

## Conference “Germano Facetti: the man the artist, the archive”

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*Introduction by*

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Ladies and gentlemen, as chairwoman of the Museum that is hosting this conference, and as head of the Istituto piemontese per la storia della Resistenza e della società contemporanea “Giorgio Agosti”, it is a pleasure to welcome you all to this special event. The Istituto Piemontese since 1 June 2006, has kept the extraordinary archive Germano Facetti gathered together in the course of his life before passing away on 8 April 2006. The importance of this collection of images and its origin, inseparable from Facetti’s experience as a political deportee, which we will discuss throughout the session, have induced us to arrange this meeting, along with the work on the archive, as swiftly as possible.

We have managed to do all this thanks to the collaboration of the Committee that was purposely set up to take care of the fund and foster it. The members of the Committee are nearly all present today, starting from Lucia Facetti, who has accomplished, together with her mother Mary Crittal, her father’s choice of placing the archive in Turin. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to both of them and to Paola Agosti, Luisa Castiglioni Deichmann, Francesco della Porta and Massimo Biava as well, for the work they have done to create a connection between Facetti and the Institute. I would like to thank all the participants who immediately accepted the invitation motivated by profound reasons: some shared Facetti’s experience at the Camp or were lifetime friends, others were younger friends or scholars.

We are aware of the fact that this meeting offers only a first brief approach to the author and his work, as Facetti was a man of many talents. «Germano Facetti – as Richard Hollis wrote in his obituary in the “Guardian” – lived several professional lives. For 25 years he was a great personality in the publishing industry and in British design, better known as the artistic director who changed the looks of Penguin books in the 60s. Few of his colleagues were aware of his contribution to theatre and progressive cinema in London and Paris. Most still did not know that his interest in the meaning of documentary images arose from what he had experienced when he was imprisoned in the nazi camps»<sup>1</sup>.

Those who met Facetti for professional and biographical reasons have been struck by his personality and his personal history. Various people have traced Facetti in writings or pictures: his professional history has been described by Hollis in the illuminating profile published in «Eye»<sup>2</sup>; his experience in the lager and his passion for documentaries have been outlined by Anthony West in the film «The Yellow Box. A History of Hate» (of which today we will watch the short Italian version), and in the video «Antiutopia» that will be presented for the first time today by Paolo Ranieri. The sketchbook of drawings from Mauthausen-Gusen has been illustrated by Benedetto Besio in the study “.....” published in «Domus»<sup>3</sup>.

Paolo Crepet has dug into Facetti’s biography and turned the conversations they had together into an incisive successful novel written in autobiographical form, from which important elements of his personality come out: Facetti’s strong urge for independence, his anarchic vein, his passion for arts and crafts as a creative activity that ran in the family, and the moral qualities that made him strong enough to survive the lager experience and denounce injustice and violence for the rest of his life. Giuseppe Cederna has written down the vivid feelings he had of the encounters with Facetti in the hills in Sarzana<sup>4</sup> – the article appeared in «Specchio».

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<sup>1</sup> R. Hollis, *Germano Facetti*, “The Guardian”, Tuesday April 11, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> R. Hollis, *The image as evidence*, «Eye», a. 8, n. 29, 1998, pp. 62-69.

<sup>3</sup> B. Besio, *Mauthausen Facetti Belgiojoso*, “Domus”, n. 882, giugno 2005.

<sup>4</sup> G. Cederna, *La mia vita fra Hitler e i Beatles*, “Specchio”, 7 maggio 2005

But that is not all there is to know, as there are at least three other aspects that should be studied thoroughly:

- as far as Facetti's background is concerned, we should not forget the years he spent in Milan before leaving for England in 1950. We know that during his apprenticeship at Belgiojoso, Banfi, Peressutti and Roger's study he had been particularly influenced by the teaching of Ernesto Rogers, director of «Domus», and whose program was: «to educate people in aesthetic criticism, help them improve their technical abilities and ethical attitudes, in order to achieve the same goal: the construction of society». But back then the graphics in Milan were strongly engaged in civil commitment. Belgiojoso, Max Huber, Albe Steiner, Remo Muratore, Gabriele Mucchi, Eugenio Gentili Tedeschi had all pledged themselves to find new forms of communication through the first Resistance and Reconstruction exhibitions, and this in the subject the Institute has focused on while restoring one of the first exhibitions in collaboration with the Istituto Nazionale per la storia del movimento di Liberazione in Italia<sup>5</sup>.
- As far as Facetti's activity is concerned, we must have a deeper knowledge of his reflections on visual communication which gave birth to a practical application in the film «Victoria etcetera» (1971) and to a theoretic formulation in the book *Identity Kits. A pictorial survey of visual signals*, written by Facetti and Alan Fletcher the same year. The movie «Victoria etcetera», made in collaboration with the photographer Paolo Gori, will be presented later on today by Carlotta Fontana.

In these works Facetti studied and illustrated through a vast selection of images «[...]the creation, elaboration and sometimes the resulting confusion of identities grafted on to that visible world, particularly as we experience them through visual modes of communication. We are concerned not with semantics, but with how, by printing, we can extend words temporally; how, by typography, we can extend their emotive value; how, by association, the Pavlovian reaction is invoked [...]» . «[...]Our purpose in making this book is not, however, to trace the complex history of man's quest for his own identity among visually coded meanings. It is simply to show some of the layers of meaning to be dug out of visual forms, and something of what these can tell us about people in general and our own subconscious striving for self identification [...]».

These statements and the analysis carried out in the book clearly prove that Facetti's thoughts cannot be considered separately from Contemporary European Semiology and its connections with psychoanalysis. So we can easily observe how early Facetti got to the concept of coexistent and contradictory multiple identities – a subject that he understood by analysing visual language and that is now being widely discussed by philosophers and sociologists.

- And finally Facetti's archive is not only an essential tool that serves the purpose of recording this intellectual path. It is also a real laboratory he developed while working as an archivist (processing data and solving problems connected to them; broadcasting the archive online with the program “metarchivi”; educational use of the material in the specialisation course in *mediaeducation*).

We are far from the results, but still think this first approach is necessary for two main reasons:

- to familiarise the public with an immensely rich heritage very few people were aware of and that will become gradually accessible. Those who have been working to make the archive accessible have been precious intermediaries between Facetti and the Institute, as they have tied together two separate worlds by immediately recognising and emphasizing their connections and similarities.
- to rebuild the network of friends and relations that were part of Facetti's world and that we would like to use to support us in the work we are doing. While organising this day we have tried to recreate this precious web.

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<sup>5</sup> See the catalogue by A. Mignemi, G. Solaro, *Un'immagine dell'Italia Resistenza e ricostruzione. Le mostre del dopoguerra in Europa*, Milano, Skira, 2005.

Today we will listen to the voices of those friends who shared and remember vividly Facetti's experience in the lager, his political or professional background. We will also listen to those who just recently came in contact with him through his archive, writings and interviews, and were fascinated by his story and personality. We will watch the films and videos that have been made about Facetti. We will hear about the contributions of archivists, historians, writers, graphic artists and architects.

Marzia Ratti will present the exhibition on the sketchbook of drawings Facetti kept while in Mauthausen-Gusen, which will be inaugurated the 29 September in La Spezia. The exhibition is to be considered Facetti's last work, since he designed the panels and the catalogue himself. This last labour shows how strongly he desired to convey the terrible memories he had secretly kept in a Kodak 'yellow box' for 60 years.