moda, la cultura visual, la arquitectura, la gastronomía y la cultura popular) capaces de transmitir algo de Italia, cruza el Atlántico, influye en la cultura estadounidense y luego rebota en la madre patria. ¿Cómo describir y reconstruir este proceso, que implica papeles y capacidades profundamente diferentes en su transversalidad? Es necesario no sólo involucrar a diferentes estudiosos, sino también sistematizarlos, compartiendo lenguajes y métodos de análisis. Esta propuesta presenta y discute los métodos, herramientas y resultados de un proyecto de investigación de cuatro años, PRIN Transatlantic Transfers. *The Italian Presence in Post War America 1949/1972*, en el que han intervenido conocimientos profundamente diversos (entre el diseño y la arquitectura, el cine y la moda, la literatura, la industria y la artesanía, e incluso la infraestructura para el intercambio cultural, político y económico), tratando de sistematizarlos en el trazado de un mapa complejo y ponderado, deformado por el peso de determinados grupos de contribuciones, para que pueda describir la complejidad de los años a los que se refiere, relacionando centros de producción, desembarcos, actitudes, medios materiales, mecenazgo político y relaciones diplomáticas. El interés del proyecto reside no sólo en el resultado, que gracias a esta cartografía ha permitido releer las relaciones italoamericanas, poniendo de relieve no sólo la influencia estadounidense, tradicionalmente reconocida por la crítica desde la posguerra, sino también la influencia paralela de Italia en la cultura de una clase media, culta y acomodada estadounidense, y en las herramientas de su elaboración y difusión, el Atlas digital y la exposición. El Atlas es a la vez un archivo y una herramienta de investigación; recoge elementos individuales y sus relaciones y puede organizarse según temas predefinidos o libres, en función de los intereses de la investigación y el estudio en profundidad. La exposición, por su parte, propone algunas claves de interpretación, espacios temáticos que exploran formas inéditas de la influencia cultural italiana en Estados Unidos: el deseo de un lugar soñado o de una forma (a veces) imaginada de entender la vida, o incluso el uso del pasado y la historia, o la tensión y el anhelo de modernidad, en una narrativa que se construye principalmente en suelo estadounidense. Este experimento examina no sólo la evolución y los personajes de un episodio de la modernidad, sino también el sentido y la manera propios de una investigación verdaderamente multidisciplinar y las herramientas que permiten compartirla de la manera más eficaz, capaz de cuestionar y profundizar en la lectura crítica de un proceso.

Palabras clave: Transatlantic Transfers. Atlas. Multidisciplinaria. Mapping. Enfoque integrado.

This text is the result of collaborative research work and shared reflection, as the paragraphs Introduction and All that is left in each of them is a scenographer are. Paragraphs With other eyes, Through things: the vectors of transatlantic transfer are attributed to Marta Averna, Identity and identities, Transatlantic Transfers. The Italian Presence in Post-War America. 1949/1972, to Roberto Rizzi.

Introduction

Every story, every outcome of a human affair, comprises an interweaving of people and gestures, spaces and things, words and silences, actions and reactions. Every story, even the simplest, is layered. And this stratification does not settle at the apparent end of a process. However, it continues to tangle at every rereading, new thought, and suggestion that refers back to the original story. This process applies to every phenomenon and thing, both subject to constant questioning that constantly updates their original meaning and conformation, even deforming them. We can apply this structure to the narrative of cultures, meant as "the set of values, symbols, conceptions, beliefs, models of behaviour, and also material activities, that characterise the way of life of a social group" (DELLA PORTA; PATOTA, 2022a) and verify their stratification, complexity and slow change also thanks to the interaction with external actors.

This contribution and the research that is its main subject and outcome reflect on the structures and modalities of interaction between different cultures, highlighting the processes through which the cultural identity of a social group is represented for itself and through interaction with others, and by reflection on the concept of culture itself, which in its most authentic value is defined by the way it is acted out about its othernesses. They do so by referring to a specific case study: the relations between Italy and the United States in the years immediately after the end of the Second World War. Italy is then a profoundly scarred country, where the devastation, not only material, caused by the conflict and fascism heavily damaged the built stock and the ability to recognise themselves in a national community, and where it is essential to rebuild what was destroyed, redesigning not only the infrastructure but also a new 'national identity'. At the same time, it is a country eager to redefine itself through the skills and abilities of all its citizens, who are taking on a project to reboot the economy and reintegrate into the democratic scene, moving towards industrial prosperity also thanks to international relations, especially with the United States of America.

This contribution also considers the methods and tools of a research aimed at exploring and describing the complexity of cultural phenomena from a perspective of interaction between profoundly different disciplines and competencies (in this case study, between architecture and design, cinema and fashion, literature, industry and craftsmanship, and the infrastructure for cultural, political and economic exchange). It tries to prefigure the tools needed to represent the complexity of research, putting it into a system in the design of a complex and weighted map, deformed by the weight of certain groups of contributions, which relates centres of production, landings, attitudes, material means, political patronage and diplomatic relations. It intends to present also the collective efforts made by this research group in mapping and building technical research criteria, as well as enabling a digital platform for the insertion of data/results/publications that can serve as a basis and reference in debates on the topic. The interest thus lies not only in the historiographical findings, which through the integration of knowledge has made it possible to describe Italo-American relations in a renewed manner, highlighting both the influence exerted by the United States, traditionally recognised by critics since the post-war period, and the parallel influence exerted by Italy on the culture of an emergent, educated, affluent, urban American middle class, but also in the instruments used to develop and disseminate it, the interactive Atlas, an analytical archive and research tool at the same time and the virtual Exhibition of synthesis.

Identity and identities

In order to describe this process correctly, it seems essential to reason about the meaning of specific terms, starting with identity, "the sense and awareness of oneself as an entity distinct from others and continuous in time" (DELLA PORTA; PATOTA, 2022b), which allows the identification "of a person or collective subject, as such, by oneself or by others." (Ibid.) A recurring word central to the definition of contemporary society that we find it impossible to think of and narrate without its use:

Identity appears to be a banal, self-evident, precise, and vernacular term. Everyone knows what identity is. Identity is our presence to ourselves and others, our daily recognition [...], our specific biography. However, it is also our being part of a group, our way of feeling the bond that unites us to others, our habits and traditions: bonds and solidarity, memory and history. It distinguishes us from the Others; it is the evidence of our diversity. (COLOMBO, 2005/2006, p.11)

In any case, it is a complex concept, interesting, since it "highlights a relevant site of social construction of reality and meaning" (Ibid.) but problematic, given that it uses "a 'category of practices' - a considered adequate way of 'doing' and 'saying', used by individuals immersed in their daily actions to make sense of their reality" as if it were "a 'category of analysis'" that makes "those practices of action and production of meaning accountable". (Ibid.)

We often relate it to words current in everyday discourse, such as culture, civilisation, and tradition: all notions with a complex statute, variable over time and cyclically challenged, which "suffer from an ambiguous condition that would have them suitable for indicating a very circumstantial and defined situation, univocal and precisely described, which instead presents itself with blurred, altering and changing contours, narrated in different ways by different observers. (RIZZI, 2023, p.115) These words always refer to a multiplicity of differences and nuances, so that it is never the single identity but rather identities, cultures, civilisations and traditions; and each of them is in constant evolution, a "dusting of phenomena, energetic of course, that is dynamic, not static and not 'substantial'." (FORMAGGIO, 1990, p.35) Thus, they are concepts in the making, which we can consider "a cluster of problems rather than a single issue", to which we must actively contribute since they are "a task not yet realised, not accomplished, like an appeal, like a duty and an incitement to act." (AIME, 2004, p.27)

In order to grasp its meaning, it seems appropriate and exciting to speak rather than of the definition of identity per se, which, as in the words of Francesco Remotti¹, "is not inherent to the essence of an object" (REMOTTI, 2005, p.34), of the relationship between identities, and how they express and narrate their nature in the relationship and in the attempt to communicate with other identities, cultures, traditions and civilisations. Like form, described and studied by Dino Formaggio², identity in the relation has a dynamic character embedded in the movement of time, "dynamised in the time of speed." (FORMAGGIO, 1990, p.92) Identity is not a univocally defined fact but one in constant evolution, which highlights how change and the processes of "radical metamorphic transmutation" are the "founding principle of every class of events (phenomena) in today's culture" (Ibid., p.123)³ in which "words have many

¹ Francesco Remotti (b. 1943) is an Italian cultural anthropologist and former professor of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Turin.

² Dino Formaggio (1914/2008) was an Italian philosopher and art critic, holding the Chair of Aesthetics at the State University of Milan.

³ Dino Formaggio called the process observed from the beginning in natural phenomena, according to which 'the already formed is immediately transformed again' (FORMAGGIO, 1990, p.12) trans-morphosis, to emphasise its difference from Goethe's metamorphosis, a concept superseded by the definition of morphogenesis developed by René Thom. Trans-morphosis, which means that forms are transformed,

meanings, some fluctuating, which, in order to be embodied, wait for someone to fulfill them by living"⁴. (FUSINI, 2023, p.52)

Identity is clarified "from the outside", from an intermediate space in which different actors look at each other and tell each other what François Jullien⁵, who had already preferred to rename identities resources or fecundity, calls divide, "a divergence – let us already call it a divide – to reconfigure the debate: to pull it from its rut and reengage with it more securely". (JULLIEN, 2021, p.24) "Difference lets each of the terms fall to its wayside, into its isolation, but the divide sets the terms face to face, holds in tension what it has separated" (Ibid., p.59) and forces it to react to the different, trying to understand it, to receive it, and finally even to adapt by considering a point of view and a frame of mind different from the initial ones. This way and structure of reasoning are particularly suited to the case study referred to in this text: the Transatlantic Transfers research project does not discuss and study Italian identity in the post-World War II years, but rather its evolution, functional to the way different and distant eyes perceive it.

Transatlantic Transfers. The Italian Presence in Post-War America. 1949/1972

The research project has spanned four years, slowed down by the tragic year of the pandemic⁶, from March 2020 to March 2024, within the framework of a national programme of the Italian government called PRIN⁷, funding projects of relevant national interest, which due to their complexity and nature may require the collaboration of several professors and researchers and with a financing requirement that exceeds the regular economic availability of the individual institutions involved, also because of more effective participation in the initiatives related to the European Union Framework Programmes.

Its objective was to question the contents of the historiography on post-World War II relations between Italy and the United States, overcoming a consolidated point of view privileging the description of the cultural Americanisation of Italy, forgetting some specific experiences, even already known, of Italianisation of style in the United States, also thanks to the passage from the dualistic scenario opposing national and international to a more complex one based on the concepts of transnational and global. It aimed to trace the emergence, manifestations and meanings of Italian Style, the so-called Made in Italy, distinctly "Italian" and "modern", that originated in Italy and became internationally known in the 1950s and 1960s but whose visibility has depended on a complex international and intercultural infrastructure

"focuses on the transition from form to form, on the 'trans'. (...) So the term trans-morphosis is necessary precisely to accentuate the new way of assuming form once it has been freed from the concept of being, once it has been dynamised in the time of speed". (FORMAGGIO, 1990, p.92) Although these reflections date back over 30 years, they seem to resonate more and more today, corroborated by the digital revolution that in those years was not even imaginable.

4 In many of the beautiful short stories collected in *Creature in bilico* by Nadia Fusini, a scholar of English and Comparative Literature, this reflection on identity, its changes and permanence resonate: in particular, in the dialogue that constitutes the story of Alice and Aracoeli, where the expression of identity passes through migration, uncertainties and change, where "It is no coincidence that the Greek *panta rei* in Latin is translated *omnia migrant*, commented Aracoeli. - Already, Alice resumed, - and again not by chance in Latin, migrate sometimes takes the meaning of violate, transgress". (FUSINI, 2023, p.58)

5 François Jullien (1951) is a French philosopher, Greekist and sinologist; he is a professor at the University of Paris VII, where he directs the Institut de la pensée contemporaine. He holds the Chaire sur l'altérité at the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme.

6 The Covid emergency resulted in two six-month increases of the initial project duration, which was supposed to be three years.

7 The acronym PRIN stands for Research Projects of Significant National Interest.

for cultural, political, and economic exchange between Italy and the USA. It also sought to investigate how specific works of art and literature, film, design, fashion, visual culture, architecture, food and wine, and popular culture were introduced to American audiences (through events, exhibitions, book reviews, advertisements, festivals) between 1949 and 1972 and how a recognisable modern style associated to Italian iconographic public figures (writers, artists, designers, intellectuals and movie stars) was appropriated as a marker of distinction in the identity formation of an upward mobile, cosmopolitan, affluent American middle class. This theme emerged from a double reflection developed by historiography, which highlighted, on the one hand, how the narrative of the cultural Americanization of Italy alone was no longer sufficient to describe a phenomenon that seemed more articulated and brought an Italian contribution, and with the same logic European, to the United States, and on the other hand how a reflection on a specific Italian trait, Made in Italy, was necessary, not so much as a commercial label, but as a "public discourse on Italian-ness", (CINOTTO, CRISANTI, 2023, p.10) capable of contributing to the definition and promotion of Italian identity. As Gaia Caramellino and Paolo Scrivano note,

the bi-national or bi-directional dimension with which we often look at the phenomena of transfer [...] leaves numerous open questions, the level of clarity of which varies considerably from time to time. Firstly, if one reflects carefully, a bi-directional approach to the study of transfer phenomena leads one to question the intensity maintained over time by relations between individual national realities and the extent of their reciprocity, forcing us to probe the forms of exchange that materialise between spheres that often refer to very different conceptions of cultural identity and 'nationality' (CAMELLINO, SCRIVANO, 2023, p.311)

Moreover, this mainly affects specific historical disciplines, including the history of architecture. Furthermore, studies on the political, economic and cultural relations between Italy and the United States were able to verify, as Simone Cinotto and Giulia Crisanti observe, not only the processes of Americanisation of Italy but also the resistance to it, shedding "light on the reciprocity of influences between the two sides of the Atlantic, as well as on the various forms of 'selective appropriation' of American models in the different European countries". (CINOTTO, CRISANTI, 2023, p.13)

Made in Italy, to be meant "not only as a commercial label, and so as an economic resource, but also and above all as a public discourse on Italianness, and so as a historical-cultural construct in constant becoming, [...] was born and grew in a transatlantic context". (Ibid., p.10) It "exerts an influence both internally, recompacting and giving prestige to an Italy destroyed by the war, and externally, influencing and nurturing an American (and global) taste for Italy." (Ibid., p.16) It thus proves capable of operating on the double level of nation-building, i.e. the reconstruction of Italian identity after the dramas of fascism and the war, and on that of nation-branding, i.e. its promotion beyond national borders, operating on the front of the cultural Italianisation of a wealthy and cosmopolitan middle class in the United States.

With other eyes

In the face of this need to renew one's point of view with respect to a phenomenon, "to behold the hundred universes that each of them beholds," paraphrasing Proust⁸, it is first of all necessary to observe carefully what one wants to understand and describe

⁸ This is a sentence from *La Prisonnière*, the fifth volume of Marcel Proust's *La Recherche du temps perdu*, where it is written at greater length that "Le seul véritable voyage, le seul bain de Jouvence, ce ne serait pas d'aller vers de nouveaux paysages, mais d'avoir d'autres yeux, de voir l'univers avec les yeux d'un autre, de cent autres, de voir les cent univers que chacun d'eux voit, que chacun d'eux est". (PROUST, 1923, p.75)

by renouncing, as Daniel Arasse proposes for the interpretation of the work of art, to "vouloir interposer entre toi et l'oeuvre, une sorte de filtre solaire qui te protégerait de l'éclat de l'oeuvre et préserverait les habitudes acquises dans lesquelles se fonde et se reconnaît notre communauté académique". (ARASSE, 2000, p.1)

Even at first glance, transatlantic exchange does not present itself as a unitary phenomenon but rather as the result of a combination of different phenomena involving various cultural and productive sectors, and even less as a linear phenomenon: it is possible to note at least three types of movements that cross the Atlantic. The first originates in Italy and is traditionally associated with poverty, emergency, and emigration; the second originates in the United States and, in turn, is conventionally associated with prosperity, wealth, and the dissemination of a lifestyle. Finally, there are multiple movements, bouncing between the ocean's shores, enriching and altering at each landing on a different continent, such as those experienced in the vicissitudes of Olivetti, the well-known Ivrea company producing writing and calculating machines. Camillo Olivetti and his son Adriano travelled several times to the USA from the beginning of the 20th century to visit, among others, the Ford factories that were to represent an apparent reference for the scientific organisation of work in the Piedmontese factories. In the years of Adriano's leadership, however, the rigid Fordist-Taylorist structure will be overcome by a broader vision, which takes into consideration the different aspects, including the alienating ones, of industrial production and tries to cope with them through incentives and services imagined in a perspective of personal care in the complementary times of work and rest. In parallel, crossing the Atlantic in a twofold movement, not only the design of the products evolves, but also that of the means of promoting and marketing them, print and television advertisements, documentaries and films, technical manuals, informative brochures, and exhibitions and commercial spaces, in the words of Olga Gueft on *Interiors*⁹ "a great piece of showmanship, a stupendous display, and wonderful theatre". (AVERNA, 2022, p.45).

Moreover, transatlantic relations are not a simple phenomenon since the means of transfer, be they things, people, state bodies or organisations, events or manifestations, have entirely different characteristics and modes of fruition. Some are told to the American public: due to their size and complexity, they are merely the subject of a carefully constructed narrative, which often relies on a stereotyped image of Italy to make them desirable beyond the border. Others, instead, are directly experienced, landing on American soil introduced by that aura of appeal built for things and experiences that would have remained overseas. Through the gestures and eyes of their new recipients, both acquire new shades of meaning. Emblematic in this sense are the ocean liners, "very intricate vectors of italianità (Italianess) and essential means of transportation for ten years" (AVERNA, 2024, p.82), citadels in motion designed to signify a modern, active, technically capable Italy and at the same time attentive to the beauty and value of history: the Andrea Doria, in the pages of *Interiors*, "is, in fact, a culmination of the most extreme notions of sumptuous living characteristics of two civilisations, two distinctly different conceptions of nth design comfort -the American, or mechanised dream, and the European, or 'sybarite viewpoint'". (BRENNAN, 1953, p.90) They encounter different types of audiences: those who make the crossing to reach the new continent and, often, a new life with better securities and possibilities, or to return to Europe, experiencing its history and landscapes, and those who daydream about it, through advertisements, fashion reports, reviews. And through the eyes of this diverse audience - Italians at home, Americans and Italian-Americans in the US - this already complex structure is further articulated. [1]

⁹ *Interiors* was a magazine on interior architecture and design, published by Charles Whitney in New York from 1881 to 1977, which paid great attention to the world of Italian design in the post-war years, especially thanks to Olga Gueft, who was its editor-in-chief from 1952 until it ceased publication.

Transatlantic Transfers. Tools and methods for an integrated approach

Transatlantic Transfers. Instrumentos e métodos para uma abordagem integrada

Transatlantic Transfers. Instrumentos y métodos para un enfoque integrado



FIGURE 1 – Means of transportation and complexity of meanings.

Sources: *Transatlantic Transfers*. 2023

The former, from the last years of the war, were planning and implementing a strategy to project a renewed image of the country abroad that would make clear the change in its political, social and economic structure. Max Ascoli had moved in this direction when, from New York, he envisioned and launched the Handicraft Development Incorporated (HDI), a foundation to promote the recovery of handicrafts in Italy, encouraging production, promotion through product exhibitions and marketing in the United States through the House of Italian Handicraft (HIH). A renewal through work was Ponti's aim, who, in 1948, in an editorial in *Domus*, wrote:

Everything that is represented in this magazine has to be considered by Italian and foreign readers from a work perspective: that is to say, we want all pure art and home productions to be considered not only from a critical point of view but also from a work perspective, that is to say, as a presentation of works and production capacities that are means of life, prestige and value for the country, an expression and portrait of its vital capacities. (PONTI, 1948, p.IX).

On the other hand, US citizens see Italy as a country that is both close, rich in art and history, and remote because of its folklore, lifestyle, language and landscapes. Sometimes, they know it directly, sometimes only thanks to those goods that cross the ocean, such as objects, books or films. During the crossing, relentlessly, for each of these goods, there is a slight shift in meaning, linked not only to the translation, but also to how it is narrated, to the arguments on which the narrative relies, and to the adaptation to a different way of living, of inhabiting spaces, of understanding family, work, leisure. This was the case for many novels: in the translation of Alberto Moravia's *La Romana* (*The Woman of Rome*) in 1947, the 'complete and unabridged' aspect prevails and spills over into the cover illustration, which depicts a woman in dishevelled clothes and allusive poses. The success was such that the reference to the women of Rome was transferred to other translations and covers: Dante Arfelli's *I Superflui* became *The Girl of the Roman Night*, with a half-naked man embracing a woman in petticoats on the cover.

Lastly, Italian-Americans look at Italy with eyes full of affectionate nostalgia that makes one forget the harshness of the motherland and makes it the country of memory, which one no longer knows due to time and geographic distance, except

as it used to be, representing what one would like to be, but to which one no longer corresponds. The gaze of Italian-Americans, fundamental promoters of the products and lifestyle of the Bel Paese, is the most uncertain one, which fears upon returning to the abandoned homeland to find a landscape in which one no longer recognises oneself, as does John Fante who, having returned to Italy in 1957 to write the script for a film, is "unable to return to his father's country out of 'modesty, perhaps for fear of finding a banal reality, a Torcello la Peligna that does not resemble the country he knows drawn with few glimpses from his father's nostalgia and his imagination'", (AVERNA, 2023, p.22), as he told Baldo Fiorentino, who interviewed him during a visit to Naples.

Through things: the vectors of transatlantic transfer

A phenomenon, then, that is neither simple, nor linear, nor univocal, but reported to a multiplicity of means that convey an identity: how is it possible to get to know it and reread it from a perspective and in a way consistent with the complex structure we tried to outline in these paragraphs? In response to this challenging question, the Transatlantic Transfers research group tried to work out some strategies.

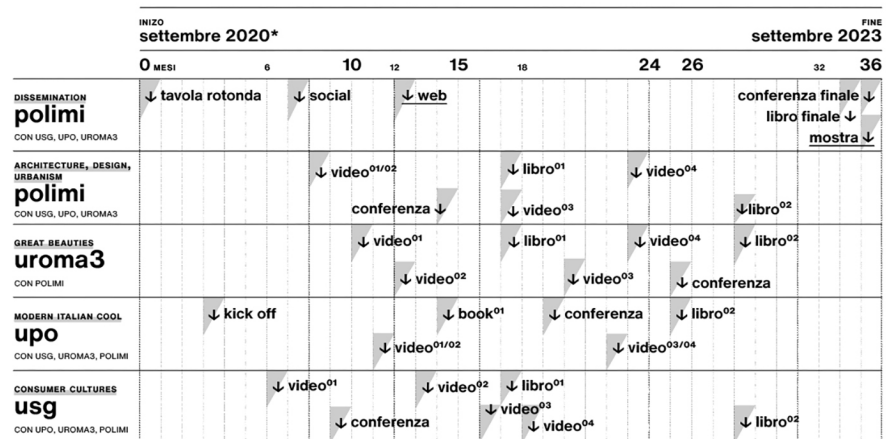


FIGURE 2 – Research groups, timeline, outcomes of the research project.

Sources: Transatlantic Transfers. 2020.

The first concerns the composition of the research group, composed of scholars from different disciplines and institutions, with their own and not necessarily corresponding traditions and study methods. Under the leadership of the Politecnico di Milano, which dealt with architecture, interiors, urban planning, industrial design and fashion in a design and historical sense¹⁰, three other research groups were gathered from the Università degli Studi Roma Tre for cinema, literature and art history¹¹ from the Università del Piemonte Orientale for English, Italian and Anglo-American literature¹² and from the Università di Scienze Gastronomiche di Pollenzo

10 Gennaro Postiglione, Principal Investigator, Marta Averna, Elena Montanari, Roberto Rizzi (Architecture of Interiors), Gaia Caramellino, Valeria Casali, Paolo Scrivano (History of Architecture), Paola Briata (Urban Planning), Chiara Colombi, Alessandra Spagnoli (Industrial Design).

11 Enrico Carocci, associate investigator, Ilaria A. De Pascalis, Giuseppe Gatti, Veronica Pravadelli, Matteo Santandrea (Cinema), Lara Conte (History of Art), Sabrina Vellucci (Literature)

12 Cristina Iuli, associate investigator, Gioele Cristofari, Cecilia Gibellini, Stefano Morello, Giulia Pellizzato, Carla Pomarè, Marta Zonca (literature)

for contemporary and consumption history¹³ [2] This made it possible to deal with phenomena of a different nature with a sufficient level of depth, with the idea of keeping central a "dialectic of tension between the desire to characterise a specific context and the need to relate it to others, between the identification of specificities and the recognition of similarities," (REMOTTI, 2019, p.13) making scholars and experiences speak, and thus discovering a surprising convergence of intentions, in goods and products designed and produced in the period under review. The effort was to overcome a process that had as its result parts that were still autonomous, confronted only at the margins, to generate indentations that configure cooperative but self-sufficient gears and construct ensemble figures, which put even very different elements into a system. In other words, it was also necessary to define a way, referring to the materials and documents analysed, that would make them comparable while respecting their differences, in order to carry out a study that was "multi-textual, as well as multi-disciplinary". (CINOTTO; CRISANTI, 2023, p.14)

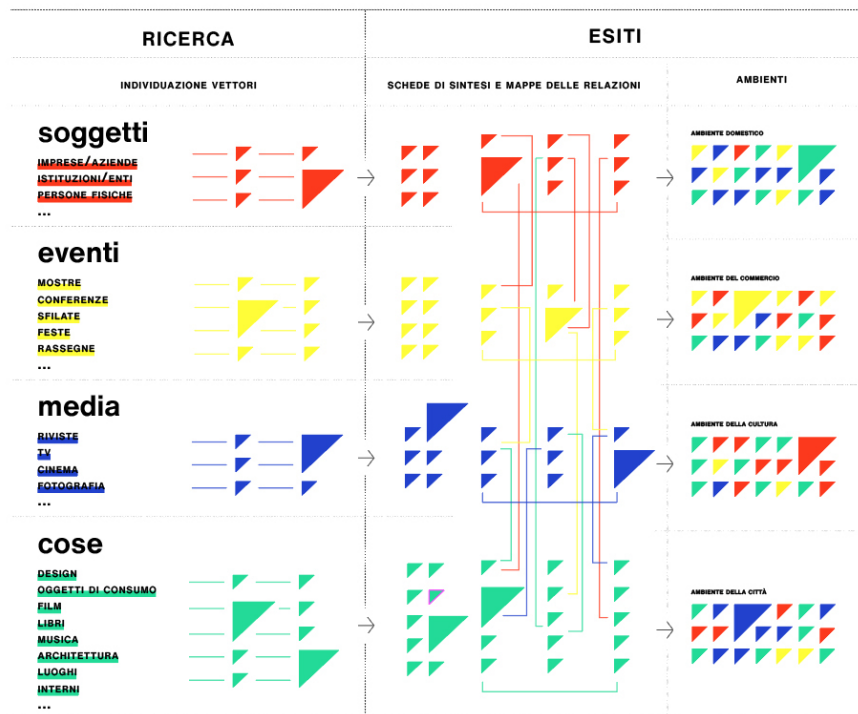


FIGURE 3 – Vectors, maps, scenarios: qualities and relations among the research instruments.

Sources: *Transatlantic Transfers*.2020

It is precisely in this logic that the various media of transatlantic exchange have been redefined, regardless of their nature, by a single name: they are vectors, "a figure of synthesis [...] capable of affecting a context, a force that possesses one or more origins, whose direction of action depends on the conditions around it and whose incidence depends on the force with which it knows how to act in a manner congruent with its destination". (RIZZI, 2023, p.15) Vectors are "items (objects, projects and realisations), as well as subjects (people, companies, institutional bodies), media (newspapers, magazines, books, videos and films), and events (exhibitions, parades and meetings)", bearers "of a cultural and identity content that has spread beyond national borders, and has proved capable of affecting the culture and lifestyle of the country that received it". (AVERNA, 2023, p.19) Some re-emerge from the past and represent the traces of an original thought on the relationship between Italy and the

¹³ Simone Cinotto, associate investigator, Giulia Crisanti (Contemporary History), Michele Dantini, Michela Morelli (History of Art)

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United States. In contrast, others have been reworked and bear witness to subsequent interpretations of the same phenomenon. [3] They allow us to move through time, which makes "the contemporaneity of what is not contemporary emerge" (BLOCH spud RIZZI, 2023, pp.14) and verify its influence on the present. All the things involved in Italian-American exchanges in the post-World War II years, regardless of their nature, are described through the same record (with the same information, categories, and nomenclature) and thus made comparable.



FIGURE 4 – Books, journals and conferences.

Sources: Mimesis. 2023/2024

The last strategy concerns the tools for synthesising and disseminating the research results. In addition to making use of more traditional tools for the scientific community, such as conferences and presentations¹⁴ publications in journals and scientific monographs [4], and exhibitions¹⁵ several advanced tools were specifically designed, which made extensive use of digital media and the web, in order to be easily accessible to all the communities involved: the Atlas of Modern Transatlantic Transfers and the digital exhibition Transatlantic Transfers. Objects, Aesthetics, and Narratives of Italy in the United States. 1949/1972.

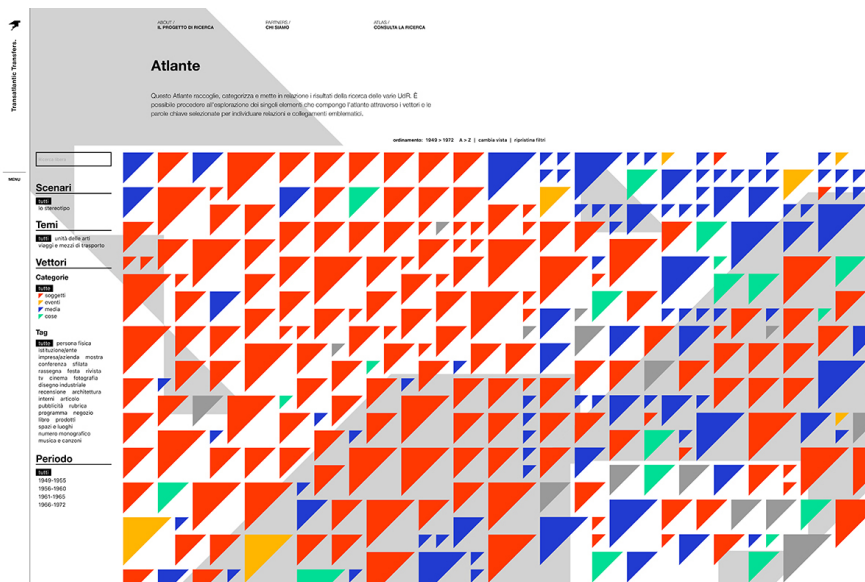


FIGURE 5 – Weighted vectors in the opening page of the Atlas of Modern Transatlantic Transfers

Sources: Transatlantic Transfers. 2021

14 25/26 June 2021, Consumismi transatlantici moderni. Culture del consumo e prodotti italiani negli Stati Uniti del dopoguerra, Facoltà di Scienze Gastronomiche di Pollenzo (CINOTTO; CRISANTI, 2023); 7/9 April 2022, The Italian Presence in Post-war America, 1949-1972. Architecture, Design, Fashion, Politecnico di Milano (AVERNA, 2023; POSTIGLIONE; RIZZI, 2023); 9/11 June 2022, Transatlantic Literary Networks. 1949-1972. Translation, Modernity, and Cultural Transfer between Italy and The United States, Università del Piemonte Orientale (IULI; MORELLO, 2024); 9/11 November 2022, Transatlantic Visions 1949-1972. Italian film cultures and modernisms in post-war America, Università Roma Tre (CAROCCI; DE PASCALIS; PRAVADELLI, 2023); 17, 24 November, 01 December 2022, Narrazioni atlantiche e arti visive 1949-1972. Sguardi "fuori fuoco", politiche espositive, "identità italiana", americanismo | antiamericanismo, Università Roma Tre (CONTE; DANTINI, 2024).

15 The collections of essays referring to individual conferences were complemented by a few monographic issues of journals, on the history of consumer goods (CINOTTO; IULI, 2024a) and on literature (CINOTTO; IULI, 2024b).

The vectors are collected in a digital and interactive repository, the Atlas of Modern Transatlantic Transfers (<https://transatlantictransfers.polimi.it/it/atlas/>), [5] where they can be explored individually in the forms that present their identification data, a descriptive text, some images, bibliographical sources and links to vectors that are related or involved in their realisation (the so-called actors). [6] These make it possible to highlight relations and interferences, generating maps of relations, even very complex ones, originating from particularly prolific vectors that have activated multiple action plans. Groupings can then order the vectors, suggested by the curators or imagined by the users: among the former are scenarios and themes that have emerged over the years of research, categories and tags relating to the nature of the assets analysed and their material constitution, or their periodisation. The Atlas is open to infinite expansion since it can incorporate other research results to systematise them with the already acquired data. It can be ordered freely according to the research interests of its users: in this way, it allows new research tracks and themes to emerge and to clarify those already explored.

Conte Grande
 ALLESTIMENTO DI UN TRANSANTLANTICO

1927 / 1962

scenari
 categorie cose
 tag interni

BIO PONTI architetto
NINO ZONCADA progettista
ALDO GIROGLIA architetto
PIERO FORNASETTI artista
FAUSTO MELOTTI scultore
PAOLO DE POLI artista
CASSINA produzione tavolo
EDINA ALTARA artista
LUCIO FONTANA artista
PIETRO MELANDRI artista

Vettori collegati

O.A.R.N. direttore Amministrazione
 Gio Ponti architetto
 Nino Zoncada progettista
 Aldo Girolia architetto
 Fausto Melotti scultore
 Paolo De Poli artista
 Cassina
 Edina Altara artista
 Lucio Fontana artista
 Pietro Melotti scultore
 Matteo Longoni progettista

Media gallery

Documenti consultabili
 brochure illustrativa della nave, Archivio Matteo Longoni

Fonti
 Fazio, M. 1949. «Ritorno del Conte Grande.» *Le vie d'Italia*. 1949. «Il transatlantico Conte Grande.» *La Marina Italiana*. Ufficio Stampa della Italia, Società di Navigazione, a cura di. 1950. *Le arti sul Conte Grande*. Milano. 1950. «Opere d'arte sul Conte Grande.» *Domus* (244): 14/20. 1950. «Oro sul Conte Grande.» *Domus* (244): 21/25. 1950. «Un ambiente sul Conte Grande.» *Domus* (244): 26. Piccione, Paolo. 2007. *Gio Ponti. Le navi. Il progetto degli interni navali*. Milano: Idea books.

FIGURE 6 – Vectors in the Atlas of Modern Transatlantic Transfers

Sources: *Transatlantic Transfers*. 2021

To close the project, a synthesis tool was imagined, representing the state of the art, research development at a specific time, and the progress of studies. It had to be widely usable, reaching a broad audience beyond scholars and researchers from Italy and the United States of America. In short, it had to constitute a bridge in perfect adherence with the matter of which it constitutes a representation. It was therefore imagined, a virtual exhibition, which reveals its coherence with the project in its extensive accessibility and in its nature as a transversal research tool, capable of putting into a system in its dematerialised rooms not only the complexity of a world and the relations to which it opens, but also graphic and digital skills, constructing an innovative product and showing in its forms that artistic and production capacity that all Made in Italy proposes as specifically Italian.

FIGURE 7 – Opening page of the digital exhibition Transatlantic Transfers. Objects, Aesthetics and Narratives of Italy in the United States. 1949/1972.

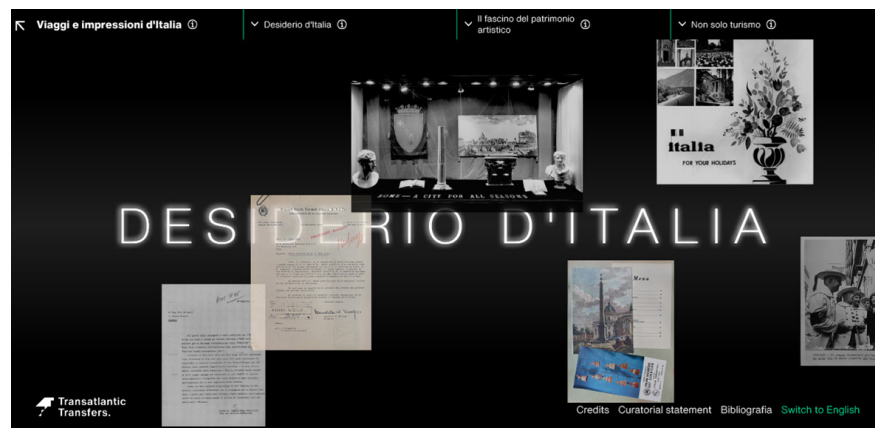
Sources: Transatlantic Transfers. 2024



The object of great attention both from a curatorial point of view, since it had to bring together disciplines and scholars accustomed to their autonomy, and from an exhibition design point of view since it required the design of a specific tool capable of arousing interest and maintaining attention despite the digital medium, the exhibition Transatlantic Transfers. Objects, Aesthetics and Narratives of Italy in the United States. 1949/1972 collected the primary outcomes of the research in six scenarios. [7] Travels and Impressions of Italy discusses the image of post-war Italy in the imagination of the American middle classes, between literature, cinema and modernity. Lifestyle, instead, describes how the practices, spaces and brands of a new Italian Style, imbued with the quality of handicraft-cultural products and lifestyle, penetrate the North American imagination, conditioning the United States' gaze towards the peninsula. Spaces and objects of everyday life are fundamental vectors of a new Italian and modern way of living: they allow one to experience A New Country, and in the meanwhile, they are the means of a New Italian Renaissance, which first of all overcomes the recent fascist past, telling its story with new references to medieval and Renaissance history and art. In the two decades following the Second World War, Italy was admired and criticised from across the Atlantic as the product of the tension between a cumbersome past and a present in redefinition: the legacy of a noble past, that of the Classical Reflections of Romanity and the Renaissance, and the legacy of the ancestral and rural tradition of As We Are, As We Were. In any case, the United States looks with fascination at the seemingly light and disenchanted way in which the Italians approach the impressive heritage they inherited to intervene in it, enabling the development of modern life: an ability to flank the existing by exalting it, touching it in a few carefully drawn points and showcasing characters and traits that were in danger of being lost. History pervades and does not overwhelm: the Italians, in the eyes of their overseas observers, possess this rare and peculiar ability to deal with it. [8]

FIGURE 8 – One of the scenarios of the exhibition Transatlantic Transfers. Objects, Aesthetics and Narratives of Italy in the United States. 1949/1972.

Sources: Transatlantic Transfers. 2024



All the young researchers involved in the project contributed to each scenario, albeit in different measures depending on the theme: thus, the scenario Public Spaces, Shared Lives integrates the spontaneous and vernacular architecture of the Little Italies, which looks back to gangster movies, first and foremost The Godfather, the critical reflection on the Italian city that runs through the sketches of Costantino Nivola and the letters from Italy by John Fante, the literature of representation and denunciation of the backwardness of a still rural South, such as that of Fontamara by Ignazio Silone, to which many films, such as Stromboli, correspond. All these different ingredients are integrated into a scenario whose coherence is appreciated, confirming the project for constructing a new Italian identity that we have spoken of several times in these pages.

All that is left in each of them is a scenographer (BARTHES, 1976, p.6)

Both outcomes, the exhibition and the Atlas, have a value in themselves which goes beyond that strictly inherent to the research project: they are finished products, usable in an autonomous way, whose qualities and expressive capacities can be appreciated. As in the comparison that Roland Barthes sets up between Sade, Fourier and Loyola, at the end of the classification process that each of the three philosophers initiates, the specificities are forgotten: "Sade is no longer an erotic, Fourier no longer a utopian, Loyola no longer a saint." (BARTHES, 1976, p.6) The achievement of their work remains, and its value, even if the author is forgotten. "All that is left in each of them is a scenographer: he who disperses himself across the framework he sets up and arranges ad infinitum". (Ibid.)

So, it is the process that led to the design of new ways of analysing, comparing, and disseminating research content. When one looks at the final product, all the premises are hidden, and only the outcome remains. Furthermore, suppose this is capable of narrating a way of understanding relations between worlds and cultures that is not made up of overpowering but of listening and of a willingness to observe and understand what is different from oneself. In that case, it is charged with a meaning that goes beyond the contingent meaning of post-World War II Italian-American relations, which reminds us that:

This common of the intelligible is the common of the human. Though men or cultures never understand one another completely, we must nevertheless set it forth as a principle—as an a priori necessity (as a transcendental necessity of the human)—that they can understand one another; and it is this possibility alone of understanding the diversity of the human—as through languages— that yields the "human." (JULIEN, 2021, p.73)

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