Corporate Printed Matter

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The Olivetti company was established in 1908 in Ivrea. Its multifaceted visual outputs were crucial in developing a “corporate diversity” that, far from repeating a stiff design formula of brand, logo-type, institutional colors and typefaces, provided an ideal working environment for Swiss graphic designers, photographers and art directors. The relationship between Olivetti and the Swiss graphic designer Walter Ballmer is a case in point. In 1955 Ballmer was hired by Adriano Olivetti as one of four in-house art directors. He worked for the typewriter company until 1971, when he established Unidesign, his own design studio. Olivetti was arguably the most prominent client for whom Ballmer worked. His experience there had a remarkable impact on his career that went well beyond the mere client-designer relationship.

At Olivetti, Ballmer was in charge of designing printed advertising materials for typewriters, photocopiers, and office furniture. Most of his works feature a bold use of typography in association with either photographs or abstract compositions. His poster for the exhibition *Stile Olivetti* is a good example of Ballmer’s use of typography as a constructive, visual element of his graphic compositions. [Fig. 21] This poster was declared the Best Swiss Poster for the year 1961. In 1970, Ballmer was in charge of the redesign of the Olivetti logotype as part of the company’s rebranding. [Fig. 22] His logotype was the latest evolution of a corporate identity that had been developed over the years by key graphic designers such as Xanti Schawinsky and Giovanni Pintori. Ballmer’s contribution to the redesign of Olivetti’s visual identity was featured in a number of international design magazines, which put him in the spotlight and quite possibly gave him sufficient leverage to be elected a member of the Alliance Graphique Internationale (AGI) in 1970.

Just as Ballmer contributed to the visual identity of Olivetti, so was his public image shaped by the work he did for the company. Indeed, the media coverage of his work was largely bound up with the company. Today, his presence in museum collections across the world is still limited to the works he designed for Olivetti. Ballmer was well aware of the benefits of being associated with Olivetti. Over the years, he used the company’s network and media presence to build up his own career as a concrete artist. His brochure for the photocopier Olivetti Copia 105 is a good example of this self-promotion, as the cover’s background features a large abstract painting by Ballmer himself. [Fig. 23] In a similar manner, his modular sculptures can be spotted in many photographs of the office furniture series Synthesis.

The pamphlet for the photocopier Copia II and the poster for the touring exhibition *Olivetti Innovates* allow us to peek into the advertising department. Both artifacts conceal details that help disclose the identity of the designer. At Olivetti, neither art directors nor assistants were allowed to sign their work, so all graphic output was anonymously attributed to the Olivetti advertising office. Nevertheless, some assistants came up with stratagems to flout the rules and declare their authorship. For example, Urs Glaser included a photocopy of an envelope with his name and address in the spreads of the Copia II pamphlet, [Fig. 24] while Anna Monika Jost sneaked her initials AMJ into the poster *Olivetti Innovates*. [Fig. 25] Besides these issues of clandestine authorship, both the pamphlet and the poster illustrate the uneasy power dynamics between the art director and his assistants: often, the brand discourse of the company—for which the contribution of designers was crucial—essentially obliterated the designers themselves. As such, these visual artifacts provide a more complex and nuanced image of the advertising department than the one reiterated in the literature.

2. See Pfeiffer-Belli 1962.
Fig. 21    Poster for the exhibition *Stile Olivetti. Geschichte und Formen einer italienischen Industrie* (Olivetti style. History and forms of an Italian industry), held at Die Neue Sammlung in Munich, Jan. 15–Feb. 25, 1962, Walter Ballmer (graphic design), 1962.
Fig. 22 Spread from the booklet presenting the new Olivetti logotype for internal use, *Segno e disegno di una firma* (Sign and design of a company), Walter Ballmer (graphic design), 1971.
Fig. 23  Cover of the commercial brochure *Olivetti Copia 105. Desk-top copier*, Walter Ballmer (graphic design), date unknown.
Fig. 24 Spread from the commercial brochure *Copia II*, Walter Ballmer and Urs Glaser (graphic design), 1970.
Copia bene

Ogni copia, la prima come l’ultima, presenta le stesse eccellenti caratteristiche: nitidezza di segno e d’immagine, ottima resa delle tonalità e delle mezze tinte. Le copie escono perfettamente asciutte e si mantengono inalterate nel tempo. La qualità del risultato è costante, non dipende dall’abilità di chi aziona la macchina: è essa stessa a controllare ed assicurare, mediante un dispositivo elettro-nico, la densità del toner e quindi l’uniformità delle copie, reintegrandone automaticamente le particelle resinose utilizzate nel corso del processo di stampa, ed assicurando così sempre la concentrazione ottime di toner.

Fattore di efficienza

La varietà delle prestazioni e la straordinaria versatilità, qualificano la Copia II come la macchina di impiego universale, adatta ai più diversi settori di attività, al centro come alla periferia, in aziende ed istituti di ogni dimensione.

L’elevata velocità, l’eccellente qualità della copia, la possibilità di copiare in formati diversi, l’elevato numero di copie che è possibile ottenere, la larga autonomia di lavoro, il basso costo di esercizio, l’uniformità delle copie, sono le caratteristiche per le quali la Copia II si raccomanda nelle organizzazioni dove il lavoro di copia è centralizzato. La sua versatilità le permette di far fronte alle più varie richieste: circolari, ordini di servizio, documenti legali, contabili, tecnici, disegni, articoli di riviste specializzate. Ogni ufficio o settore di lavoro riceve immediatamente risposta alle sue esigenze, ed è subito in grado di far conoscere a tutti gli interessati i materiali informativi necessari per il miglior coordinamento e il più elevato rendimento produttivo. Una copia o molte copie: dove la tempestività è condizione determinante di funzionalità, la Copia II è uno strumento di lavoro indispensabile, il cui rendimento effettivo ripaga l’investimento in valore moltiplicato: non solo è una macchina efficiente, ma una macchina che crea efficienza a sua volta, dinamizzando l’ambiente di lavoro.
Fig. 25  Poster for the exhibition *Olivetti Innovates*, held at the City Hall in Hong Kong, Oct. 19–25, 1966, Walter Ballmer and Anna Monika Jost (graphic design), 1966.