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Simona Tobia, “Advertising America: VOA and Italy,” 27-47. DOI:
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Introduction by Thomas Maddux, California State University, Northridge

In the introduction to this special issue of *Cold War History*, Simona Tobia notes that a workshop at the University of Reading, UK in November 2009 started the discussion on public policy and popular culture in the Cold War with emphasis on the reception of U.S. Cold War propaganda as well as audience research by the agencies involved in the production of the propaganda. The authors devote special attention to Italy and France in their studies. Their bibliographies attest to the substantial number of studies that have focused on public diplomacy in the Cold War, and they have addressed the most challenging question that the literature sometimes neglects, the actual impact of the propaganda on the audiences.¹

As the reviewers note, the five articles may be divided into two groups with three focusing on U.S. propaganda and its impact on European audiences. Linda Risso's article focuses on the NATO traveling exhibitions of posters and pictures in the 1950s and 1960s to instill confidence about the new U.S.-European alliance. Simon Tobia's article evaluates the Voice of America's broadcasting in Italy with news, music and entertainment aimed at a wide ranging audience; and Graham Mytton focuses on the BBC and its efforts through letters and interviews to evaluate the listening public particularly in communist countries. The articles by Luigi Bruti Liberati and Hilary Footitt shift the focus from an evaluation of larger public groups to influential opinion leaders. Liberati evaluates the Italian daily newspaper, *Corriere della Sera*, and its articles by leading journalists which indicate a good deal of ambivalence about events in the U.S. Footitt focuses on the reactions of French communist party members and sympathizers to the American troop presence in France in the early 1950s.

The reviewers agree that the different focus of the articles provides a good contrast for evaluations of the central question of this special issue: the actual impact of U.S. propaganda and the extent to which Western Europe was "Americanized" by this campaign. Emanuela Scarpellini outlines a disagreement among historians, with one group suggesting that "transference of technology and know-how did affect European structures, ushering in a change toward liberal consumption-oriented capitalism" with mass media and Hollywood cinema providing the most influential impact. "Americanization in fact coincides with 'modernization'," Scarpellini concludes. A second group takes a "minimalist view of American influence", especially on political, social and cultural values. As American influence in various forms penetrated Europe, adaptations varied from country to country with the spread of a consumer culture along the lines of Victoria De Grazia's *Irresistible Empire. America's Advance through Twentieth Century Europe*. Scarpellini concludes that

¹ Three recent examples that are featured in H-Diplo roundtables are Laura A. Belmonte's *Selling the American War: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008) which will appear in a forthcoming roundtable; Nicholas Cull's *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945-1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) at <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XI-6.pdf>; and Kenneth Osgood's *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006) at <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XI-6.pdf>.

“Europe Americanized?” makes an important contribution to the debate by examining both the propaganda and the audience’s reactions and suggests that the U.S. media helped persuade Europeans that the “American model was a good one,” and also triggered a “European narrative which began with pro-Americanism held up as a mirror, and went on to construct an independent profile for itself, centering on national identities.”

Stephen Gundle and Giles Scott-Smith agree with Scarpellini on the lack of data on the effectiveness of the U.S. propaganda campaign, although Gundle points out that European countries over time “broadly adopted the American way of mass production and mass consumption and they came to accept liberal democracy as a universal norm.” Gundle does point out that European opinion at times resisted U.S. propaganda, noting Liberati’s discussion on Italian journalists and how attraction to American cultural representations did not necessarily co-exist with pro-American views. “Attitudes toward U.S. politics and culture were complex and ... coherence or consistency were often absent,” Gundle emphasizes, and in the period before the media became dominant, “direct socialization and face-to-face interaction ... counted for more” than U.S. propaganda with reference to Footitt’s study of the French Communist Party. “Communists could comfortably enjoy jazz, comics or Hollywood cinema—and sometimes even appropriate these things to add appeal to their subculture” without shifting their political orientation, Gundle concludes.

In reviewing the articles, Scott-Smith raises significant questions about the reception research carried out on the propaganda campaigns and the reactions of the audiences in Europe. Noting a similarity between reception research and impact evaluations followed by public diplomacy practitioners, Scott-Smith skeptically suggests that impact “supposedly proves the worth of both budgets and research.” Secondly, Scott-Smith points to Graham Mytton’s essay on BBC’s audience research as indicating the appeal of anecdotal personal stories over statistical data whereas historians of public diplomacy find themselves relying on documents “written by practitioners [that] are often inflated in their claims simply because those writing them have to justify what they do and so safeguard their budgets.” Thirdly, Scott-Smith uses Risso’s article on NATO’s touring exhibitions with the author’s suggestion that they were successful to question whether a more verifiable line of inquiry could be pursued such as the “mind-set of NATO and how it perceives the world around it.” Finally, Scott-Smith uses Tobia’s article on VOA and its shift in Italy from its own broadcasting service to cooperation with the Italian broadcaster RAI to suggest that “reception research is most valuable if it is connected to tracking how an information apparatus adapts over time, in terms of its methods, its messages, and its target audiences.” In conclusion, Scott-Smith suggests that a different approach to public diplomacy and propaganda may lead to a fuller exploration of the field with data that provides more documentation for verifiable conclusions.

Participants:

Stephen Gundle is Professor of Film and Television Studies at the University of Warwick. He is a cultural historian who has mostly worked on Italy. His most recent book is *Death and the Dolce Vita: The Dark Side of Rome in the 1950s* (Canongate, 2011). He has recently completed a large research project on Mussolini’s personality cult.

Emanuela Scarpellini, Ph.D. in History of European Society, is full professor of Modern history at the University of Milan. She is the author of, among other works, *Material Nation: A Consumer's History of Modern Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); *Italiamerica*, co-edited with J.T. Schnapp, Milano: Il Saggiatore 2008; "Shopping American-Style: The Arrival of the Supermarket in Postwar Italy", *Enterprise & Society*, 5 :4, December 2004. She is currently working on a book on consumer and food culture in Italy.

Giles Scott-Smith received his Ph.D. in International Relations from Lancaster University (1998). He currently holds the Ernst van der Beugel Cahior in the Diplomatic History of Transatlantic Relations since WW II at Leiden University, and he is also Senior Researcher with the Roosevelt Study Center, Middelburg, the Netherlands. His research interests cover transnational relations, the role of non-governmental groups, and public diplomacy during the Cold War, particularly in the transatlantic region. His publications include *The Politics of Apolitical Culture* (Routledge, 2002), *Networks of Empire* (Peter Lang, 2008), and numerous articles in journals such as the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, *Intelligence & National Security*, *Journal of American Studies*, and *Cold War History*.

When did Europe become 'Americanised'? 1945? 1949? 1950-something? 1989? Or never? Certainly, if one wants to talk in terms of Americanization there are distinct moments when the U.S. government and its various agencies actively pursued a campaign of propaganda. Their aim was precisely to make Europe more pro-American and ultimately more American. As the articles by Linda Risso and Simona Tobia in this fine themed journal issue show, a range of media was harnessed to seek to convince public opinion in the 1940s, 1950s and even 1960s that the United States offered a model way of life and was a force for peace and security in the world. The NATO travelling exhibitions, Risso tells us, were seen by millions of people and were conceived in original and enticing ways. The radio programmes examined by Tobia undoubtedly reached a wider audience even if their duration each day was short. The U.S. took public opinion in allied countries seriously and it approached it in a sophisticated manner. America was already a highly "mediated" society in the 1940s and both advertising and the social sciences were well-developed. Thus social psychology and communications theories were brought to bear in formulating policies in this area.

The problem any historian faces in examining these efforts is that really we have very little idea how effective any of them were. Overall – and one should not lose sight of the big picture – the countries of Western Europe remained allies of the U.S. In time they broadly adopted the American way of mass production and mass consumption and they came to accept liberal democracy as a universal norm. The much-feared Communist threat did not melt away everywhere even as prosperity was diffused more widely, but over time it dwindled and eventually imploded with the collapse of the Soviet empire. To this extent one might conclude that the U.S. efforts were certainly successful in general terms and the single initiatives analysed here probably made some sort of, maybe minor, contribution. However, from a historical point of view, the period between 1945 and the 'revolutions' of 1989 cannot be seen as one of steady progress towards a final desired goal. European public opinion was often resistant to American propaganda (it had after all been consistently targeted by governments both dictatorial and democratic through the war years) and, as Luigi Bruti Liberati demonstrates, even supposedly pro-American elites were sometimes not inclined to endorse U.S. policy uncritically. His study of the cases of the Italian journalists Ugo Stille and Indro Montanelli is extremely revealing in this regard. Montanelli was a maverick who quite happily advised U.S. ambassador Clare Boothe Luce and lunched with her at the embassy, but he almost never swayed during his long career from his view that the Italians were a people who revelled in their vices and who would never change. Liberati cites a celebrated article by Umberto Eco, as well as generously referring to a book of my own, to make the point that U.S. cultural products often appealed even to those who were politically anti-American. Even hardened opponents of U.S. policy and values found it difficult to resist all the seductive images, sounds and techniques that hailed from across the Atlantic. His article supports a point I made in an article in a French journal a few years ago in which I reversed the premise of Eco's article and explored the

anti-American cultural inclinations of those who were politically supportive of the United States.¹

What both the example of culturally pro-American anti-Americans and instances of culturally anti-American pro-Americans show is that the attitudes towards U.S. politics and culture were complex and that coherence or consistency were often absent. What this reveals is that U.S. efforts occurred in a context in which people's views and life practices were shaped by a variety of different factors which worked in different ways. Risso concludes that the issue of how the NATO exhibitions were received and their impact "remains open" (21). Tobia argues that the radio broadcasts were "successful, but only to a certain extent" (43). The fact is that the U.S. probably mistakenly saw the western European public as being as ripe for persuasion as the American one. It assumed that media techniques - which were often inventive - could have a significant impact. The Americans could certainly be forgiven for making this assumption since the media were indeed highly developed in Europe and in the cities at least they were widely followed. But in the period before what the sociologist Edgar Morin called "le grand cracking",² when the media became socially dominant, it was direct socialisation and face-to-face interaction that counted for more. No doubt many people who were curious about the United States came to see the NATO exhibitions or watched the film material prepared by U.S. government agencies but an organisation with a strong and capillary presence on the ground like the French Communist Party, as Hilary Footitt well demonstrates, could be much more effective in shaping opinion, even if its long-term destiny would be the one we know. This meant that Communists could comfortably enjoy jazz, comics or Hollywood cinema - and sometimes even appropriate these things to add appeal to their subculture - without in any way fearing that such contamination would lead to political conversion. Some readers may recall Vera Belmont's semi-autobiographical 1986 film *Rouge Baiser*, which cleverly explored the fascination exercised by Rita Hayworth and cosmetics on two adolescent Parisian girls around the time of the Ridgway riots.

In my view it is the study of the interaction, or conflict, of different forms of propaganda and the marshalling of all possible evidence about their impact that can aid us in understanding how public opinion was shaped. Of course, all diffusers of propaganda messages tried to measure impact but the results of these efforts can only ever be a part of the assessment of the historian. A wide trawl through the contemporary press (including local publications) can assist and oral history can offer valuable insights. Perhaps, at the end of the day, the settings that are most receptive to all types of propaganda are authoritarian ones. As Graham Mytton's article demonstrates, non-democratic contexts do not only mean that government messages can be diffused without fear of contradiction, and with a certain degree of certainty that they will be widely received, but that there will be a

¹ 'La modernité italienne et l'image de l'Amérique', *Le Banquet*, No.21, 2004, 107-126.

² Edgar Morin, *L'Esprit du temps* (Paris: Grasset, 1962), pp. 59-74.

portion of the population that, seeking alternatives, can be effectively reached by counter-propaganda.

Americanisation is a theme that has a certain history of its own in historiography. I first addressed it in the context of a collection of essays published by *Quaderni storici* in 1986.³ One of the most important contributions in that period was the late Pier Paolo D'Attorre's volume on the allure of both the USA and the USSR in Italy after World War Two.⁴ Most of the chapters in that rich volume, and the conference that preceded it, highlighted the importance of paying deep attention to impact. It is noteworthy that virtually all of the European scholars who contributed to the discussion were keen to stress that, if Italy had become 'Americanised', it was only in the sense that American ideas and practices became a significant factor in processes of socio-economic and cultural change that also had domestic roots, antecedents and motivations. Paradoxically, it was mainly North American scholars who tended to argue in favour of a thesis of successful cultural colonisation.

³ 'L'americanizzazione del quotidiano: televisione e consumismo nell'Italia degli anni cinquanta', *Quaderni storici*, 21:61(2), 1986, 561-94.

⁴ Pier Paolo D'Attorre (ed.), *Nemici per la pelle: sogno americano e mito sovietico nell'Italia contemporanea* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1991).

Europe Americanized? is a clear and somewhat provocative title capturing the purpose of this special issue of the journal *Cold War History*, which is to stir up a debate that has engrossed U.S. and European historians for decades: the social, political and cultural ties between Europe and the USA over the second half of the twentieth century.

The volume contains five essays, each tackling a different facet. The first three hinge on American propaganda in Europe and its effects. Linda Risso goes into the NATIS (NATO Information Service) schemes of the Fifties and Sixties, focusing on the travelling exhibits whose posters and pictures were designed to promote the role of NATO among its member countries. This traditional type of propaganda targeting a broad public was on the lines of wartime and above all Marshall Plan propaganda designed to reassure the European populace (the exhibits being aptly named Caravans for Peace). The second essay by Simona Tobia – guest editor of the review – explores a more modern vehicle of propaganda, the radio *Voice of America* in Italy. She notes how this formed a model of broadcasting: its messages contained “information”[3] (a more acceptable term than propaganda) and had a wide-ranging target with its news, music and entertainment for workers, intellectuals and youth, not forgetting women who might be curious about their American counterparts’ lifestyles. The last of the three, by Graham Mytton, concentrates on the BBC and the problem of taking audience soundings. From his long experience in British radio broadcasting the author reconstructs the techniques used to detect and monitor the listening public (largely letters and interviews), especially those in communist countries in the final phase of the Cold War. Special attention is devoted to *Radio Liberty* and *Radio Free Europe* (financed by the American government). The articles conclude that the various forms of propaganda promoting specific projects, U.S. policy in Europe or the desirableness of the American way of life, were a great success with their chosen public. But in the space of a few years that success tapered off and the audience went over to the national networks. Failing proper means of quantitative and qualitative measurement, moreover, it is often hard to gauge the real impact of specific propaganda.

The other two essays are a bit different. They might be said to shift their sights from the general public to its “opinion leaders” – people or institutions thought to be influential. One such was the Italian daily *Corriere della Sera*, organ of the moderate middle classes, which is here studied by Luigi Bruti Liberati. Its articles by influential journalists show pronounced ambivalence towards U.S. policy: the 1953 presidential elections, the Julius and Ethel Rosenberg affair and the ‘case’ of physicist Robert Oppenheimer reveal anti-American sentiments even in political areas that were close to the USA. Lastly, Hilary Footitt investigates certain communist party members and sympathizers in the role of opinion moulders in France. She recalls the impact André Stil had in creating an anti-American “narrative” to the effect that French soil had been continuously occupied, first by the Nazis and then by American invaders. This argument would stiffen communist opposition in France.

The overall drift of all these papers is to show the importance of American propaganda (or information) in building an acceptable political and cultural model in Europe. But equally central is the extent to which this message was received in Europe: this was far from a foregone conclusion and often charged with ambiguity and opposition.

From this angle the issues fully in line with the current history debate whose milestones it may be well to spell out. The fact is that historians have long pondered the influence of the United States, above all after World War II ended in Europe (and then in Japan). From the Forties and Fifties on, for war-beleaguered European countries to rise again it seemed indispensable that they take on board the “American model” – meaning a system of mass production, new techniques of scientific management, organization and marketing. But apart from the obvious political and military influence of the USA on Europe of the day, just how far did America really export her socio-cultural model? Historians divide on this point. In a nutshell: there are those who think transference of technology and know-how did affect European structures, ushering in a change towards liberal consumption-oriented capitalism¹. A major part in this process was played by the mass media, above all Hollywood cinema, which created a receptive atmosphere favourable to growth and the diffusion of consumer patterns². Passing on production techniques and setting up ideological consensus thus went hand in hand. On this view, any resistance was seen as rearguard action by groups defending their corporative power. Here Americanization in fact coincides with “modernization”.

A second group of scholars take a different and minimalist view of American influence. Though one can hardly deny that many U.S.-derived techniques came in, that does not mean people converted to American-style political, social and cultural values. For a long time the ruling elites of Europe held out against full liberalization of markets or embracing the ethos of competition. More significantly, too, many in the ranks of the workers and trade-unions were in favour of the concept of welfare that was gradually taking shape in Europe. On this view, American influence was selective and limited³. Of late the picture has become more blurred. Black-and-white acceptance/rejection tends to be avoided; features of both are seen to have co-existed. Two points especially are emphasized. The first is *path dependence*: it was only the exceptional postwar situation that brought structural changes in Europe, but there was still local tradition to be reckoned with, and this varied greatly from country to country⁴. The second point is how actively Europeans interpreted the American model. Resistance and adaptation have a positive significance: they stem from the need to adjust to new situations and experience them in original forms⁵. Recently Victoria De Grazia has lucidly outlined this position⁶. Her overall interpretation

¹ Andrew Glyn *et al.*, *The Rise and Fall of the Golden Age*, in Stephen A. Marglin, Juliet B. Schor editors, *The Golden Age of Capitalism: Reinterpreting the Postwar Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

² Charles S. Maier, *The Politics of Productivity: Foundations of American International Policy after World War II*, in *Id.*, *In Search of Stability: Explorations in Historical Political Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

³ Pier Paolo D'Attorre ed., *Nemici per la pelle: sogno americano e mito sovietico nell'Italia contemporanea* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1991); Michael J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain, and the Reconstruction of Western Europe, 1947-1952* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

⁴ Marie-Laure Djelic, *Exporting the American Model: The Post-War Transformation of European Business* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁵ Jonathan Zeitlin, Gary Herrigel, *Americanization and its Limits: Reworking U.S. Technology and Management in Postwar Europe and Japan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

is that this *was* ascendancy based on soft power and the spread of modern consumer society (advertising, supermarkets, Hollywood films, a high standard of living, consumer centrality, etc.), though much adapted by the various European countries.

Against this background *Europe Americanized?* has an interesting contribution to make to the historical debate. First, it gives diffusion and publicizing of the American model its due in Europe; second, it sifts the various media used in this process; third – the most original feature – it studies audience reactions, not just the implementers' own viewpoints. Though there is obviously a dearth of data about this last point, the results are definitely interesting and (in nearly all essays) based on primary sources often making a first appearance.

Taking its cue from specific, even secondary, issues, the volume seeks to build up a broader picture of Cold War Europe. A picture in which U.S. media played a fundamental role, not just in persuading the man in the street (not to mention many politicians and intellectuals) that the American model was a good one, but also in triggering a European narrative which began with pro-Americanism held up as a mirror, and went on to construct an independent profile for itself, centering on national identities.

⁶ Victoria De Grazia, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

“This is all very interesting, but what did it really *achieve*?” This is the standard question from any mildly sceptical diplomatic historian when presented with studies on public diplomacy and propaganda. The person questioned will usually try to defend their work with as much evidence as they can muster as to how attitudes were changed or policies influenced, but more often than not they will fall short of expectations. The evidence – beyond the anecdotal or the alleged – is rarely there to fully satisfy the questioner.

Anyone working on the history and practice of public diplomacy – the ways and means of influencing public opinion abroad – will have at one time or another been faced with this situation. Fortunately diplomatic history has broadened out in recent years to accommodate researchers interested in fields of activity outside of High Politics. Nevertheless for many the “relevance” question remains hanging in the background. In some fields – particularly radio – enough research has now been accumulated to judge fairly comprehensively the kinds of impact that Western broadcasting had during the Cold War.¹ In other fields there is still plenty to be done. The articles in this special issue of *Cold War History*, covering NATO exhibitions, the Voice of America, the BBC, *Corriere della Sera*, and the French communist press, add some closely-observed case studies driven by three central questions: what policies of propaganda were implemented? What kinds of reception research were carried out? How did particular target audiences in Europe react?

The first thing that strikes the reader is that this kind of reception research fits within the parallel trend of impact analysis as carried out by public diplomacy practitioners themselves in recent years. Just as historians of public diplomacy and propaganda feel the need to justify their field in response to diplomatic historians in general, so too do practitioners of public diplomacy need to check what the impact of their activities actually is, not so much to create a feedback loop for improved practice (that rarely seems to happen, since the same mistakes are often repeated) but to justify the continuation of their funding. For years the Department of State “emphasized anecdotal evidence of program outputs instead of tangible outcome measures assessing the impact and reach of overseas public diplomacy activities.”² There is scepticism all around, both in academia and in policy-making circles. Thus ‘impact’ supposedly proves the worth of both budgets *and* research.

The second thing that comes out, following on closely from the above, is the problem of defining success. The temptation for historians, when faced with the (generally) well-

¹ See especially A. Ross Johnson and R. Eugene Parta, *Cold War Broadcasting: Impact on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2010).

² Evaluation and Measurement Unit, Office of Policy, Planning and Resources for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs (R/PPR), United States Department of State, accessed on 29 September 2011, <http://www.state.gov/r/ppr/emu/>.

meaning but sceptical question posed at the beginning, is to reach for statistics and 'hard evidence' in order to show how many people came into contact with various information media as evidence of scope of impact. In contrast, the author of a fascinating article in the special issue on BBC audience research, Graham Mytton, says the following:

One of the difficulties with audience research, or perhaps it is less a difficulty than a fact that audience researchers need to take full account of, is that most of us are less impressed with representative statistical data and much more with stories about real people and what they say.³

This is an interesting claim, because it challenges the historian to interweave personal histories with wider political attitudes and events, using sources of information as a crucial variable. The sources that Mytton says were used by the BBC – audience letters, refugee interviews, travellers' reports – were as much anecdotal as anything else. Diplomatic historians are generally trained to trust documents rather than people, because memories are fallible and documents give us the facts (so we are led to believe). Yet those historians of information campaigns, propaganda, and public diplomacy are often faced with the opposite dilemma. Documents written by the practitioners are often inflated in their claims simply because those writing them have to justify what they do and so safeguard their budgets. In contrast, individuals on the receiving end often have no need to inflate their experiences and can offer a more balanced reflection. A curious paradox.

The third issue relevant here is the value of institutional histories of propaganda, by which is meant the reasons behind propaganda campaigns, and how they are put together and run. It is justifiable to say that the apparatus of propaganda has as much of importance for historians as the propaganda itself. Why are these campaigns run at all? What did those running them *think* they were doing? The study on NATO's touring exhibitions by Linda Risso chronicles the running of these information tools through the 1950s and 1960s, and shows the institutional mindset of those organising them.⁴ The attempt by NATO to interact with its publics is certainly an important part of the alliance's history. Yet the article still states several times that the exhibitions were "successful" (3, 20), even though the final conclusion is that while we have some idea of the numbers of people who attended these events, we still have no idea what they actually thought about them. The assumption is that if the exhibitions were not successful, they must have been a waste of everyone's time – including the historian's. Yet could it not be more useful to consider whether the apparent *need* for the exhibitions came from the Service itself rather than from the publics? Is it necessary to declare that they were successful when the evidence for this is unclear?

³ Graham Mytton, 'Audience research at the BBC External Services during the Cold War: A view from the inside,' *Cold War History* 11:1 (February 2011): 53. DOI: 10.1080/14682745.2011.545597. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2011.545597>.

⁴ Linda Risso, 'Propaganda on wheels: The NATO travelling exhibitions in the 1950s and 1960s,' *Cold War History* 11:1 (February 2011): 9-25. DOI: 10.1080/14682745.2011.545595. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2011.545595>.

This way the attention is directed to the mind-set of NATO and how it perceives the world around it – a valuable field of historical research - rather than once again trying to satisfy the sceptical (and, dare I say, positivist) historian’s query about relevance.

The fourth point is that reception research is most valuable if it is connected to tracking how an information apparatus adapts over time, in terms of its methods, its messages, and its target audiences. Propaganda – or better said, good propaganda – is not static but is sensitive to changes in political context and audience behaviour. A case in point here is the Voice of America’s decision from 1953 onwards to shift resources away from its own Italian broadcasting service towards increasing cooperation with the Italian broadcaster RAI (Radio Audizioni Italiane). The evidence presented in Simona Tobia’s article on VoA suggests that RAI saw the advantages of this arrangement but were sensitive to attributing material to the Americans.⁵ This is a very interesting shift, as it indicates a realisation on the part of USIA and VoA planners that their message would have a greater impact if it was packaged in an Italian box. Yet the implications of this ‘grey propaganda’, the reasons why RAI decided to cooperate in this way, and what the broader field of U.S. public diplomacy was doing in order to smooth out the path towards this arrangement, are not dealt with in the article. This is a missed opportunity to understand how both the Americans and Italians thought at the time about what they were doing and why, in relation to how they could reach their audience.

As is stated in the special issue’s Introduction, “the thorny question of reception still remains open.”⁶ Yet this begs the question: can reception research *ever* be an open-shut case? And by trying to make it so, are we not coming at this field of enquiry from the wrong angle? There is a greater challenge here, and while the articles in this special issue point in some interesting directions, they are still trying to satisfy the sceptic more than fully exploring the field they have chosen.

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⁵ Simona Tobia, ‘Advertising America: VOA and Italy,’ *Cold War History* 11:1 (February 2011): 27-47. DOI: 10.1080/14682745.2011.545596. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2011.545596>.

⁶ Simona Tobia, ‘Introduction: Europe Americanized?’ *Cold War History* 11:1 (February 2011): 3. DOI: 10.1080/14682745.2011.545593. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2011.545593>.