

ABSTRACT PRIN 2017

Free-range chicken. Cinema and the New Culture of Consumption in Italy (1950-1973)

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The research project PRIN 2017 *Free-range chicken. Cinema and the New Culture of Consumption in Italy* (1950-1973) questioned the role that cinema played in the processes of Italy's modernization, with a particular reference to the diffusion of the new culture of consumption during the so-called "golden age of capitalism", (1950-1973). We intend "cinema" as an institution, that is, as the sum of industrial processes of film production, distribution and exhibition, rooted in a specific historical context. With the notion of "consumer culture" we address the ways in which individuals and families have experienced and processed the daily exposure to the distinctive consumer goods typical of Western societies during the second half of the 20th century. This object of study has been traditionally neglected by film scholars, undoubtedly due to the problematic identification of suitable sources, methodologies and tools for the extensive investigation of such a culturally significant theme. In terms of periodization, the

project has taken into account the period of time defined by Eric Hobsbawm as "the golden age of capitalism"; this choice is motivated by two main reasons. First of all, the nature and structure of consumption gradually changed in Italy during that time, due to the massive imports of American goods and cultural products, the significant increase of the national and per capita incomes, and the rapid increase of the youth population. In the context of a considerable expansion of consumption during the 1950s and 1960s, food expenses decreased for the first time to under half of the available resources, while other kinds of expenses (transport, communication and culture, hygiene and health, and durable goods) started to increase. Secondly, in the same period, the media system has undergone a progressive process of "commercialization", that is, the quantity, quality, and social visibility of consumer goods offered by advertising increased significantly. Long before reaching its full potential in the context of private broadcasting—as a consequence of

the so-called “air deregulation” of the second half of the 1970s—a varied and impressive materialist imagination spread transversally in Italian society in proportion to the increase of advertising investments in the press, national TV and radio broadcasting, billboards, and cinematic spaces.

The project followed three different perspectives. In the first place, we have examined the ways in which cinema has made consumer goods a central element of film narrative, staging their narrativisation through different (often biased) articulations. Secondly, we have investigated the extent to which cinema was explicitly thematized within the national public debate that arose at that time around the incipient phenomenon of mass consumption. Thirdly, we have explored how cinema was strategically used in the context of advertising campaigns envisioned by the popular illustrated press. In this respect, each team involved examined a large amount of comparable materials, according to their respective outlooks, starting from the exploration of a wide range of Italian periodicals published in the same period, including film magazines (such as *Cinema Nuovo*), popular illustrated magazines (such as *Oggi*), political and cultural magazines (such as *L'Espresso*), women's magazines (such as *Annabella*), and teen and children's magazines (such as *Big* and *Il Corriere dei Piccoli*).

The team selected materials thematizing the relationship between cinema and consumption: documents of different editorial typology—ranging from magazine covers to photo-text, from letters to advertising, from articles to film reviews—have been selected, photographed and had their metadata recorded in order to aggregate both bibliographical references and relevant information for the researchers to locate the resource. This series of reflections has been developed within the framework of a database of digitized sources populated by the research project group and specifically developed in accordance with the most advanced

digital humanities standards. It is accessible, by registration, through the official website of PRIN (<https://ilpolloruspante.unime.it>). In addition to this research product, the project output includes the publication of a monographic journal issue (“Il cinema e la nuova cultura dei consumi in Italia: discorsi, pubblicità, rappresentazioni”, *L'avventura. International Journal of Italian Film and Media Landscape*, ns 2022), along with a series of conference, seminar and workshop presentations, and a forthcoming collection of volumes in the series “Cinema, media and consumption” to be published by Marsilio.