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# Tomás Maldonado and the Sign System for Olivetti ELEA 9003

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## Abstract

ELEA 9003 was the first Italian transistorized computer, produced serially by the Olivetti company beginning in 1959. The interest in this mainframe computer spans several fields, as its history is at the intersection of the birth of Italian information science, the ergonomic design of computing machines, and Adriano Olivetti's ideals and philosophy about industry and society. Fragments of this story have already been told: ELEA 9003 was a paradigm of excellence in Italian research. What is still mostly unknown is that Tomás Maldonado, in 1960, developed an innovative symbols system for the console of Olivetti ELEA 9003. Ambitiously, Olivetti aimed to launch its brand new mainframe computer in the international market together with IBM, Ferranti, Siemens, Bull, and others. However, in the original ELEA 9003 console, made of a keyboard and a display, the indicators were identified by Italian words. In order to export this machine to foreign countries, Olivetti thought of a brand new 'international' solution. Instead of translating Italian words into English, Olivetti asked Maldonado to elaborate a sign system that could be easily learned by any operator, regardless of his mother tongue – a novel language to be used to communicate between man and machine.

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