

# **TAILORING AN INDUSTRY TO SUIT INTERNATIONAL MARKETS: THE EMERGENCE OF ITALIAN FASHION ON THE WORLD SCENES IN THE POST-WW2 YEARS**

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## **Introduction**

This paper is more a detailed research agenda than the presentation of the final outputs of a completed research project. The development of the Italian fashion industry was a long and gradual process, dating back at least to the mid-19th century when the industrial basis of the fashion pipeline were put in place. However, it was only after World War Two that Italy's fashion system started to move from a mainly local reality to a well-developed international business. It is precisely to the question of how such a change occurred that this research tries to answer, focusing on the different tools used by Italian fashion to “conquer” the international and domestic markets in two different phases of its development. The two periods here considered (1950s/mid-1960s and mid-1960s/1970s) presented diverse constraints and opportunities for Italian fashion. We will see that although international standing was first achieved in the 1950s by Italian couturiers thanks to the catwalk shows of Florence which starred high-fashion collections, it was in the 1970s that Italian fashion gained its definitive identity and unique personality within the world fashion system. This is the period in which Milan was fully recognized as one of the world fashion capitals and Italian fashion became associated with designer-made *prêt-à-porter*. The result was a specific blend of features that are still today distinctive of the Italian system in comparison to its foreign counterparts. These notes try to answer to the question of why this change of identity occurred and how this lasting success was achieved.

## **1. The post-WW2 economic boom and the clothing industry**

During the 1950s Italy's economy experienced a spectacular growth, mirrored by a wide range of indicators (see Table 1). For the first time the secondary sector overcame agriculture

in the composition of GDP: in 1954 workers employed in the primary sector were more than 8 million, which fell to less than 5 million ten years after: from 40% to 25% of total active population (while in the secondary sector in the same period the trend is the opposite: from 32% to 40%). GDP per capita in 1950 was 100 compared to 186 of Western Europe, while in 1960 the ratio was 100 (Italy) to 165 (Western Europe) and ten years later the gap was reduced to 100 (Italy) to 148 (Western Europe). Between 1951 and 1961 average annual growth of GDP was 5.8%, reaching its peak in the years of the Italian “economic miracle” (1958-1962; peak year was 1961 with an 8.6% growth rate of GDP). Between 1954 and 1963 per capita income increased from 350.000 to 571.000 lire.

Table 1. Quantitative data concerning the Italian economic boom (1951-1963)

	1951-1958	1958-1963
Rate of growth of GDP	5.3	6.6
Rate of growth of industrial production	6.8	10.2
Exports/GDP	9.2	11.3
Imports/GDP	8.5	10.8
Employed in agriculture/Total employed	42.2	29.1

Source: G. Balcet, *L'economia italiana. Evoluzione, problemi, paradossi*, Milano, 1997, p. 51

As a matter of fact, by the end of the “miracle” (roughly 1963) Italy could definitely claim a seat among the small group of advanced industrialized nations. It is important to point out that the changes that occurred in this period were surely not only of an economic kind, as social transformations were equally deep and impressive: Italians were moving from the countryside into big cities, their higher incomes made it possible to purchase an increasingly wider array of consumer goods, especially household appliances, automobiles and clothing (see Table 2).

Table 2. Increase in consumption in Italy during 1951-1963 (1951 = 100; 1985 prices)

	1951	1955	1958	1960	1963
Private consumption	100	121	138	155	197
Public consumption	100	116	131	143	162

Source: R. Petri, *Storia economica d'Italia*, p. 189

Between 1951 and 1963 private consumption grew at an average annual rate of 5.9%, although the major increase occurs during the end of the period here considered. Indeed, in 1951-1959 average annual growth was of 4.8%, while in 1959-1962 (the “miracle” years) private consumption increased of 8% annually. For the first time since political unification of

the country (1861) domestic (private) consumption became an important factor promoting economic growth, although exports continued to play a primary role (especially in the 1950s). Wealth, along with urbanization, transformed the Italians' lifestyles, their expenditure and consumption patterns.

As is well known, a major contribution to the positive performance of the Italian economy in these years came from the United States through the channel of the European Recovery Program. For the purpose of these notes, suffice it to say that the United States not only provided capitals, investments, technology and know how to Italian firms but their importance also consisted in the opening of a new, large (and growing), wealthy market for Italian goods. This is especially true in the case of the clothing and fashion industry, which had suffered up until that point from the relatively small size and low incomes of the Italian domestic market. As far as the clothing and fashion industry are concerned, the process of "Americanization" consisted not only of the diffusion of new organizational models within the industry, with the result of an increase of productivity, but also in the widening of the demand for high-quality goods (apparel and accessories). Moreover, the spread of the "American" way of life started to influence also Italian habits: slowly, but surely, Italians overcame their traditional distaste for ready-made, industrially produced clothing and began to abandon the customary habit of home-tailoring their outfits.

However, as pointed out by Elisabetta Merlo (Merlo 2003, *Annali*, p. 671), at the beginning of the 1950s Italian consumers were still largely wary of industrial-made clothing. While the latter was generally depicted as low-quality and represented a second-choice option, the majority of population (especially in the poorest parts of the country) still preferred to dress with custom-made garments. It is in the second half of the 1950s and in the beginning of the following decade that Italian consumers start to become familiar with ready-made clothing. The increasing demand is exploited by some of the major Italian textile companies (such as GFT and Marzotto) who diversify their activities and are the first to manufacture and distribute ready-made clothing at a national level. For sure, the process was not simple, as it required not only the modernization of productive technologies, but also the introduction of fixed sizes and the creation of a widespread distribution network able to overcome the obstacle created by the backwardness of Italian retailing. Equally important were the investments in marketing, made necessary by the above-mentioned circumspection with which Italians looked at ready-made clothing in this period.

Table 3. Consumption of clothing and incomes in Italy, 1955-1961 (ISTAT data)

	Per capita income (lire)	Per capita expenditure on clothing (lire)	Weigh of per capita expenditure on clothing on per capita income
1955	243,608	20,603	8.5 %
1956	260,934	21,807	8.4 %
1957	278,945	23,001	8.2 %
1958	297,153	23,016	7.7 %
1959	316,166	23,626	7.5 %
1960	342,351	25,242	7.4 %
1961	374,623	26,474	7.1 %

Source: calculations from I. Paris, *Oggetti cuciti*, 2006, p. 322

Notwithstanding the expansion of the Italian market and the parallel growth of the country's clothing industry (see Table 3), domestic consumption was largely oriented towards low-quality products. For sure, incomes were still much too low to make the Italian market the privileged counterpart of Italian fashion. This is especially true at the beginning of the 1950s, when Giovanni Battista Giorgini, descendant of a noble Florentine family and well-known buyer for many US top-end department stores, organized the show that has been elected as the birth-date of Italian fashion.

## 2. Giovanni Battista Giorgini and the upsurge of Italian high-fashion (*Alta Moda*)

Although it is not our concern to award certifications of primacy in this field, surely it must be recognized to Giorgini the merit of having transformed into a properly international phenomenon the production of Italian fashion ateliers which up until that point was surely a minor business, very often a strongly local (not even national) fact. It is thanks to Giorgini's understanding of the changes occurring within the international markets for fashionable goods that Italian producers managed to achieve world-wide reputation. It was Giorgini who granted Italian *couturiers* a place in the international press (not only in specialized fashion magazines), as shown by an article published on January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1952 by the New York Times, which quoted the words of Mrs. Eleanor Reamer Smith, stylist for Kaufmann's department store in Pittsburgh: "You can't explain to people the beauty you have seen here [in Florence]. You have to bring it home and show it to them". As previously mentioned, the channel through which Italian fashion attained its first success was still a quite traditional one, i.e. the custom made production of high fashion *couturiers*. Surely, Italian high fashion represented

elements of novelty which distinguished it from the hitherto dominating Parisian *couture* but the market segment and the productive characteristics were overall rather similar. Actually, one could say that the international success of Italian fashion in the 1950s and 1960s was largely the result of the weaknesses experienced by French couturiers at the end of World War Two.

As a matter of fact, Italy's tradition in the manufacture of clothes and fashion accessories had started well before the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Starting with the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and especially during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the main weakness of Italian *couturiers* and fashion producers was their subjection to Paris. The economic and social changes which were transforming the West in the post-war years play a crucial role in determining the success of Giorgini's idea of creating a strong and well-defined image of Italian fashion to be exported in the rest of the world, and especially in the United States. Giorgini's success would not be understandable without considering that WW2 had created big difficulties to Paris *haute couture*. Not only did the French *ateliers* (exactly like their counterparts from other nations) suffer from the scarcity of raw materials and from the restrictions imposed on clothing by governments and largely deriving from the economic hardships of the war period. What was peculiar of the Parisian situation was that the French association of *couturiers* (the *Chambre syndicale de la couture parisienne*) had been forced to react against the Nazi determination to move such a profitable source of business to Germany. The result had been that many Parisian ateliers had decided to shut down. What is more, at the end of the conflict the strategy adopted by the *Chambre syndicale* was that of a resolute concentration on extremely expensive, ostentatious and glamorous creations (well exemplified by Christian Dior's "New Look") which however in those circumstances represented a declining market segment. To this one must add the restrictions on matters concerning exportation of models, permission of reproduction and license of French designs (Veillon 1990 and Kawamura 2004).

The resulting end of the French monopoly on world fashion represented an opportunity for Italian fashion producers to expand the scope of their activity and to attempt to conquer a place in international markets. The point is that in the past there had been numerous attempts to establish an Italian style autonomous from the dominating French one, which had culminated in the strenuous efforts devoted by Benito Mussolini in the interwar years to emancipate Italian fashion from the French "tyranny". The failure of the Fascist attempts is clear, as Italian women remained convinced that the capital of high fashion was Paris and

would accept to buy Italian produced dresses only given that they were designed according to French models.

As we have seen above, in the years immediately following WW2 it was still the scarcity of demand that constituted the main flaw of Italian fashion. As for the supply side, Italian ateliers were seen by foreign experts in the field (such as journalists of the American fashion press, who after the war were devoting an increasing attention to the Italian clothing and textile industry) as able of producing high quality items, obtained thanks to their traditional artisan skills and to the use of high quality textiles. In this respect, in the post-WW2 years the United States provided new opportunities to Italian producers who could try to exploit the growing American market. Such prospects were made even more inviting by the fact that French *haute couture* appeared progressively less adequate at adapting to the changes occurring in the demand which was shifting towards an increasing request for high quality and elegant clothes combining two main characteristics: prices had to be affordable for the upper-middle class women and style had to enable these dresses to be worn by emancipated, active women in their everyday lives.

Giovanni Battista Giorgini (1899-1971) was the first to make an attempt to exploit this new type of demand, also counting on the low cost of Italian labor immediately after the war. One of Giorgini's major assets was his deep knowledge of the American market acquired during his activity as buyer for Italian artisan products on behalf of some of the United States' top-end department stores. Given his first hand experience, Giorgini knew that it was important to present a strong image of Italian fashion to the overseas buyers, who were skeptical of the fact that Italy could boast an autonomous design capability, as at the time most Italian designs were actually only a copy of French models. Giorgini thus decided to demonstrate Italy's potential in a clamorous way. He organized a collective fashion show of emerging Italian designers in his villa in Florence to which he invited a small group of fashion journalists and American buyers. The event, which took place on February 12, 1951 is conventionally seen as the official birth date of Italian fashion, because thanks to the success of Giorgini's idea, Italian designs entered international markets. By organizing the event only a couple of days after the Parisian show, Giorgini had demonstrated the autonomous creativity of Italian ateliers.

In fact, Giorgini's project was quite simple and basically consisted in setting up a mechanism which would enable Italian fashion to demonstrate to an international audience its unique

features and its potentialities. Firstly, in order to present the production of Italian ateliers as something distinct from the well-known and predominant French *couture*, Giorgini obliged the Italian designers to present new collections that from a stylistic point of view did not echo what was shown on the Parisian catwalks. To stress even more the autonomous creativity of Italian designers, the show was organized only a couple of days after the Parisian show. The second problem that Giorgini had to face was that he needed a sort of “critical mass” in order to impress the audience. For this reason he organized a collective show, inviting eleven ateliers (Carosa, Fabiani, Fontana, Marucelli, Noberasco, Schuberth, Simonetta, Vanna, Veneziani, La Tessitrice dell’Isola, Pucci) to present their models (a total of 180). This made it possible to display to an international audience (buyers of the major US department stores and journalists of the most important fashion magazines, especially the American ones) the production of ateliers that were dispersed in different Italian cities (Florence, Rome, Milan) and that had previously organized only individual shows for their customers. Thirdly, Giorgini needed to convey to his audience the idea that Italian fashion was unique. In order to do this, he exploited the fact that it relied on centuries’ of excellence in craftsmanship and could benefit from the unrivaled artistic legacy of the Renaissance. To stress this inimitable feature, Giorgini hosted the first show in his beautiful Villa, in the hills surrounding Florence. The event was a full success: not only were all the collections that took part to the show purchased by the buyers attending it, but the happening had an enormous echo in the most prestigious international fashion magazines. The following editions of the “Italian High Fashion Show” saw an increasing attendance, which compelled Giorgini to organize the 1952 edition in the famous and beautiful Sala Bianca (White Chamber) of Florence’s magnificent Palazzo Pitti. The success of Giorgini’s show is mirrored also in the figures concerning the sales and reproduction deals sealed in that occasion: in the third edition (January 1952) they amounted to 7 billion lire.

The success of his recipe is to be found basically in the following ingredients. Firstly, the predominating look and styles proposed by the Italian collections met the expectations of US buyers. The quality of fabrics, the designs of the silks and the finishing were impressive, but the appearance was not as opulent and lavish as those of the French *haute couture* models. The enthusiasm of the overseas market were well expressed by Carmel Snow, editor of the fashion bible Harper’s Bazaar, in a statement made to the New York Times: “Italian fabrics

are superlative; the Italians' sense of color is marvelous and their clothes are fresh and beautiful" (NYT, January 28<sup>th</sup> 1952).

The Italian dresses looked more casual and could actually be worn by those American upper-class women who had an active lifestyle. Even more important, the prices of the Italian collections were much lower compared to their Parisian counterparts: an Italian tailor-made wool dress could cost 240 dollars, while a similar model in Paris could cost twice as much. According to *Women's Wear Daily*, in 1952 a *couture* model in Italy could cost between 130 and 250 dollars (daywear) and from 120 to 500 dollars in case of evening dresses (see White 2000). Again, according to the New York Time's Florentine correspondent "Parisian prices had soared completely out of this world [...] and since Italian *couturiers* are offering their wares at a price exactly half those of the French, there is an obvious inducement to buy in quantity here".

In any case, it is important to stress that the fashion shows organized by Giorgini in Florence were events that did not basically trespass the boundaries of "High Fashion" (*alta moda*). Even if there were some "boutique" collections (think of Emilio Pucci), the majority of the models were hand-made, unique creations. Fashion as it was shown in the beautifully frescoed chambers of Palazzo Pitti was nevertheless the outcome of extremely skilled artisan work.

### **3. The change of 1960s: from *haute couture* to *prêt-à-porter***

By the mid 1960s Italy had become an industrial nation. During that decade income per capita was increasing while consumption was not only growing, but also becoming more and more diversified.

One of the major events of this period were the harsh social tensions of the second half of the 1960s resulting in the approval of the "Workers' Statute" (1970) which significantly improved the country's welfare system. Its effects were twofold: on one side, it eliminated to a large extent one of the basis on which the previous growth had rested, i.e. the low cost of labor. On the other side, however, the increase in wages contributed to the growth of consumption and to the expansion of the domestic market.

As far as clothing is concerned, Italians started to dress in order to express their social status: consumption became a means to achieve social distinction and to climb the social ladder whose steps had become more clearly distinct following the economic boom of the previous



decade. Contemporary commentators and historians have talked about a “democratization of luxury” to refer to the fact that spending money on symbolic-intensive and not strictly functional garments started to become diffused among growing segments of the Italian population. For the clothing industry this meant that its success could no longer rest on the coupling of low prices and good quality as had happened in the previous years, when low incomes meant that most consumers could not afford to freely chose their outfits according to their desires.

This is an important point to keep in mind, as it had momentous consequences for Italy’s fashion system, which by the end of the 1960s showed features that were quite diverse from those of the 1950s. The major change was the shift from the predominance of high fashion to the preponderance of designer made ready-to-wear. We can well say that by the mid-1970s designer made ready-to-wear (or *prêt-à-porter*) represented the distinct characteristic and principal asset of Italian fashion.

The foundations of the Italian fashion system moved away from the artisan produced *haute couture* which had been the protagonist of the 1950s towards designer branded ready-to-wear which rested on a previously inedited cooperation between industrial firms and designers. The discontinuity compared to the previous situation was emblematically symbolized by the emergence of Milan as the new world capital of Italian fashion. The gateway through which Italian creativity (in clothing and accessories, especially female ones) reached international markets was no longer Florence, which proved to be locked in a model that was no longer able to respond to the market changes which characterized the second half of the 1960s and the following decade.

Indeed, the new direction taken by Italian fashion was largely a response to a situation of crisis following the social turmoil of the end of the 1960s, the emergence of a new category of consumers with new needs (teenagers) and the increasing diversification and segmentation of demand deriving from the increase in incomes. The overall result of these changes was a refusal of the “anonymous” traditional ready-made garments and the growth of the demand for high-quality, “style-intensive” clothing. At the same time, the market for *haute couture* was becoming smaller. Apparel and accessories now were expected to express a “personal” or individual style, yet they had to be relatively inexpensive. The solution came from providing a stylistic connotation to industrial production. This was achieved thanks to a new professional figure which gained momentum in these years. It was the rise of the designer

(*stilista*), acting as a sort of *trait d'union* between the entrepreneur and the market and providing the clothing industry with a much needed injection of creativity.

It was the designer's duty to decide which market to target (although, differently from a *couturier*, he did not customize his products). The designer also had to be acquainted with the limits and potentialities of the productive system of the firm (although differently from the entrepreneur or the manager he was not in charge of the firm's activity). For his collections the designer had to employ materials produced by the firm, although differently from the typical production of standardized ready-to-wear he could ask for and work at modifications to suit his needs. In sum, one could say that the kind of work expected from the designer was to coordinate and supervise the flow of the fashion pipeline. Such a result could be achieved most effectively if the designer was not properly part of the firm because in this way he could have a global – almost a bird's eye – view of the entire process, from the selection of raw materials to the demand coming from the markets. The designer's independence from the firm was crucial also for the second critical task that the designer was required to perform: the provision of symbolic, aesthetic value to industrial products in order to make them appealing to specific market segments.

In return, the industrial counterpart endowed the designer with the financial support and productive capabilities essential for his creative activity. We can say that it was the designer's business to create models which would satisfy a specific typology of demand while it was his industrial counterpart (i.e. a clothing or textile manufacturer to which he was professionally tied) who was in charge of producing and distributing the finished goods.

The effects of this structural change are well mirrored by the growth of the production of Italian women's *prêt-à-porter*: between 1960 and 1970 the production of *tailleurs* (women's suits) moves from 390,000 to 2 million, while the export of clothing between 1961 and 1976 grows at an annual average rate of 17.8% (see Messina, 1987).

#### **4. The rise of the designer: Walter Albini**

The above-described change in the structure of the Italian fashion system and the consequent transformation of the international representation of “made in Italy” clothing and accessories was pioneered by Walter Albini (1941-1983), often credited as the father of Italian *prêt-à-porter*.

Albini had started his professional experience in the fashion world after graduating from the Arts Institute in Turin. He first worked as a creator of sketches of fashion shows for major fashion magazines, first in Rome and then in Paris. Albini's activity as a designer, however, starts in the atelier of Mariuccia Mandelli (Krizia) and by the mid 1960s he enjoys a wide reputation in the field as shown by his designs for Krizia, Billy Ballo, Cadette and Etro.

However, the turning point for his career and for the future development of Italian fashion occurred in 1968, when Albini started cooperating with the knitwear manufacturer Zamasport. Zamasport was created in 1966 as one of the branches of a family-owned company which had been founded in the 1920s and whose main activity was the production of knitwear and underwear. The founder of the company, Augusto Zanetti, was a typical example of the behavior and entrepreneurial strategy of Italian producers of industrial-made ready-to-wear of the generation before the great transformations of the 1960s. The company had always been active (and was quite well-known) in the production of basic, plain jerseys and underclothes with no attention for the stylistic dimension. Indeed, Augusto Zanetti was convinced that the success of the company was to be found precisely in its somberness and in its aversion to changes in fashion. Although this business strategy had worked well in the economic and social context of the 1950s and the beginning of the following decade, by the end of the 1960s its flaws were quite clear. In order not to be cut out of a growing but increasingly more diversified and demanding market, the company needed to try to appeal to its customers by selling fashionable goods. It is the new generation of the family, who had entered the direction of the firm in those years, that has the merit of understanding the need to change to adapt to a modified environment. The words of one of the daughters of Augusto Zanetti are eloquent in this respect: "I entered the company not to make underwear but to produce fashion" (Giordani Aragno 1997, p. 19).

It is precisely in order to respond to such transformations that Zamasport introduced a new brand called "Callaghan" in 1966 to produce fashionable knitwear and sportswear which could appeal to the new market segment largely identified with young consumers. In order to realize this modification, the Zanettis decided to resort to the cooperation with a designer and their choice fell on Walter Albini (later substituted by Gianni Versace at the beginning of his career, followed by Romeo Gigli). We can say that the cooperation with Callaghan made Albini the first designer to abandon the atelier and to enter the factory. In other words, Albini was the first designer who did not to focus solely on the creative dimension of the fashion

activity, but who instead also gained acquaintance with the features of the industrial production of clothing. Albini's mission was not only to design the new models produced by Callaghan (knitwear and jersey) but also to provide guidance and advice as to the choice of the best machinery and techniques to be employed in order to produce the kind of fabrics and designs most requested by the market. The cooperation between Albini and Zamasport introduced a profound alteration of the features of Italian fashion. Fashion was no longer the artistic work of an atelier producing unique, exclusive dresses at high prices. It was instead the transformation of industrially produced clothing into garments that had a strong aesthetic appeal and conveyed a sharp social connotation. In other words, we could say that it was the promotion of ready-made clothing into the sphere of artistic creativity. Yet, as stressed before, the different actors animating the Italian fashion system, although linked, were distinct figures. The distinction between the firm (in charge of producing and distributing clothing) and the designer (responsible of providing a social and cultural identity to that clothing) is clearly expressed in the memories of Marisa Zanetti when she recalls Albini's arrival at Zamasport: "He used to come from Milan by taxi. He was all dressed in white, with a long wolf fur coat, a wide felt hat, an earring in his ear, his pants tucked in his tall leather boots" (*ibid.*, p. 22).

The discontinuity with the previous phase is symbolized also by the emergence of Milan as the internationally recognized capital of Italian fashion and the consequent decline of Florence. It was Albini, together with other emerging designers, who decided to abandon Palazzo Pitti and to present his collections in Milan in April 1971. In this occasion the collection designed by Albini was produced by five different companies: Callaghan (jersey and knitwear), Basile (coats and unisex suits), Escargots (knitwear); Misterfox (evening dresses); Diamant's (shirts).

The reasons behind this decision are basically to be found in the excessive rigidity of the Palazzo Pitti shows and in their closure in face of the new market trends. One could say that if the original success of Florence had largely been the result of Giorgini's readiness to understand the changes experienced by the fashion market opposed to the slow reaction of Paris, the decline of Florence as capital of Italian fashion in the 1970s was basically determined by a similar but opposite mechanism. Indeed, the collective shows of Palazzo Pitti remained stubbornly anchored to the idea of high fashion.

The rules of the Florentine show are quite eloquent in this respect. The shows were scheduled twice a year and on each occasion some 80 ateliers participated for a duration of about 1,5 hours. This meant that each atelier could basically show for 10 minutes which corresponded to more or less 15 models. Given these limitations, it became common strategy of the ateliers to try to impress the buyers and the press. This was done by showing the most extravagant and shocking creations which however did not represent the “real” production of manufacturers. The disappointment of the fashion designers is clear in Krizia’s words: “We have nothing against Florence. It’s the formula that doesn’t work anymore. I want to show my entire collection, without hurrying, in my atelier and not in hastened shows which communicate nothing to buyers. In Florence collections are limited to 16 models: too little to represent the entire collection up for sale” (quoted in Gnoli, 2005, pp. 191-192).

The setting of the Florentine shows (i.e. Palazzo Pitti’s “White Chamber”) was equally telling of the unwillingness of adapting to a changing world. If the palace’s elegant atmosphere and beautiful artworks in the 1950s had been functional to endowing Italian creations with the authority deriving from the unique historical experience of the Renaissance, by the beginning of the 1970s they were seen as a cumbersome heritage of the past and were openly opposed by the new generations of consumers. In opposition, the Milanese shows were organized in locations which were much closer to the real life of consumers such as cafés, theaters, hotels etc. Even more important was the fact that the decision to show in Milan, the country’s economic capital and the prominent industrial center, was a clear indication of the new marriage between fashion (creativity) and industry.

Getting back to our protagonist, this union is evident in the fact that the dresses of Albini’s collections all featured the label “Walter Albini per...” (ie “Walter Albini for ...” followed by the name of the company), which put on the same level the designer and the industry. Yet, Albini was not satisfied of this parity. Stimulated by the success of his shows, in 1973 he decided to terminate his cooperation with Callaghan and the other firms and to create his own company called Albini srl with his own brand (“W.A.”). The times however were not ripe and the designer was still not strong enough to exploit the market on his own. This breaking of such an almost perfect equilibrium between designer and industry occurred only in the second half of the 1970s, when it will be the designer’s brand that will conquer the center of the stage, casting the manufacturers’ name to anonymousness. It will be Giorgio Armani who will

catch this opportunity, thus creating yet another discontinuity in the evolution of the Italian fashion industry.

### **Concluding remarks**

These brief notes stress two of the major discontinuities in the process of the conquer of international markets by Italian fashion. What is interesting to note is how the differences in the macro-context of the two distinct periods here described, determined constraints and opportunities which called for an adaptive response by the fashion system. The first period here considered (the 1950s) marks the first appearance of Italian fashion on international markets. As we have stressed, without denying the distinctive assets of the Italian ateliers, their success was largely determined by the capacity of exploiting the transformation occurring in the world of fashion following the difficulties of Paris in the immediate post-WW2 years. In this respect, Giorgini's major contribution was that of filling the void which was created by the temporary weakening of French *haute couture* by offering to international (mainly American) buyers a product that was more or less a substitute of the Parisian one. In other words, the shows organized by Giorgini in Florence had still featured mainly high fashion collections which were the output of an artisan productive system whose center was the atelier.

The changes which transformed the markets during the second half of the 1960s and the following decade made *haute couture* increasingly less profitable. What became clear was that the foundations of the fashion system needed to change in order to adapt to the new scenario. The creativity expressed by the individual *couturier* in his maison was no longer what consumers were looking for. It became clear that it was necessary to set the creative moment of the design of clothing within a robust industrial apparatus. This was precisely the significance of the shift of Italian's fashion capital from Florence – the city of the Renaissance - to Milan - the country's major industrial center – which occurred at the beginning of the 1970s. Walter Albini, the main protagonist of this phase, represented the rise of a new professional figure in the Italian fashion system: the designer who endowed the industrial production of ready-to-wear with a strong aesthetic and symbolic connotation. Yet, in this chapter of the history of Italian fashion, the designer's name (the brand) was still only a marketing and promotional tool. It will be the following generation of designers, best represented by Giorgio Armani, who will further transform the relationship between creativity

and industrial production by making the brand an intangible asset to be traded between designers and industrial firms.