

**Eternal Recurrence of (almost) the Same.
Nostalgia in Italian Advertising from *Carmencita*
and *Gringo* to *Jake la Furia***
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Eternal Recurrence of (almost) the Same. Nostalgia in Italian Advertising from Carmencita and Gringo to Jake la Furia.

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Abstract

The paper sets out to analyse the relationship between past, present, and future as applied to the behaviour of consumption. The favoured approach examines the use of nostalgia in advertising and in several forms of Italian contemporary national popular¹ culture. The hypothesis posits that the emotion of nostalgia acts as a powerful factor in mobilising consumers because it inspires a desire that can speak not only to the past (which is impossible to recover) but also to the future; the latter here is taken as what one could achieve via a consumption which employs the past as a symbolic resource to activate desire. The study delineates three main strategies via which communication makes efficient use of nostalgia: the special dynamic of drawing the subject and object closer together and farther apart, the past's identity-related function, and the memory's complex work of interpretation and reconstruction of the past.

The text will examine some specific examples of advertising commercials and mass-media products which demonstrate the emotion of nostalgia's capacity to mobilise consumers.

Keywords: Nostalgia, consumption, advertising

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¹ Translator's note: The term *nazionalpopolare* has evolved in contemporary Italian usage since A. Gramsci's original formulation to express the cultural phenomena that should lay the groundwork for his socio-political solutions for the Italian state. Here, with the exception of footnotes 4 and 5, the meaning refers to a general "dumbing-down" effect of mass media on the population's cultural identity.

«Because my desire *is* desire, it is not to be belittled or despised.»
Philip Roth, 2014 [1977]

Saint Augustine's well-known writings on time are helpful in defining the terms of the issue addressed in this essay. «There are three times, a time present of things past, a time present of things present, a time present of things future [...]. The time present of things past is memory, the time present of things present is direct intuition, the time present of things future is expectation» (Augustine, 1998: 569). The author proposes favouring the field of advertising and consumption to study some of the issues involving the relationship between past and future, using the privileged viewpoint of the field of advertising and consumption. In this usage the past assumes overtones of memory while the future takes on those of desire.

The main factor to mobilise the public towards consumption is desire which, by its very nature, concerns what is not yet present and can be desired because it is absent, unavailable, not yet in progress. Taken in this light it becomes clear that consumer behaviour patterns can be easily directed and stimulated via the prompting of a vast range of emotional, cultural and symbolic references to a condition existing in the time of *not yet*. Vice versa, the past is by definition what is no longer, what has been and has now gone by, what has already been experienced and, in a certain way, already been consumed. So it would seem that the past's ability to act as a mobilising factor in consumption is fruitless; it has none of the necessary elements of tension towards future possibility since these have already tapered off into the time of *no longer*, of memory. The following pages will attempt to overturn this view by exploring whether consumption, as a social act, can in some way be prompted by reference to the past, by that dimension of time which, by its very nature, would seem to act in the opposite way, meaning as a factor of conservation of the old, rather than as a promoter of the new.

The question lies in these terms: if and how the relationship to the past acts as a factor to stimulate desire, thereby helping to motivate consumption. To put it in Augustinian terms we could pose the question as how much memory exists in expectation, meaning desire, and therefore (in a prosaic way) in consumption. A particular form of relationship to the past, nostalgia, has been chosen as the way to frame a favoured approach to the subject; this emotion seems to be widely used in advertising as a way to stimulate

recollection of some past period considered so golden as to merit being recovered and relived in the present time.

Results of research on the conceptual and empirical tie that exists between desire, memory, nostalgia and consumption will also be presented. The opening section will articulate the fundamental concepts that have guided the study. The second part will attempt to empirically outline these considerations with the support of examples taken from advertising and from cultural consumption as it occurs in the context of Italian national popular culture. This essay cannot claim to be exhaustive but it aims to provide a small contribution, especially on a theoretical level, to the sociology of consumption and of memory, a union previously identified (Halbwachs, 1913), but never investigated in any great depth.

Desire, or the Time of the *Not Yet*

The meanings of the verb to consume abound. From an economic point of view consumption is an act which serves, on the one hand, to maintain productive capacity and, on the other, to fulfil the consumer's own specific goals. This presupposes that the economic agent's decision-making process be rational and follow a linear process in which supply and demand balance each other starting from the characteristics of the production or those of consumption. A clear example of this is found in the «old and glorious paradigm of Pareto's ordinalism» (Zamagni, 1992: 325); the paradigm introduced the criterion of the consumer's rational choice whereby the individual selects, acquires and consumes some goods rather than others on the basis of his preference for the very one which will more fully satisfy his needs, hence his well-being. «If the consumer prefers x to y , it is presumed that the consumption of x increases his well-being more than the consumption y . This is why he is rational if he chooses the y basket» (*ivi*, 324).

In this regard let's also examine the concept of decreasing marginal utility which states that the individual is moved to consumption via the search for the greatest satisfaction of a need (a subjective criterion and therefore marginal with respect to the variables essential to the market's performance from the supply viewpoint). So it follows that the more a need is satisfied by suitable goods, the less important the same need will become over time thereby decreasing in value. As soon as this marginal utility slips below the hypothetical level defining its ability to satisfy a need then it will no longer be able to fulfil that goal; the consumer will choose another product that can serve the same function. However, if the price of goods is expressed in monetary units, what unit can be used to express the idea of utility? In other

words, when can we state that a certain product is really useful for an individual, seeing that this product equals the goods' marginal utilities with their relative prices?

This critique, which Vilfredo Pareto addressed to marginalists, leads to the consideration of consumption as a phenomenon that transcends the rational and economic utilities connected to individuals' use of goods; it also posits the need to introduce new variables that take into account those consumer behaviours which, from an economic viewpoint appear irrational, but, when considered from a cultural and social view, take on their own specific rationale. This social rationale shows how «objects and goods, which are used in a way apparently controlled by the principle of utility, conceal precise and often complex messages, silent discourses which mankind continually detains» (Secundulfo, 1990); it also reveals how these can be re-included among the coils of social complexity «including consumption among society's communication structures that are able to transmit socially-shared meanings» (Secundulfo, 1995: 14.)

Here the author wants to take into consideration what, in his view, constitutes the deepest determining factor in consumer behaviour: desire.

One of the characteristic features of the act of desire is the wearing deterioration undergone, in equal measure, by the desiring subject and the desired object. Once possessed the object must be enjoyed and therefore, itself, worn down and consumed; in the same way the desiring subject is consumed by waiting to enjoy the object of his desire. So generally the desiring experience is the natural tension of people towards what they do not have.

Plato's myth of the Androgynous describes man and the object of his love as two separate halves of a single sphere. The desire of one for the other consumes each one of the lovers in their anticipation of the encounter. Their reunion does not, however, relieve the consumption since both halves, in their reacquired fullness, stop worrying about their survival and, like lovers lost in the ecstasy of falling in love, allow themselves to die. In this sense, the sphere as a symbol of fullness and perfection represents the completeness of the single being and the «perfection of a sort of pleasure self-sufficient» (Moduli, 2002: 14) but, also, self-referential since «desire would not desire one object or an other except for itself in the other» (*ibidem*).

In another context Hegel, who in his dialectical model brought Western metaphysics to its fulfilment, considers man as a subject contemplating, in a desiring way, the object of his desire. What differentiates the desiring act of animals from that of humans is the awareness of this tension, the consciousness that takes man beyond mere desire of conservation towards a

perception of desire in itself and, consequentially, towards the awareness of the desirable nature of a specific object of desire.

These brief and general remarks about the experience of desire are helpful in highlighting the main feature and that is the lacerating tension of the desiring subject towards the *not yet* of the desired object. To desire means, above all, to wear oneself out by waiting and suffering from the absence. Consumption is an act which, much more than others, rewards desire's expectation. In this sense to consume means to put into relationship the present and the future, that is to connect expectation and desire via action.

Memory, or the Time of *No Longer*

The study of the social dimensions of recollection is little more than a century old but it has by now allowed us to reach a firm conclusion: if the past is the time that is no more, then memory is the social act that reconstructs it in the present time (notice *to reconstruct* and not simply *to bring back an awareness of*). Maurice Halbwachs (1877 – 1945), pupil of Emile Durkheim, is to be credited with the sociological intuition whereby making memory is strictly and prevalently a community activity (Halbwachs, 1996 [1925], 1988 [1941], 2001 [1968]). According to the French sociologist even the most strictly individual kind of memory is only possible to the extent that some socially-characterised ordering activity is able to guarantee the importance of each individual recollection. Subjective memory resists oblivion only in so far as the social group allows it to happen via the social framings of memory, meaning interpretive categories of the social past which offer importance and meaning to the personal recollections. It is no chance, then, that Halbwachs defines them as «nails on which the individual hangs his memories» (Halbwachs, 1996: 20).

Such collective framings of meaning include language (the most elementary and stable of the framings); collective representations of space and time; the categories within which we subsume the concepts of the real and, in general, the values, norms and contents of the collective conscience which allow us to hold on to the memory of the past considered important by the community. In fact the framings mediate between the individual and his social environment and allow meanings to be shared through the act of remembering. Each recollection, even the most personal one², is always

² Although it may appear counter-intuitive, in Halbwach's proposal all recollection is social memory. Even the most personal recall is mediated by systems of values, beliefs, and norms that make the particular circumstance worthy of being

mediated by the belonging to a group and can be evoked only in the interaction with other individuals who belong to the same community.

Therefore collective memory is not so much a static conservation of the past contained within a shared depository as it is the product of the incessant reconstruction of the past that communities, via social framings, affect in the present and with the purpose of a future project. Seen this way oblivion consists substantially in the individual's impossibility to enter into relationship with a certain community's social environment and collective thought. When there is divergence from what Halbwachs calls "affective community" and from the common foundation on which a system of collective and shared memory can arise, then oblivion occurs, in substance a product of the inefficiency and inapplicability of memory's social framings.

So to make memory does not mean to bring the past back into the present as much as to reconstruct it in the present, in keeping with the future project undertaken by the social community. We remember not so much what really happened in the past as what we presume to be important to recollect. Such a presumption might not concern the events that effectively took place but rather their reconstruction (even independently of the real facts) in the present time. As Elena Esposito has summed it up, «the remembering person [...] is not engaged with the world, but rather with himself and the conditions from which he derives, and the memory is realised in the present, not in the past» (Esposito, 2001: 3).

So, generally speaking, memory seems to be configured as the place of the no longer, of what has been and of what is irredeemably lost. It is not up to memory – be it individual or collective – to reconstruct the past in an exact way. This lesson is well-known in the case of executioners when, paradoxically maybe even in good faith, they construct a convenient version of the past subjected to forms of more or less explicit removal³. Memory is also able to modify, in even a radical way, the identity of communities which have lived through traumatic events and which strive to receive recognition of their status as victims (Alexander, 2004). More than outlining in a precise and coherent mode the events that happened, memory constitutes the place where the past is elaborated and the community's future project is founded.

It is precisely the potential oblivion concealed in memory that will serve as an interesting resource in the argument to be developed in this essay. Such

remembered. Thus the sharing of that act must needs be social since it can only occur via that particular system of meaning that is language which fixes thought in shared signs. See Berger P.L. and Luckmann T. (1969).

³ Here the author recalls Primo Levi (1987) and his extremely precise and painful analysis of his concentration camp experience.

oblivion is easier to manipulate and to reinterpret in different ways, plus the irredeemable loss of the past (in a literal sense) can constitute a point of suffering for individuals and communities incapable of retaining true traces of their past; for both of these reasons the discourse on memory seems to open onto a new dimension: meaning a return to the past as people would like to see it, a desire which is oriented towards the past time. Here the *no longer* becomes the *new*, that is the discourse on nostalgia.

Nostalgia, or the Time of *the New*

Nostalgia (Prete, 1992; Jedlowski, 2009; Petri, 2010; Affuso, 2012) is a modern word: it was coined in 1688 by the young Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer in his very well-known *Dissertatio medica de nostalgia* presented at the University of Basel. The neologism was composed of the ancient Greek roots *νόστος* and *άλγος* meaning, respectively, *return* and *pain*. Hofer used these terms to describe the illness affecting Swiss soldiers stationed in far-off garrisons and suffering from being far away, lonely, deprived of well-being and a sense of belonging. According to Hofer what they truly suffered from (especially mercenaries who lacked even the ethical ideal of heroic sacrifice in their country's service) was the separation from their birthplace, their homes and from those loved ones who were tied to a mythical and past golden age, which the soldiers feared was irredeemably lost. The pain of re-entry had characteristic symptoms: fever, hallucinations, depression, slowing of the circulatory system, nausea and delirium. In the most dire cases, some soldiers died of nostalgia. There were no certain remedies for the illness: the only one that was known to be reliable was the return home. Over time, the birthplace would cure all the symptoms and restore the nostalgia sufferers to full recovery. In literature it is Manzoni who paints the best known case of nostalgia⁴ as he describes Lucia crossing the Adda River to escape Don Rodrigo; her silent and heart-rending thoughts are swollen with grief and aching for the return. «*Farewell, ye mountains, rising from the waters, and pointing to the heavens! ye varied summits, familiar to him who has been brought up among you, and impressed upon his mind as clearly as the countenance of his dearest friends! How mournful*

4 The reference to Manzoni is deliberate. Further on there will be an Antonio Gramsci quotation dealing with the subject of national popular culture; he considered the Milanese writer as a very archetype of the intellectual élite who looked down on the people with paternalistic superiority and, hence, showed themselves to be in no way of the people. However, the author cannot avoid noting that the example of Farewell ye mountains constitutes a crystal-clear demonstration of nostalgia.

is the step of the one who, brought up amidst your scenes, is compelled to leave you! [...] Farewell! native cottage [...] Farewell! thou cottage, still a stranger [...] Farewell! my church [...].» The step employed to leave one's homeland is «heavy», her gaze is «sad and listless» and the sadness of leaving is allied only by the «restless longing» for the day when she will return «with rich abundance» to her mountains. (Manzoni, 2002: 163).

Nostalgia is yearning in the desire for return, it is the place of a “perilous and disturbed recollection” (Prete, 1992:13) and invests the most intense sentiments both in the grief of removal as well as in the euphoria of return.

However, what Hofer failed to take into consideration in his *Dissertatio* is the collateral effect of the pharmakon for nostalgia, of the return. It is possible to re-enter one's homeland but one will never find there what had been left behind previously; the past is irredeemably lost. What has happened cannot return; what has been lost cannot be regained; what has taken form cannot be undone in what has never occurred unless it is in the dimension of the simulacrum, meaning the copy lacking its original (Secondulfo, 2007). On the other hand irreversibility is a necessary predicate of time. It is impossible to re-find the past just the way it was when the subject stepped out of it. Moreover «the universe is full of irreversible processes [...]. We can transform an egg into an omelette but not an omelette into an egg. Milk is mixed with coffee; combustibles burn and are transformed into exhaust; people age and die» (Carrol, 2011: 12). Writing in 1798 about the Swiss soldiers suffering from nostalgia, Kant noted that «if [...] they return to those places they are quite disappointed [...]: they believe that this feeling comes from the fact that everything has changed but in reality it is because they no longer find their youth there» (Kant, 1798, in Prete, 1992: 66). After all, nostalgia is also an experience of limits. Not being able to have and choose everything implies renouncing all the rest and this can be a painful experience. As Paolo Jedlowski has rightly noted, the homeland is «a place of the soul, it is lost time. Philosophically it alludes to the implacable nature of our being situated in the world and of our being marked by a birth in a certain time and place, among certain people and not others [...]. One can feel nostalgia for these origins but carrying on one's own existence means, also and necessarily, one can no longer coincide with them» (Jedlowski, 2009: 13).

In this way the time of the new so coveted by the nostalgic subject enters into conflict with the irreversible limit of the time of *never more*, which he can only relive in the form of dreams, recollection, hallucination, memory or else – and here the author arrives at the end of his journey among the ideas of this section – desire: the time of the *not yet*.

In fact, just like nostalgia, desire, too, feeds on lack and both of these feelings imply a tension: the former fills the vacuum of the present's direct

intuition by tending towards the past. The second performs the same function by tending towards the future. The subtle cultural game that the author wishes to highlight concerns the idea that nostalgia and desire can feed off one another, each fuelling the other. The lack of a past can transform itself into a tension towards the future; moreover, the lack of the past can become the matter on which this tension feeds.

The author proposes to test this idea by observing a rather curious phenomenon: mass media communication's overwhelming recourse to the nostalgia effect when dealing with goods for consumption, first and foremost in the field of advertising. Here it is necessary to recall that this essay cannot be an exhaustive study but is rather exploratory in its aim; the author will try to enter into a quite complex phenomenon allowing himself to be conducted by the few theoretical coordinates which have been traced in the opening pages and which can shed light on several questions that oscillate in the hidden folds of society.

Nostalgia in Italian national popular culture

The author hypothesises that the mobilising power implicit in nostalgic tension acts as a powerful phenomenon that favours and drives consumption. When nostalgia is employed in the field of mass media communication and, especially, in advertising, it seems to stop looking backwards to the past and to redirect its tension to the future, towards desire. All this, moreover, is necessarily brought to bear on the question of the relationship that ties communities to their past; therefore, we must pose the question about what conditions are required for nostalgia to act as a stimulus, thereby becoming a tension towards desire. The main three conditions discussed here can be quickly summed up as: the dynamic tension between memory and desire, nostalgia as a function of identity and, lastly, what can be called the "work" of memory. In explaining these categories the author will refer to examples taken from Italian national popular⁵ culture in recent years, particularly from advertising.

⁵ Without entering further into the question, the author adds that the topic of national popular culture might well constitute an extremely interesting field of scholarship since it represents a highly meaningful section of what occurs in the hidden folds of society, well beyond the limits of folkloric themes. The guiding idea employed here is Gramsci's view of a national literature; folklore is not just a picturesque element but rather deserves to be studied as a "concezione del mondo e della vita, implicita in grande misura, di determinati strati [...] della società, in contrapposizione [...] con le

Italian national popular culture loves to look to the past with a nostalgic gaze; this statement is supported by a rapid overview of its supporting structures (Morreale, 2009). For several years the *Sanremo Festival della canzone italiana* – in itself an indestructible banner of the national popular – has devoted an entire evening to its own former glories like the evergreen [Kessler Twins](#) and the [songs](#) to which not even the most snobbish Italian can honestly deny having listened. The Festival also features other [personalities](#) who, with their ups and downs, inhabit the collective imagination. Pop music also favours the theme of nostalgia. The author recalls his childhood spent with the background strains of one of the period's many couples of the century, [Albano&Romina](#); his adolescence witnessed many evenings listening, moved, to the [883](#) band. In more recent times (and indeed this study has also been inspired by the fact) he discovered that [Jake la Furia](#) (*vis*) created a nostalgic rendition about our nostalgia of yesteryear. Social networks count innumerable [groups and pages](#) devoted to the mythic past and there are [radio shows](#) which alternate today's entertainment with nostalgic celebrations of earlier generations. Lastly, let's recall here what is perhaps the most outstanding example of all: public television's recently developed and aired [Carosello Reloaded®](#), an updated version of [Carosello](#), which remains perhaps the best-known entertainment program in the history of Italian television. Although touched on briefly, these examples illustrate how the emotion of nostalgia is widely rooted in contemporary Italian popular culture.

Between Subject of Memory and Object of Desire

Even when observed in reference to the theme of desire and consumption, nostalgia appears to be a widely used symbolic resource and a rather efficacious means of constructing a symbolic connection between past and future. In this sense our consideration must first examine the particular tension that runs between the subject of memory and the desired object, a tension that implies a strong recourse to memory and, especially, to nostalgia. In this case, to be efficacious, nostalgic tension must be referred to an object in two contrasting ways. On the one hand the object must be sufficiently near, meaning attainable in time, to be remembered (even though it will be discovered, because of time's – read memory's – irreversibility, to be different from the way it was originally); but it must also be sufficiently removed in time and space as to be seen with renewed desire. The [Cornetto classico](#)

concezioni del mondo 'ufficiali' [...], che si sono successe nello sviluppo storico” (Gramsci, 1966:215).

[Algida®](#) helps exemplify this contrast. The footage shows the advertisement celebrating a brand of ice cream cone that is so strongly rooted in the Italian collective imagination as to define, by its brand name, the general object. The ad was aired in 2010 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the cone's marketing launch⁶. From a structural and communications reading, the ad is composed of a medley of the product's [various advertising film sequences](#), all broadcast over the years, especially in the 1980s. Each one of the ad's component sequences addresses an audience belonging to a different generation; so anyone, sooner or later, is bound to be struck by the image as it has settled in his own memory and is reactivated by the ad. The nostalgia effect is guaranteed by the music, too; this pop jingle, which accompanied the 1982 ad campaign, is one of the most widely-recognised by audiences.

Considered in the light of this essay's theme, the Algida footage seems to well exemplify the hypothesis, which is that nostalgic tension acts as a powerful force to mobilise consumption. This is why mass media communication uses it so widely, because it is structured in a way that institutes a short-cut between past and future, between memory and desire. Indeed it is precisely the element of memory that generates desire. For an audience that recognises the sound and image used to market the ice cream in the past, the recent ad puts them in contact with images and sensations of that past time that they would like to experience again today. This is where desire swings into action to re-find the mythic past that the object (ice cream cone) incarnates.

However, as we have already noted, the past can never return the same as it was before since it lies in the time of *no longer*. Perhaps this is the reason why the end of the ad proposes to the consumer to buy one old-style cone and, at the same time, to receive the offer of a free new product. From a symbolic point of view this efficacious strategy takes steps to mitigate the probable disenchantment inevitably contained in the inclination towards nostalgia.

Nostalgia and collective identity

This brings us to the second point which concerns nostalgia as a possible function of the communities' collective identities. In order to act as a

⁶ On its website Algida® makes a clear reference to its being rooted in Italian popular culture, the aspect that allows the brand to efficaciously exploit the “nostalgia effect” suggesting the idea that it's own history is, fundamentally, the history of the consumer.

mobilising force of desire, the emotion of nostalgia must inspire a sense of belonging within the community of which it is an intimate part. In other words it must allow the clear and unequivocal definition of the boundaries of the land of return, of that symbolic *Heimat* which is represented as a co-factor in the construction of collective and shared memories of the desired object. With regard to this theme, it is useful to focus for a moment on the ad to launch the restyling of the [nuova Fiat 500®](#). Fiat introduced the restyled-car onto the automobile market in 2007 and the ad was broadcast in Italy for that entire year. Produced in three versions⁷, the commercial is constructed through a sequence of images of recent Italian history. The author recalls here in random order: former President of the Republic Carlo Azeglio Ciampi saluting the coffins of the carabinieri killed in the 2003 attack on the Nassiriya base during the war in Iraq; the 1966 flood in Florence; images of the 1993 attacks on Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino; the 1980 explosion at the Bologna train station, and so on. Next to these there are a series of images of very evocative figures who are all well-rooted in the Italian collective imagination: Alcide de Gasperi, brothers Carmine and Giuseppe Abbagnale, Carla Fracci, John Paul II, Mother Theresa, cycling heroes Coppi and Bartali, Eduardo de Filippo, just to name a few. Lastly these figures are alternated with images taken from Fiat history but that any Italian knows well from the news programs: the factory of Mirafiori, the 1980 march of forty thousand workers, or the signs denigrating southern workers that were hung in the Turin factories during the era of the great emigration from Southern Italy. The soundtrack is taken from *Back to Life* by pianist Giovanni Allievi, another champion of the national popular culture. (The latter is also involved in a [ferocious polemic](#) with other internationally-renowned musicians for some of his incautious statements to the press⁸). The individual scenes are tied one to the other by cuts from Giuseppe Tornatore's Oscar-winning film *Nuovo cinema Paradiso* (1988), with the unforgettable faces of Philippe Noiret and the then-small Totò Cascio. Finally, as the communication product's last aspect, the narrator's voice presents a text⁹ containing a wealth of suggestions and interesting references.

7 Versions 2 and 3 can be seen here.

8 There is no intent to emphasise the point for a poorly concealed form of voyeurism but rather because the authors sees a clear echo here of Gramsci's distinction between authorised and popular culture (Gramsci, 1966). His interest is not to support either one or the other. Rather the intention is to underscore once again how even a commonplace event can help to highlight what is happening in the concealed workings of society.

9 "La vita è un insieme di luoghi e di persone che scrivono il tempo. Il nostro tempo. Noi cresciamo e maturiamo collezionando queste esperienze. Sono queste poi che

In general the ad's narrative structure is very simple and evolves along the fully Manichean distinctions between beauty and ugliness, right and wrong, good and bad, the necessity of being and the necessity of not being. These elements contain a tacit reference to the dimension of identity and of an inclusive "we" ("we are these people, for better or for worse") and they define an idea of community founded on the choice of proposed noble alternatives and on the refusal of the ignoble ones (that is, when the latter are not removed from the possible narration). In this way the viewer can identify himself with the ad and find some of his own personal recollection in its images, music, words and syntactic binders. This experience will lead him back to the seat of community recollection in the most classic manner of memory's collective workings as a function of individual and social identity (Halbwachs, 1996, 2001). Next to this it is easy to trace back the identity-related function of the object represented in the film clip, the Fiat 500, a true champion of the Italians' identification with both the automobile and its producer¹⁰, in the ups and downs undergone by both parties. Italians have never been too tied to either the Fiat company or its automobiles. Both have often been ridiculed as examples of Italian capitalism's mediocrity and of national government welfarism; however it is undeniable that both one and the others have a favoured place in the history of Italy and its memory. In this sense the ad for the new Fiat 500 is an attempt to change the public's perception of the object represented and of the company that produces it. To possess this automobile means, in some way, to confirm belonging to a national community with its history and memory to be used as instruments to amplify desire to look towards the future. The end of the clip puts it even too clearly, "the new Fiat belongs to all of us."

vanno a definirci. Alcuni sono più importanti di altre perché formano il nostro carattere. Ci insegnano la differenza tra ciò che è giusto e ciò che è sbagliato. La differenza tra il bene e il male. Cosa essere e cosa non essere. Ci insegnano chi vogliamo diventare. In tutto questo alcune persone e alcune cose si legano a noi in un modo spontaneo e inestricabile. Ci sostengono nell'esprimerci e nel realizzarci. Ci legittimano nell'essere autentici e veri. E se significano veramente qualcosa, ispirano il modo in cui il mondo cambia e si evolve. E allora, appartengono a tutti noi e a nessuno. La nuova Fiat appartiene a tutti noi."

¹⁰ Italian collective imagination has developed a great many quotations, anecdotes and aphorisms about the Fiat 500, some unable to be quoted while others are paradoxical. Here the author exemplifies by just one piece recorded in 1992, Cinquecento by the Elio e le Storie tese band.

Desire and the “work” of memory

The last dimension concerning the emotion of nostalgia as a mobilising factor of desire and consumption, is what we can term the “work” of memory. With this expression the author suggests that is not simply a re-actualising of the present, the re-emergence of past images within the consciousness, as much as it is rather a dynamic reconstruction of the past carried out on the basis of the ever-changing aspirations of the present (Leccardi, 2009). The act of making memory means to interpret the past during the present time. In this sense, the possibility of the past’s narrative infidelity does not in any way invalidate its ability to act as a memorial device: an old man who tells a boy about his life omitting (more or less voluntarily) some details is still, and in any case, making a memory of his own past, which he ties to the present moment via the listener’s direct experience. Nostalgia and the tension of desire are not extraneous to this dynamic. In order to allow nostalgia to act as a mobilising factor of desire and of consumption it must know how to re-interpret the past in such a way as to transform it from desire for the past into desire for the future. In other words, it must know how to reinvent the past on the basis of the present’s language, themes and stylistic features, while at the same time sustaining the collective representation of the past. An example¹¹ taken from another sample of the Italian collective imagination will better illustrate the point. Let’s examine the well-known characters from Carosello¹², Carmencita and Caballero, anthropomorphic renderings of the coffee pot as advertised by caffè Paulista. These figures have been appearing on TV screens since [1964](#); in that early period Caballero was a fearless cowboy riding the endless pampas in search of Carmencita; however, the woman he had fallen for and wanted to steal away was promised to Paulista, the iconographically ridiculous prototype of the *caliente* Mexican.

11 Another, more recent example of how the work of memory has been applied to advertising in order to function in a similar way to Carmencita and Caballero can be seen in the commercial for Montana®. During its advertising campaign of the 1970s, the tinned meat was presented in the well-known forms and modalities of Carosello but when the same product was re-launched in recent years (2013 and 2014), the commercial was run with similar forms but modified content.

12 The commercial films included in Carosello had to respect rigidly codified rules: they had to present a story extraneous to the product being advertised which could not be mentioned for the first ninety seconds of the commercial; moreover the number of times the advertised product could be mentioned was also pre-determined as was the number of seconds to devote to the commercial as a whole. The resulting format determined the historical TV show’s unique form as well as its particular way of introducing commercials.

Carmencita, a docile town clerk fearfully puts off Caballero's impetuous attempt, which he desists from only when faced by the legitimate wooer.

The forms of the characters, their stories, language, music and rhymes all penetrated the Italian collective imagination of which they have been a firm part for many years. Although Paulista is a particular mixture of roasted coffee beans, its brand name has represented coffee, in general, for a very long time.

Returning to those same characters, the Lavazza company as producers of caffè Paulista launched a new ad campaign in [2005](#). Now, forty years later, Carmencita is a free and independent woman who works (even too hard according to Caballero); she shares a house with her girlfriends with whom she discusses everything openly, from sex to hair removal, from admirers to love affairs. The proud Caballero of the 1960s is today a "victim" of the free and social-climbing Carmencita.

In this film ad, too, the past is explicitly exhibited, albeit modified, in keeping with the present's representations and imaginary views. It is a past that has been re-elaborated, reconstructed and staged in the present and, precisely for this reason, acts to stimulate desire and consumption. Carmencita and Caballero do not slavishly re-propose the past but they stage and act it out. This play recalls the desired object to mind, In this sense it acts like the work of de-construction, elaboration and re-construction that memory operates on events of the past.

Conclusions

In this essay the author has tried to question the special relationship that ties the past to the future, that is linking memory to desire, via the emotion of nostalgia; in this context useful and interesting ideas have been provided by advertising. In noting that nostalgia acts to stimulate desire and consumption, three main strategies have been outlined: the dynamic between the subject and its desired object as the two draw closer together and farther apart, the identity function inherent in things and, lastly, memory's work in actively constructing the past. Nevertheless the answers that have been uncovered are decidedly less than the number of questions raised. For example, why is the past used as a device to construct the future? Why is the stimulus towards desire and consumption so strong when it is inspired by reference to the past and, especially, of a past that is considered mythical, lost forever and, therefore, to be missed and seen through the lens of nostalgia? On the one hand it can be supposed that what is happening is some form of making the past into a patrimony to be used in the present and honoured as a fulfilled form of the collective imagination's representations. However, on the other

hand, we can also hypothesise that such explicit reference to the past can be an indicator of a lack of concrete and real perspectives on the future, of a crisis involving culture and society; of the inability to plan the future unless it is on the basis of what has already taken place. Impossible for the author to delve into these last questions, they must be left only in the form of hypotheses. What remains is the fascinating dynamic between past, present, future between memory and desire which material culture (Secondulfo, 2012) and consumption allow us to observe with remarkable clarity.

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