

Germano Facetti and the Sign as a Necessity of Memory

Germano Facetti, Memory, Ludovico Belgiojoso, Yellow box, Narration

/Abstract

The experiences of war, of death, of pain, unspeakable by nature and perhaps due to the very limitations of language, must at some point be recounted, through interpretable narratives. This text attempts to reconstruct the complex experience of some of the protagonists of deportation, who, however, were not immediately, due to the pain caused by that event, active participants in the construction of memory, allowing everything to remain in the intimate sphere of affection. We refer to the story of Germano Facetti, a graphic designer of international fame, deported to Gusen, who after choosing silence for years, only began to recount his experience at the end of the 1990s, at almost 70 years of age. He does so by entrusting his 'yellow box', a Kodak photo paper box, in which he had kept a notebook for all those years, with drawings of the concentration camp and some documents from the Lager. The result will be a cinematographic narrative, which will trigger a long and active participation on Facetti's part to try to leave a testimony, to provide evidence, as he himself says before disappearing or committing suicide like the others. An attempt will be made to retrace the construction of his documentary memory, trying to enter into his personal expressive form, but also to tell, through his, the story of others such as Ludovico Barbiano di Belgiojoso, his point of reference, not only artistically, and part of the Milanese architecture studio BBPR.

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Narration and memory: a methodological problem

“But, now, in my old age, and in these dark times of fundamentalism, war and death, I feel the need to recount so that the youngest may know what we have experienced and may understand what bestialities hatred can lead to”.

Germano Facetti ¹

War stories take one’s breath away, but it is the historian’s job to tell the tale. The telling comes after a careful and respectful analysis of documents, oral, written, and drawn. One often encounters the unresolvable dilemma of survivors who found themselves caught between the desire to keep silent and the impulse to recount something that was inexpressible in terms of intensity and pain. These experiences, for those who lived through them, are truly inexpressible, sometimes due to the very limitations imposed by language. For those who find themselves recounting the pain of others, perhaps, it is a cliché that it cannot be conveyed.

However, whatever the contingencies, these experiences are said at some point, and this saying translates into cultural constructions that constitute narratives to be interpreted and transmitted. The contradiction between narratives and the unspeakably of facts is blinding, but the historian must overcome it in the name of the right of facts to be told.

One of the elements that certainly complicates the narrative is that it is usual to distinguish the truth of the historian’s facts from their representation. Actually, representations and facts are definable to the extent that we do not consider them on parallel tracks, but let them relate to each other. On the one hand, representations have facts as their material; on the other hand, facts are structured in order to be told according to the tools that they share with representations. One and the other meet insofar as they relate to the subjectivity of human beings. Whose task is it to make them interact? Perhaps to oral history, which is bound to facts as history but is confronted with representations for its working practice; or to art, to subjective sign expression, which starts from representations and arrives at the reconstruction of facts.²

Still in the methodological field, one may ask how it is possible to generalise broader frameworks from individual documents. How does the biographical, personal, subjective picture relate to the social, collective picture? Perhaps one of the generators of this misunderstanding is that we often use expressions such as life stories to define the subjective, biographical picture, giving greater weight and relevance to the word lives, rather than the word stories.³

1 Benedetto Besio, “Mauthausen Facetti Belgiojoso”, *Domus* (June 2005): 62.

2 Alessandro Portelli, *Storie orali. Racconto, immaginazione, dialogo* (Roma: Donzelli, 2017), 114-116.

3 Portelli says in this regard: “(...) the facts may be concrete and verifiable, but what we have at hand is not the

So does formalising the history of a person help us to think about the history of a society?

This question applies to all disciplines that deal with histories, such as literature. In literary criticism and the history of literature, tools are generally used to relate the individual to the social.⁴

The symmetry or balance between these two positions, individual and society or culture, goes towards the relationship between word and truth. This does not mean that everything the narrator says is necessarily true: what counts for every auto-biographer is the coherence of the narrative and the narrative construction of self.

It should also be remembered that no life story can be entirely summarised within general social frameworks because no person can be entirely summarised within general social frameworks. Todorov, in his book *The Fantastic Literature*, states that each work of art is a genre in its own right.⁵

For the sake of scientific abstraction, social reality is often represented in the form of a grid, made up of squares that are all the same. But this is an artifice because the world is shaped like a mosaic, each tile matching or overlapping, forming a whole in which we can recognise a form made up of the diversity that fits together.

The narration of both individual and collective stories always brings us back to the realm of memory. But even here, complex dynamics arise. Halbwachs legitimises in their scientific use expressions such as 'group memory' and 'collective memory' but always emphasises that the act of remembering and the process of memory are always attributable to the individual. He goes on to say that even if individual memory does not exist, it is common to read in testimonies and stories: 'I remember'. If memory were only collective, one witness for each collective would be sufficient. But this is not the case, because each individual carries a memory derived from a multiplicity of groups and always organises them differently. Like any human activity, memory is social and can be shared. However, as Portelli continues, like language with respect to words, it only manifests itself through individual memories and stories. It becomes a collective memory when it separates and abstracts itself from the individual. Collective memory is not a spontaneous expression of experience, but a mediated formalisation. There is not only an 'official' and 'ideological' memory on the one hand and an 'authentic' and pure memory on the other, but a multiplicity of memories all mediated on an ideological, cultural, and narrative level. Memory, therefore, must be extended in

experience, the lived experience, the reality, but rather their narration, a verbal construction in which the narrator, thanks to the opportunity and the challenge brought by the researcher, gives narrative form to his own life. The authenticity and immediacy of experience will always elude us; on the other hand, we possess an object that bears at least a formal relation to the experience itself. After all, the narrative of life is also part of life'. Portelli, *Storie orali*, 241.

4 Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Che cos'è un genere letterario?* (Parma: Pratiche, 1992).

5 Tzvetan Todorov, *La letteratura fantastica* (Milano: Garzanti, 1977).

its spectrum, not limiting it to a dichotomy but to a multiplicity of different memories. It is only with this perspective that we can understand how fundamental and foundational is, for memory, another element, which Halbwachs describes as absolutely individual, solitary, which is *forgetting*.⁶ An approach that makes us realise how it is possible, often within the same people, that the individual desire to forget coexists with the social commitment to remember.⁷

The choice of silence

How, then, are we to consider those who politely declined the invitation to testify and fled in front of a microphone? Was this, perhaps, a way of warning us that some form of sacralisation was taking place and that their testimony could have no place within the boundaries of testimonial legality?⁸

Annette Wieviorka has identified a true 'era of the witness', the period in which interest in all that was being told was concentrated in order to give voice to a desire to make us participants. (Wieviorka 1999) This interest, legitimate as it is, has somehow allowed the reality of those who felt uncomfortable when faced with the demand to transcribe their testimonies on a written page to be overlooked. Cavaglion writes that bibliographical attention and care, the value of testimony, and the cult of oral history are one thing, but respect for those who escaped the investigations of those who chased them with a microphone and a tape recorder is quite another. Perhaps, one should have thought of more sophisticated knowledge tools to understand their silences.⁹

And so, when we have recently begun to come to terms with the abuse of memory, with the rhetoric of commemoration, these prolonged silences have shown that they have retained a genuine modernity.¹⁰ Many witnesses defended the right to silence, sometimes interrupted in *limine mortis*. The return home

6 Forgetting allows memory to take on a form, through two modes: social memory needs to erase some memories and therefore tends to eliminate them to make room for others; because of an alleged incompatibility between memories, there is a tendency to select or to harmonise them. This schema that Lotman and Uspensky present to us is based on an opposition of positions: on the one hand the things that are remembered, on the other those that are forgotten, the act of remembering is possible because we forget. However, as Portelli points out, the memory of war complicates this dichotomous picture because it is too important to be forgotten but also too traumatic to be remembered. Again, it is important for social and personal memory, but because of its intensity and contradiction, it does not allow for a reconstructed construction. On forgetting as part of the work of memory see Jurij Michajlovič Lotman, Boris Andreevič Uspenskij, *Tipologia della cultura* (Milano: Bompiani, 1973), 46-47. In this text they write that "Culture is, by its very essence, directed against forgetting: it overcomes forgetting by transforming it into one of the many mechanisms of memory."

7 Portelli, *Storie orali. Racconto, immaginazione, dialogo*, 216.

8 In relation to this attitude common to those who have gone through traumatic events such as war, we can perhaps reflect on the possibility that memory and forgetting, are not analysed on two opposite sides, but part of the same narrative. A memory that Portelli helps us to define as "oxymoronic", i.e. a memory in which everything that is remembered is a way of forgetting, and within oblivion the unbearable memory can find space and comfort. Portelli, *Storie orali. Racconto, immaginazione, dialogo*, 197.

9 Alberto Cavaglion, «Immagini senza testo» In *Germano Facetti. Dalla rappresentazione del lager alla storia del XX secolo*, ed Daniele Moraca (Torino: Silvana Editoriale, 2008), 23-30.

10 It must also be emphasised that, for many years, official Italian culture did not give due value to the memories of traumatic events such as those passed in the concentration camps, not considering them suitable to be analysed with the tools of scientific and historiographical research. This attitude lasted at least until Primo Levi's death (1987). It was considered for a long time that the experience of the concentration camps was the prerogative of the witness account and should be placed at the margins of the debate between scholars and literati.

for them represented the beginning of a turning of the page, to be able to close all the horror of memories inside a box: a box with too short strings like Sergio Sarri's (Sarri 1999), or the yellow box, by Germano Facetti.¹¹ Then there are examples of some who did not want to publish anything but became characters in other people's works or allowed themselves to be published in the lives of others.¹² Paolo Crepet, psychiatrist and storyteller, for example, was fascinated by Facetti and made him the protagonist in his story 'The Reason for Feelings'.¹³ (Crepet 2002)¹⁴

In addition to the complexity of the language that these silent testimonies recalled to us, there is also, in relation to memory, the indefiniteness of the perception of the events that occurred in their places of horror.¹⁵

Belgiojoso says "In camp life, the accounts of what was happening, outside and inside the camp, were very often misleading. They reflected, in general, much more the wishes and hopes of the inmates than the reality. (...) Much of this was not true, but it was enough for an assumption to resemble expectations or hopes that the news immediately ran from mouth to mouth, as if the facts had really happened. Desire created the facts, and proved them, confirmed them through the verdict of 'rumours'. How many accounts of the events of history could have come about in this way?" (Belgiojoso 2009, 86-87)¹⁶

The painful experiences of the camp forced one to return to the deeper meaning of each word spoken in relation to certain experiences. Belgiojoso reflects on certain episodes in the concentration camp in Gusen: 'I often made considerations about language, about our way of expressing ourselves, because it seemed to me that words had their truest meaning here, regaining a weight they did not have in normal life. The expression "deadly silence", for example: how

11 Germano Facetti (Milan, 1926 - Sarzana, 2006), is internationally known for his activity as a graphic designer, particularly linked to the art direction of Penguin Book in the 1960s in London. He was deported to Mauthausen, little more than a teenager, for political reasons.

12 The most emblematic case is that of Roberto Bazlen, founder of the Adelphi publishing house, who spent a lifetime publishing memoirs and testimonies of intellectual friends, but never published a note of his experience. The book that Bazlen never wanted to write was written by friends and collaborators after his death. Roberto Bazlen, *Note senza testo* (Milano: Adelphi, 1970).

13 Paolo Crepet. *La ragione dei sentimenti* (Torino: Einaudi, 2002).

14 From 2001 to 2002, Facetti met at his home in Sarzana, Paolo Crepet, with whom he established a friendly relationship, and from whose conversations a pseudo-biography appeared in the novel *La ragione dei sentimenti*. This tale, as Crepet himself declared, is the only biography of Facetti that is not limited to the deportation story. The tale is therefore not a true biography, because his name is never mentioned, but it is considered a starting point for understanding Facetti's complex human story. The story is also the culmination of an acquaintance that began in 1972, when a pupil of Franco Basaglia, he had joined him in the latter's project to write a history of psychiatry, which would also involve Facetti. It is no coincidence that Basaglia's name can be found written in pen on the Yellow Box. Paolo Crepet believes that Facetti began to recount his experience of deportation when in 1978, he collaborated with him and the photographer Raymond Depardon, in the organisation of an exhibition on the loss of humanity in asylums and lagers. Marzia Ratti, «Raccontare Mauthausen. Intervista a Paolo Crepet.» In *Non mi avrete. Disegni da Mauthausen e Gusen. La testimonianza di Germano Facetti e Lodovico Belgiojoso*, ed. Marzia Ratti (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana editoriale, 2006), 24-25.

15 See on this topic Guido Vaglio, ed., *The Words and the Memory. La memorialistica della deportazione dall'Italia. 1993-2007*, (Torino: EGA editore, 2007)

16 Belgiojoso, Lodovico Barbiano. *Notte, nebbia. Racconto di Gusen*. Milano: Hoepli, 2009, 86-87
In 1932, Lodovico Barbiano di Belgiojoso (1909-2004), together with his friends and colleagues Gian Luigi Banfi, Enrico Peressutti and Ernesto Nathan Rogers, set up the BBPR studio. During the war he was arrested for his anti-fascist commitment and deported to the Gusen concentration camp. After the war he continued the activity of the studio that contributed to the reconstruction of Milan: among the most significant realisations were the Sforzesco Castle Museum and the Velasca tower that changed the city's skyline.

lightly I had heard it pronounced so many times... and the adjectives “unbearable”, “impossible”, “unbelievable”: what a precise, precise meaning they had in our field...’¹⁷

Primo Levi also wrote on this subject: “On many occasions, we have realised how little use words have for describing our experience. They work poorly because they are poorly received, because we now live in the civilisation of the image, recorded, multiplied, and broadcast, and the public, especially the young, is less and less inclined to make use of written information; but they also work poorly for a different reason, because they are poorly transmitted. In all our stories, verbal or written, expressions such as *indescribable*, *inexpressible*, *words are not enough* are frequent...’¹⁸

When Facetti speaks, he does so by constructing his testimony with images without text, entrusting it to a notebook. A form of stopping memory, resulting from his meeting with Belgiojoso, who transmitted to him the possibility of finding in drawing first, and then in photography, his salvation. In fact, his notebook contains a parallel graphic narrative, his own and Belgiojoso’s. Because against the lager’s will to turn men into beasts, there is a countervailing will to tell, to *bear witness*, to survive. But in what way? Belgiojoso will follow the path of architecture, Carpi the drawing, Facetti the graphics, illustration, design; Perresutti the photography¹⁹.

Using the graphic sign as testimony was, for them, a form of guarantee that the message would arrive in its expressive immediacy. Facetti also, in his professional life, made the danger that a bad transmission might cause a bad reception a methodological motive. In his work as graphic director of the London-based Penguin Books, when he chose an image to illustrate a volume of history or a book, he made sure that words were not needed, and that the image resolved the communicative objective in its representational completeness²⁰ (Baines 2008).

Therefore, the problem of avoidance, instead of being considered a fault, should be considered in order to study a type of recollection that could be defined as being in exile and that uses tools such as drawing, graphics, and photography in its expression.

17 Belgiojoso, *Notte nebbia*, 83.

18 These words come from the preface written by Primo Levi to a catalogue of photographs. It was the result of an exhibition that was organised in Trieste in 1987, on the initiative of the ANED (Associazione Nazionale ex Deportati Politici nei campi di sterminio Nazisti). His text was published posthumously, because Levi died before the exhibition. Primo Levi, «prefazione.» In *Rivisitando i Lager, di Catalogo della mostra*, ed. Teo Ducci. Firenze (Idea Books, 1987).

19 Serena Maffioletti, *Enrico Peressutti. Fotografie mediterranee* (Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2010).

20 Germano Facetti was appointed cover art director at the London publishing house Penguin Books in January 1961. The choice fell on him after the publishing house wanted to look for a designer, other than Hans Schmoller and John Curtis, who would help to modernise the company’s image. This modernisation was not only limited to the choice of new fonts or new illustrative techniques, but proposed a characteristic identity for the company combined with a good dose of flexibility. Facetti succeeded in achieving this flexible identity by, for example, using Penguin’s traditional colours, clearly separating text and image, giving more value to the latter. The illustrations were entrusted to young designers, or photographers. The first series Facetti edited was Crime. See on this experience Phil Baines, “Germano Facetti presso la Penguin Books 1961-1972”, in *Germano Facetti dalla rappresentazione del lager alla storia del XX secolo* (Milano: SilvanaEditoriale, 2008).

Germano Facetti is not an isolated case: Leonardo de Benedetti, Levi's travelling friend, described in *La tregua*, after having signed with Levi the *Memoriale per Minerva Medica* (1946), would not publish a single line. In addition to medicine, he would dedicate himself to travelling and taking thousands of photographs. The camera will represent the other side of memory, another form of being a witness.

Also interesting is the case of Peressutti²¹ also a member of the BBPR, whose wartime history is not easy to reconstruct. His daughter Marina recalls that he never spoke about it at home; the only traces were the photographs he took and the article 'Encounters in Russia' that appeared in the 1942 Bompiani almanac, signed 'Arch. Enrico Peressutti, lieutenant in the Engineer Corps. Layout by Bruno Munari, eleven photographs of the Russian campaign are arranged on four pages accompanied by a diary that begins on 3 August and ends on 24 October of the same year.²² He asks himself in these pages, "Can I still be an architect?"²³. Even in a condition that is not contextualised by architecture, he never stops observing settlements and houses through the eyes of the architect. The photographs first represented modernist architecture, then the faces of women, old people, children, and the men at the front. When he could, he drew, pencil sketched Russian izbe; he was interested in the interiors and the ways of living.²⁴

These silent witnesses, then, continues Cavaglion, do not represent the ancient *querelle* between the *man of the book* and the *man of life*, of life irreducible to the constraints of all forms, of unrepresentable tragedy. It is something more radical.²⁵ What is evident is that, as Bazlen points out in his 'note without text', 20th century tragedy has made essential a new form of narration and a new

21 Enrico Peressutti (1908-1976) grew up between Italy and Romania. He graduated from the Milan Polytechnic in 1932, and associated with Gian Luigi Banfi, Belgiojoso and Rogers to form BBPR, an architecture studio in Milan that in the 1930s forged relationships with exponents of the Modern Movement. In June 1941, he was called up to arms and left for Russia as a Romanian interpreter in the Alpine Celere division. From a map we reconstruct his route, a journey to Austria, Hungary, Romania, to the front on the Dnepr river. In Romania he took part in Operation Barbarossa on the side of the Axis countries. He stayed until November 1942, fell ill with typhus and was repatriated. He spent his convalescence in the military hospital in Bologna, thus avoiding the infamous 'Russian retreat' (January-February 1943), which only a third of his division comrades survived. His final act, in its disastrous epilogue, due to inadequate equipment, the hostility of the German ally, and the solidarity of the Russian and Ukrainian people, compose a picture of horrors that we can partly find in the stories of Mario Rigoni Stern, Nuto Revelli, and Giovanni Bedeschi. He later joined, like his comrades, the Resistance. Banfi and Belgiojoso experienced concentration camps in Austria; Rogers, of Jewish origin, took refuge in Switzerland. Banfi did not return from the lager, never did his comrades keep his name in the acronym of the studio. Peressutti combined his professional activity with various teaching experiences in Italy and abroad. Saibene writes that the expedition of the ARMIR (Italian Army in Russia) and before that the CSIR (Italian Expeditionary Corps in Russia), between 1941 and 1943, is one of the black holes in Italian history. Alberto Saibene, "Un architetto in guerra", in Serena Maffioletti e Alberto Saibene, eds., *URSS 1941, de Enrico Peressutti* (Milano: Humboldtbook, 2022).

22 Enrico Peressutti, "Incontri in Russia" in *Almanacco letterario Bompiani* (Milan: Bompiani, 1942).

23 "26 September 1941...can I still be an architect? The assumptions, the reasons, the needs, the means of this being an 'architect' flashed like lightning in my brain. In that instant, I went through the history of mankind to get to myself. To myself as an architect, of course. then I found myself; the white walls of our studio framed me in an atmosphere that was 'ours'; took me to a plane that had nothing in common - other than my person - with the life I live here. And between the two planes, I could not, despite trying, identify any momentary connection. Even between heaven and earth there exists, at times, that vortex of air that seems to unite and participate at least the pains of the one in the ecstasy of the other. I have not succeeded except by opening and closing, with sadness, valves and valves in my brain, except by cutting, as a scalpel can do, into the convictions I made for myself, and still have today. At the end of this bewilderment I found myself materially, and there, there in our studio, spiritually". Enrico Peressutti "Incontri in Russia." (Milano: Almanacco letterario Bompiani, 1942).

24 Alberto Saibene, «Un architetto in guerra.» In *URSS 1941*, di Enrico Peressutti, ed. Serena Maffioletti e Alberto Saibene (Milano: Humboldtbook, 2022), 8

25 Cavaglion, *Immagini senza testo*, 29

scansion of time, a different succession of historical cycles. "There is an epoch of prologues, the epoch of the opera, the epoch of epilogues". And he adds bitterly: 'but our dying people did not know how to epilogue'.²⁶

Open the box

"The day I went to Sarzana in March 1997 to visit my friend Germano, with the intention of searching through his archives for material for one of our projects on industrial utopias, I had no idea that I would return home with the idea of another film, completely different, to which I would give absolute priority. All because of a small yellow box of Kodak photographic paper; I had glimpsed it at the bottom of a desk drawer in the studio. I was curious about the box because Germano absolutely did not want me to open it (perhaps in truth, on the contrary, he wanted me to open it). The little box gave off an indefinable charge. "What is it?" I asked. "Nothing, it's not material for your project". I felt an increase in tension that I had not felt before. "But why? You never know...maybe...". We opened the box: many poisonous snakes came out of it, a real Pandora's box full of all the evils of this world."²⁷

Germano Facetti, an internationally renowned graphic designer who was deported to Gusen, only began to recount his experience in the late 1990s, at the age of almost 70.²⁸

He does so by entrusting a director Tony West with his 'yellow box', a box of Kodak photographic paper, in which he had kept a notebook and other documents for all those years.²⁹ The result will be a cinematic story, which will kick off a long and active participation on Facetti's part in trying to leave a testimony, to provide evidence, as he himself says before *disappearing or committing suicide like the others*.

Facetti opens the yellow box in front of a witness. The box had been in a drawer for a long time. It contains a notebook whose cover is made of the fabric of a deportee's uniform. In it are collected many drawings, original photographs, or taken from magazines, newspapers, German archives, extracts from poems, lists of names and addresses³⁰ [Fig. 1]

The opening of the box seems to want to free the painful memories by burying the container where they had been locked away, but above all this gesture

26 Roberto Bazlen, *Note senza testo*. Ed. Roberto Calasso (Milano: Adelphi, 1970).

27 Tony West, "Note sulla realizzazione di La scatola gialla di Germano Facetti", in *Germano Facetti dalla rappresentazione del lager alla storia del XX secolo*, ed. Daniela Muraca (Torino: SilvanaEditoriale, 2008) 143-146.

28 Facetti arrived at Mauthausen in 1944 at the end of February, then was transferred on 7 April to Gusen camp, a sub-camp of Mauthausen, and liberated in May 1945 by the Americans.

29 "The yellow box. A short history of hate" in Archivio Istoreto, fondo Facetti Germano [IT-C00-FD31 "La scatola gialla. Una breve storia dell'odio" in Archivio Istoreto, fondo Facetti Germano [IT-C00-FD29].

30 In addition to the notebook seen in West's film, the box contains other mementos, as he himself testifies in an article in *Domus*, such as a small notebook of wire-bound sheets of paper with poems by Belgiojoso. (Besio, "Mauthausen Facetti Belgiojoso") This is also mentioned in Crepet's book. Paolo Crepet, *La ragione dei sentimenti* (Torino: Einaudi, 200), 44.

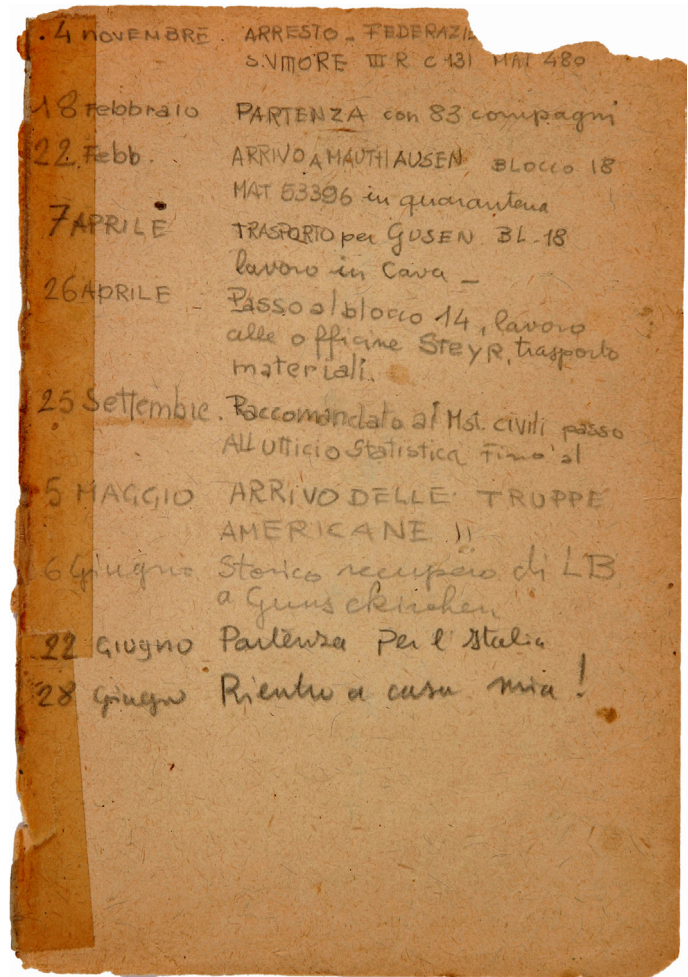
allows two things: an immediate return to a past time, the one in which the notebook was born, but it also allows the birth of the time of testimony. And this gesture is fixed in a film, in *The Yellow Box*, and marks the precise moment when the silent witness “takes the floor” on Gusen.³¹

A choice that speaks of memory as practice, as work, therefore as such, contradictory, partial and contingent.³²

The expression “taking the floor” in Facetti’s case takes on a specific meaning because his speech was very often soundless during the making of the film and turned into the gesture of showing the contents of his box. West himself speaks of the difficulties he had in filling the silences in film narration and says in his text: ‘There were problems of continuity, which made it difficult to construct a clear and easy-to-follow discourse. Germano had a habit of disappearing in the pauses, without warning, and then returning dressed in a totally different way.’³³

The production of the film allows a fundamental historiographical passage: the notebook is transformed from a personal object into an archive object, available. Starting from this kind of matrix testimony, to which every subsequent disclosure will tend to refer, today’s gesture of reading or analysing the document will be a historian’s gesture.

The director’s task in this case was not simply to ‘collect’ a testimony and structure a monologue, but to generate a narrative in the form of cooperation. And the tale was possible because they both had to learn to look each other in the face. The word *inter-view* means a mutual exchange of gazes in which the observer is also observed and is obliged to observe himself in the other’s gaze. The interview and dialogue suspend while recognising the inequality that exists between the speaker and the listener, heroically trying to construct a possible plane in which we speak to each other as equals. From the interviews, we learn that both parties are confronted with an otherness from which they learn something and that even though control of the machine is in our hands, nevertheless,



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31 Émilie Kaftan, “Il taccuino di deportazione di Germano Facetti: un ‘oggetto malgrado tutto’”, in *Germano Facetti. dalla rappresentazione del lager alla storia del XX secolo*, ed. Daniela Muraca (Torino: SilvanaEditoriale, 2008), 31-46.

32 Ronald Grele, “Introduzione”, in *Storie orali. Racconto, immaginazione, dialogo*, ed. Alessandro Portelli (Roma: Donzelli), 2017 IX-XVIII.

33 West, *Note sulla realizzazione di La scatola gialla di Germano Facetti*, 145.

Fig. 1

Fondo Germano Facetti, taccuino, n. 003.

This and the following images belong to ISTORETO - Istituto piemontese per la storia della Resistenza e della società contemporanea ‘Giorgio Agosti’

authority is shared.³⁴

From the interview from which the film originated, we no longer recognise a chronicle but a narrative, a construction based on memory. The interview does not only tell us what happened in the past, but also how the past acted in the life of the interviewee and interviewer. Ronald Grele writes that since the interview was created here and now but the dialogue had as its object the elsewhere, the past and the present were so intertwined in the dialogue that talking about past events was like evoking those of the present.³⁵

The notebook

Opening the box, therefore, reveals a notebook, the making of which is difficult to date. Facetti himself never provides this information, but considering its structure, it was probably assembled later, presumably in the period between the liberation from the camp and his repatriation to Italy, i.e. between May and June 1945. The cover of the notebook is made of clippings from Facetti's camp uniform and contains various types of documents, mainly drawings. [Fig.3] Those depicted are the significant elements of a closed universe, where one enters but does not leave: the roll-call yard, the grids, the granite quarries, and the crematorium. Each place represented recalls of confinement, exhaustion, death, and the absence of any possible way out. [Fig.4]

It also recounts, with sequence plans, the days that follow one another organised in the same way: the toilet, checking for lice, the queue for the soup distribution, and work. A daily life is always in contact with death. Beyond the factual information that the notebook object offers us about camp life and its value as a historical document, what is interesting is to consider the act that gave birth to it to try to understand what led Facetti to make that object in that way.

The notebook seems to allow for a form of catharsis because it not only allows for a return to the past but is also a means of projecting into the future. A rite of passage, containing the remnants of a past life linked to suffering and death, but locked away for decades in a box, on that tomb a new life is attempted to be rebuilt. This reconciling moment occurs not only when he opens the box in front of the camera but also when he decides to deposit his notebook and other materials in an archive.³⁶ Facetti says: 'I would like to be able to cat-



34 Portelli, *Storie orali. Racconto, immaginazione, dialogo*, VII-VIII.

35 Grele, "Introduzione", XI.

36 The Germano Facetti fund is currently located at the Piedmont Institute for the History of the Resistance and Contemporary Society 'Giorgio Agosti', in Turin. The archive, paid by the heirs to the institute as a deposit on 1 June

Fig. 2
Fondo Germano Facetti,
taccuino, n. 034



ologue well and make all the photographs I have intelligible (...) look at these folders, they are full of pictures, newspaper clippings, documents that help you understand'.³⁷

So, the notebook took on a different role, representing the pivot around which Facetti centred his entire need to witness.³⁸ This necessity not only stems from a civil and social responsibility but is, above all, an inner one. In essence, drawings and documents represent a *substitute for memory*, a kind of *artificial memory* because testimony is subject to alterations and omissions; the notebook ensured the accuracy of the facts: notes, addresses, drawings, and lists.

Art as catharsis

The notebook represents the cruelty of the lager but also a collection of bonds between supportive people, who would become points of reference for Facetti. In September 1944, he met Gian Luigi Banfi and Ludovico Belgiojoso, both members of the BBPR architectural firm, examples of humanity and nobility of spirit. [Fig. 6] Belgiojoso, a courageous man, as Facetti himself describes

2006, has a size that can be calculated at around twenty linear metres, 22,000 iconographic documents, stored in 118 boxes. See on the structure of this archive the text by Andrea D'Arrigo, in the book *Germano Facetti. Dalla Rappresentazione del lager alla storia del XX secolo*. Andrea D'Arrigo, "Tra 'laboratorio' e meta-biografia: il fondo Germano Facetti presso l'Istituto piemontese per la storia della Resistenza e della società contemporanea "Giorgio Agosti", in *Germano Facetti. Dalla rappresentazione del lager alla storia del XX secolo* (Torino: SilvanaEditoriale, 2008).

³⁷ Crepet, *La ragione dei sentimenti*, 120.

³⁸ It is quoted in all further testimonies, such as in Paolo Crepet's 2002 book. We also find it in the 2002 documentary *Antiutopia*, also made by Paolo Ranieri, and it becomes a substantial part of the exhibition *Non mi avrete*, from the title of a poem by Lodovico Barbiano di Belgiojoso.

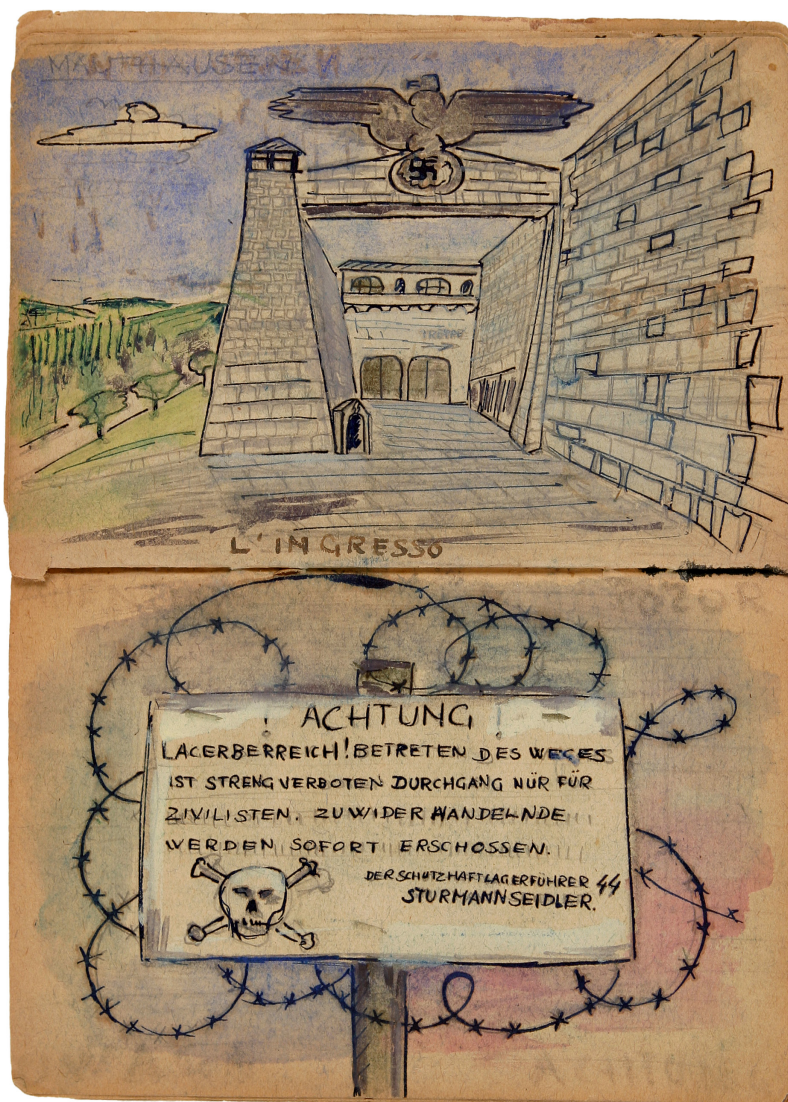
Fig. 3
Fondo Germano Facetti,
taccuino, n. 001

him, is determined to resist to preserve his dignity and inner freedom.³⁹

This moral integrity can be seen in the way she portrays him: she draws him as a real man as opposed to his self-portrait identified only with a number. His figure is elegant and even gives him a name, LODO, thus an identity, which in the camp was the object of constant annihilation. [Fig. 2] He became such an important reference that he began to copy his drawings. Copying drawings, as well as being a form of homage, is also the beginning of the search for his own necessary form of expression, and not possessing it himself, he borrows it from those he admires most.⁴⁰

Belgiojoso drew with the stubbornness of one who intends to survive and rebel against annihilation. He used to tell of beauty, through the lightness of poetry that had the power to evoke distant worlds and helped to endure all the horror of the camp, in a cathartic process that alleviated, comforted, strengthened dignity.⁴¹

This practice, common to artists in their imprisonment, makes us reflect on how figuration, in addition to the function of representing reality, can give voice to the need to communicate what one has experienced, allowing one to overcome the emotional and verbal blockade that painful events have caused.⁴² The image encloses in its synthesis episodes that emerge directly from consciousness. See, for example, the scene of the 'unloading of the contents' of a train. Facetti and Belgiojoso were in charge of unloading the train cars arriving at the camp. When they opened the hatches, they discovered 'piles of women



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39 Benedetto Besio, "Mauthausen Facetti Belgiojoso", *Domus* (2005): 62

40 Una grande parte dei disegni del taccuino sono copie di disegni attribuiti a Belgiojoso.

41 In a passage from *Se questo é un uomo*, we know that Primo Levi recites verses from Dante's *Inferno* to another prisoner. He says "Culture could, therefore, serve, even if only in some marginal cases, and for brief periods. (...) 'it could embellish a few hours, establish a fleeting bond with a comrade, keep the mind alive and healthy'. Primo Levi, "I sommersi e i salvati", in *Opere, di Primo Levi*, ed. Marco Belpoliti (Torino: Einaudi, 1997), 1103.

42 Walter Benjamin says that the image arises unexpectedly when words are "impossible". He writes: "Suppose, suddenly blocked, the movement of thought - it will be like a kind of backlash in a constellation overloaded with tension; a jolt that leads the image (...) to suddenly organise itself, to constitute itself into a monad..." Walter Benjamin, "Écrits français". Ed. Jean-Maurice Monnoyer (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), 346.

Fig. 4
Fondo Germano Facetti,
taccuino, n. 048

gasping on layers of corpses, children wrapped in rags and faeces, a few eye-balls looking on in terror'⁴³. [Fig.7]

This horror immediately took the form of a drawing, much later published (1990) in *Il Parlamento Italiano*⁴⁴ but it was not until 2002 that Facetti's film *Antiutopia* was realised.⁴⁵

The verbalisation although tense, did not lose the weight of emotion, so much so that when Facetti spoke about it, he could not hold back the tears. Director West himself, when talking about the experience of making the documentary, reports how difficult it was for Facetti to put into words the description of painful events. He writes: 'Perhaps I made a mistake, I had left freedom of language: but at the time it seemed better to give Germano the chance to express himself in the language that came naturally to him. Sometimes, he expressed himself with great difficulty; he could not find the words in any of the languages he spoke.'⁴⁶

The image thus transcends language and becomes a universally comprehensible language, arriving directly, albeit sometimes sacrificing factual accuracy in favour of impression. [Fig. 5]

Facetti's feat is not an isolated gesture; other eyes and, in other deported camps, create images. Aldo Carpi⁴⁷, and Alessandro Tartara,²⁸ using pencils or brushes, fix the cruelty of events on various media and with various techniques, choosing a realistic style to leave no room for interpretation. In fact, there are many artists who suffered deportation⁴⁸. They had different personal stories, and different sensitivities, but in common, they had the desire to keep themselves alive through forms of expression, poor in instruments, rich in messages. Facetti's notebook, however, is, as a whole, the "art of holocaust"⁴⁹, an object that looks like no other. It is the result of a collection of different documents, a collection of borrowed drawings. It is as if an obsession was born in him to retrieve and carefully arrange archive documents of Germans saved from destruction, lists of comrades, poems, and photographs recovered from the various camps.⁵⁰ Even though the drawings are not by his own hand, Kaftan claims, the

43 Archive notes, box GF 94.

44 As Kaftan points out, there are three separate drawings of this episode. The original drawing is probably by Belgiojoso, made immediately after the incident. Facetti (or even Belgiojoso himself) would reproduce the drawing in the notebook. Much later, Belgiojoso would make a third version of this episode, representing it with a wider shot, and this is the drawing that is published in *Il Parlamento Italiano*. Émilie Kaftan, "Il taccuino di deportazione di Germano Facetti: un 'oggetto malgrado tutto'", in Daniela Muraca, ed., *Germano Facetti. dalla rappresentazione del lager alla storia del XX secolo* (Torino: SilvanaEditoriale, 2008), 39.

45 *"Antiutopia. Mauthausen - Gusen 1944-1945. Germano Facetti e Aurelio Sioli"* in Archivio Istoretto, fondo Facetti German [IT-C00-FD390].

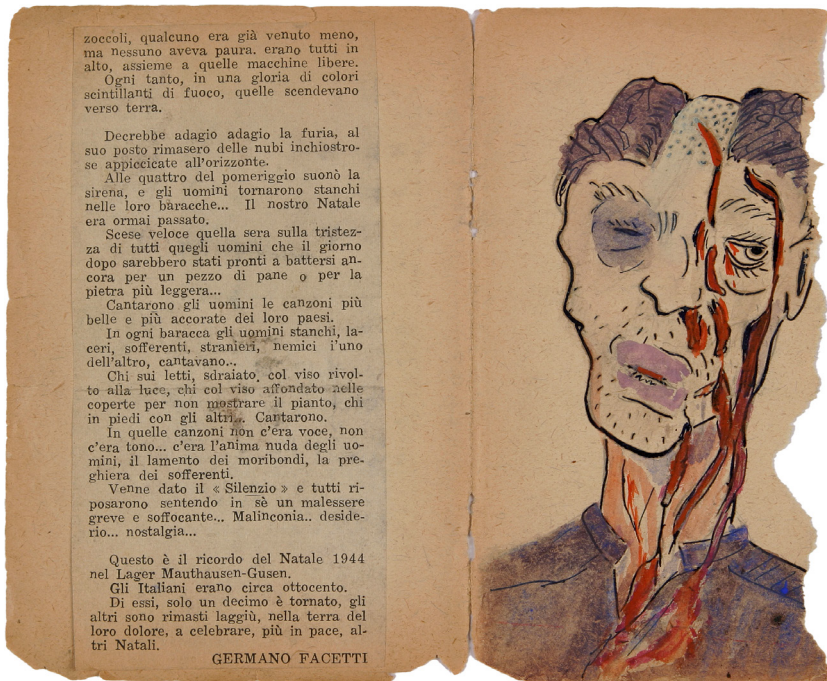
46 West, *Note sulla realizzazione di La scatola gialla di Germano Facetti*, 145.

47 Aldo Carpi de' Resmini (1886-1973), was a Sicilian painter and sculptor. He won the chair in painting at the Brera Academy in 1930, where he taught until 1958. In January 1944, a fellow defector revealed the painter's Jewish origins to the fascists. They then informed the SS and Carpi was arrested and deported to Mauthausen and then to Gusen I: he managed to document life and death in the concentration camp with numerous sketches and a personal diary. See Aldo Carpi, *Diario di Gusen* (Milano: Garzanti, 1973).

48 Bernard Aldebert (1909-1974), Zoran Mušič (1909-2005), Renzo Biason (1914-1996), Giuseppe Novello (1897-1988), Goffredo Godi (1920-2013), among many.

49 Term from the title of a work by Sybil Milton and Janet Blatter, *Art of the Holocaust* (London: Orbis, 1982).

50 Belgiojoso published a small collection of poems he had composed in the concentration camp in 1986,



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Fig. 5
Fondo Germano Facetti,
taccuino, n. 016

Fig.6
Fondo Germano Facetti,
taccuino, n. 034

Fig.7
Fondo Germano Facetti,
taccuino, n. 064

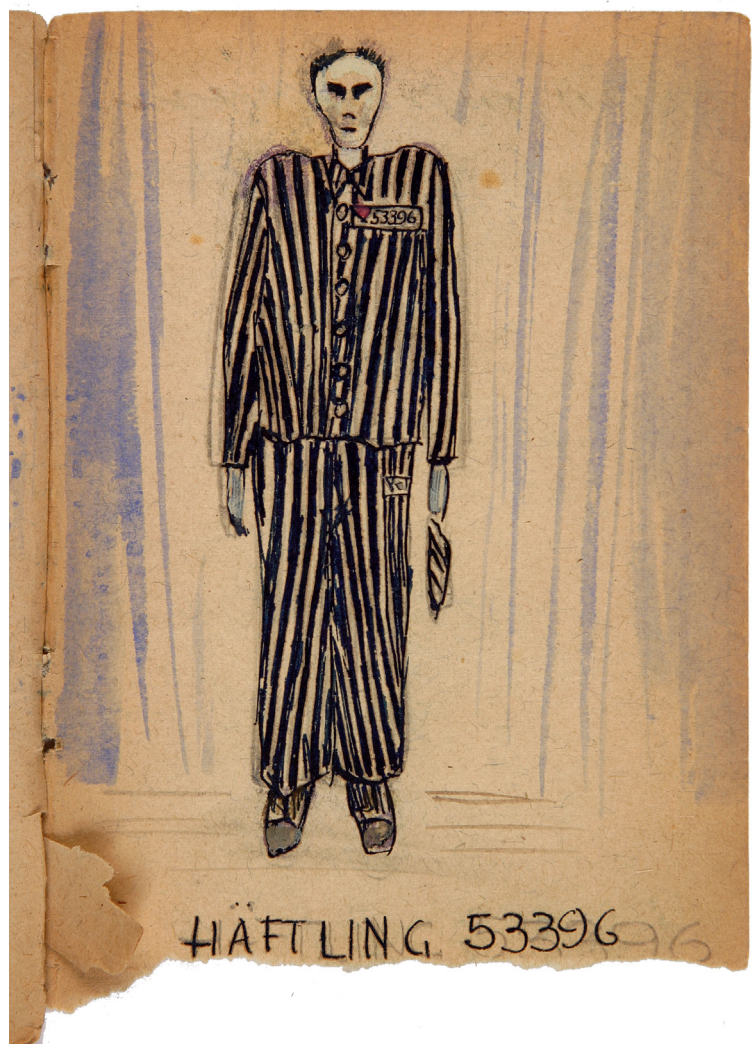
fact that he brought them together and combined them with other documents made this an 'art object' in spite of everything. Twenty years after the box was opened, Facetti began the construction of his own iconographic archive, and it seems that the notebook allowed him to find his personal form of expression: not a draftsman, not a photographer, but an assembler.⁵¹

The absence of the "self"

Facetti's testimony, favouring general information, shows a certain character of discretion. Facetti remains outside the graphic narrative, and very often, the drawings or photos collected in the notebook do not concern him directly but relate to other concentration camps. Witnessing is expressed through the gesture of collecting to preserve and not writing to tell. This places the notebook outside the sphere of the 'private diary', and Facetti, by eschewing words, a difficult path for him, allows many to identify with his form of communication.

Perhaps this choice to evade the 'I' is a way of communicating avoidance or represents proof of the successful destruction of the annihilation that the perpetrators have wrought on the perception of the self. (fig. 8) This thesis could be reinforced, as Kaftan points out, by the presence of a self-portrait from which any sign of identity has been removed, transforming it into an abstract image of a prisoner like any other. An anonymous man, stripped of everything, barely identified by a number, who seems to have retained nothing of his previous life, not even his name.⁵²

It is interesting to note how the absence of the self is also found in the form in which the archive has been organised. The pattern that emerges from an analysis of its structure is that the criterion with which the documents have been organised and catalogued, containers without any apparent uniformity, moves



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Non mi avrete (Spinea: Edizioni del Leone, 1986). Then, *Come niente fosse* (Spinea: Edizioni del Leone, 1992). Finally, two stories about his deportation experience: Lodovico Barbiano, *Notte, nebbia. Racconto di Gusen* (Milano: Hoepli, 2009); Guanda, Parma, 1996 e *Frammenti di una vita* (Milano: Rosellina Archinto Editore, 1999).

51 Kaftan, *Il taccuino di deportazione di Germano Facetti*, 37.

52 Kaftan, *Il taccuino di deportazione di Germano Facetti*, 35.

Fig. 8
Fondo Germano Facetti,
taccuino, n. 014

away from the intention to suggest some form of biographical narrative. Thus, the narrating subject, even in this case, places himself 'outside himself' and outside the function of the protagonist of his story. This "conscious marginalisation of every evident trace of one's own biography" as D'Arrigo defines it, spares no document in the archive, subtracting it from individual experience and inserting it into the world of the transmission of historical knowledge.⁵³

Therefore, to become objectively transmissible, the facts that have happened must free themselves from individual experience, the self-referentiality of which Facetti considers selfish. And transmitting becomes a gesture not only of narrative value, but political and civil. He himself says: 'I end my existence here; someone will pick it up somewhere else. We are all a bit like conveyor belts, except perhaps those who leave nothing to those who remain, because they have only wanted, selfishly demanded. Not leaving marks is sterile, not knowing nothing cancels'.⁵⁴

A non-conclusion

Facetti's notebook is a complex object, an intermediary between two worlds of the same story: that of its editing and that of its function as a document-matrix. It was a tangible proof against the uncertainties of memory. It was the object that brought them back to reality by demonstrating the authenticity of what they experienced. In essence, drawings and documents are a substitute for memory, a kind of artificial memory especially when fifty years pass. Testimony is subject to alterations and omissions; the notebook was the guarantee that ensured the accuracy of the facts: notes, addresses, drawings, and lists.

On the one hand, there is a fixed past, immobilised in its events, and on the other, there is a present of a discourse about it that continues to evolve. On one side, there is testimony, on the other, there is history.⁵⁵

53 D'Arrigo, *Tra "laboratorio" e meta-biografia: il fondo Germano Facetti presso l'Istituto piemontese per la storia della Resistenza e della società contemporanea "Giorgio Agosti"*, 134.

54 Crepet, *La ragione dei sentimenti*, 131.

55 This work is financed by national funds through FCT - Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P., under the Strategic Project with the references UIDB/04008/2020 and UIDP/04008/2020.

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