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SCUOLA DI SCRITTURA BELLEVILLE presenta
UMBERTO ECO
A LIBRARY OF THE WORLD

a film by Davide Ferrario

* BELLEVILLE - SCUOLA DI SCRITTURA presenta il PRODOTTORE UMBERTO ECO A LIBRARY OF THE WORLD directed by DAVIDE FERRARIO
DANI CRISTINA SARDIO coordinatore ANDREA ZAMBELLI ANDREA ZAMBELLI CAROL OFF music FABIO BARBERIS monte YVES HARTMANN
INTERIM PRODUCTIONS LARUS ZAMBELLI sceneggiatura DAVIDE FERRARIO FRANCESCO BOCIA produzione PRODUCTIONS in collaborazione con RAI CINEMA in coproduzione con
MC - DIREZIONE GENERALE CINEMA E AUDIOVISIVO / PREMIO DI DOC FILM FUND - FILM COMMISSION TORINO PREMIO DI REGIA PREMIO CINEMA A CINEMA GUILD release

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http://www.cinemaguild.com/theatrical/umbertoeco_press.html

Synopsis

A documentary immersion into all things Eco, Davide Ferrario's film takes us on a tour of Umberto Eco's private library, guided by the author himself. Combining new footage with material he shot with Eco in 2015 for a video installation for the Venice Biennale, Ferrario documents this incredible collection and the man who amassed it. As Eco leads us among the more than 50,000 volumes and his family reflects on his legacy, we also gain insight into the library of the mind of this vastly prolific and original thinker.

Director's Note

In the movie, a long-time collaborator and friend of Eco's says: "I was a lucky man to have worked with Umberto". I can say the same, since I worked with him in 2015 to produce a video-installation for the Venice Biennale where he was the protagonist. It was on that occasion that I had the opportunity to see his library and right away I asked him to shoot a sequence of him walking among the books, the same sequence that now opens the film. One year later, when he died, that sequence was used by many media in the world. I was both sad and proud, because those images were telling the story of a life in an iconic way. I felt I and Umberto could have connected on some other project, but unlike his collaborator I did not have a chance to work with him any more. So this documentary, in a way, is the movie we could not make together. Thanks to Renate, Stefano and Carlotta who accepted me in their home and helped me to describe a library where the spirit of its owner still lives.

A Note from Umberto Eco's Family

Supporting and being part of Davide's documentary was motivated by the desire to bear witness to the existence of Umberto's and Renate's home-library-studio, built by them through the years, where we, as a family, lived for such a long time. There are many books, yes. They fill up the shelves, they overflow on the tables, they occupy boxes and drawers and sometimes they just lie in piles on the floor: they are the "vegetal memory", in which Umberto's soul lives on.

To narrate his library means also to describe his passions, the vastness of his memory, his limitless curiosity, his sense of humor and irony, the concept of "encyclopedia" as all-around education; finally, his passion for an open knowledge. After the agreement we signed with the Ministry of Culture, the books are to find a new home: the contemporary collection will go to Bologna, at the University; the rare book collection will be moved to the Biblioteca Braidense in Milan. Before they went, we felt necessary to share with others what it meant to have lived in such a place.

Davide Ferrario was the natural partner for this endeavor. The sequence of Umberto walking in his library has become viral and we found that Davide himself still wanted to film the library again and so we started sharing stories, photographs, memories. Davide has come up with his personal view and a wonderful movie of which Umberto himself would be happy.

A Conversation with Davide Ferrario

How did the idea of this movie come about?

It started with something that happened in 2015, one year before Eco's death. Vincenzo Trione, the director of the Italian Pavilion at the Venice Art Biennale, asked me to work with Umberto Eco on a video on the theme of memory, which was based on an interview edited into a three-screen installation. That's how I met "the Professor". We shot the interview in the living room of his Milan home. When it was over, we started chatting informally and he asked me if I wanted to see his library. I said yes, of course. The feeling of surprise and admiration I had is the same I hope everybody experiences watching the opening sequence of the film, when we follow the Professor through his labyrinth of books. I could not resist the temptation to ask him if he would do the same thing for the camera. The thought amused him and he accepted. I also explained to him that it would be great if he went to look for the most remote book and if he took the most devious route to get there... He did so. That's how we got that iconic sequence – with a sad side effect. When he died one year later, those images were used all over the world to describe his love for books. His death also put a stop to some thoughts we were exchanging about doing something else together. Years passed and one day a Spanish journalist who was writing a piece on the libraries of famous writers, asked me to talk about my experience with Eco. I called the family to check some information, and they told me that the library was being given to the Italian State. They said they would like a filmed memory of it and we started talking. From one conversation to the other, the very basic idea of filming the books developed into a full-fledged documentary.

Can you describe this documentary?

It's a film not only about the actual library, but about the general idea of libraries as a memory of the world, according to Eco. That's why there are images of libraries from all the continents, both old and modern: fascinating, almost magical locations. Furthermore, using the books as a sort of *fil rouge*, the film is about Eco himself, the novelist and the intellectual. You cannot understand Eco without his library. That was the world where his ideas, his stories, his thoughts were born.

It seems you developed a very peculiar relationship with the family...

It's true and it makes me smile a little bit, because it wasn't supposed to be like that in the beginning. Actually, we started imagining the film in a very formal and intellectual way: the original idea was to describe the library section by section, and each one of the sections would be explained by some important writer who had been a friend of Eco's. I felt right away it might become a very academic and boring documentary. So I proposed that these interviews should at least be filmed as a conversation with members of the family, to make them less stiff. Then something happened, a sincere trust developed until I insisted that it should be them to talk about the library because there was nobody better to do it – those who had lived with Eco and

the books. And so I filmed not only Renate, the widow, and Carlotta and Stefano, the daughter and the son, but also the grandsons; and even the little 8-year-old granddaughter has a part, using the library as her playground. It was essential to show the library not just as an archive, but as a living thing.

How did you work with the archival footage?

First of all, we used the long interview I had shot in 2015 and that I had used only in parts for the Venice installation. Then we went looking for interviews, conferences, and speeches in which Eco's words always had some reference to books. Which turned out to be not a limitation, but the opposite: it became clear that all Eco's wisdom sprang from the books in the library. So we found ideas put forth 20 years ago that were unbelievably long-sighted. For instance, his provocative thoughts about the internet: he said that when the sharing of a "commonly accepted encyclopedia" fails, the web might give birth to 6 billion private truths, where everybody believes only what he wants to believe. Which is pretty much what we have seen happen with the widespread use of fake news, so that it's getting almost impossible to share the same idea of reality as it is. Another very contemporary theme is Eco's fascination for what is fake and for the power of language, which "can express not what is there, but what is not there". Besides, Eco was a great speaker, almost an entertainer, capable of charming his audience – and so I tried to exploit his "acting" talent.

What about the monologues?

That's an idea I got reading again and again certain essays he wrote on the love for books. I realized that they could be turned, with some adaptations, into theater pieces. They are as brilliant and full of irony as he could be. The pieces, performed by actors, also give a rhythm to the narration – and supply another chance to show wonderful libraries.

Music has a peculiar role in the film...

I have a story to tell on this. There is a piece by Carl Orff, *Gassenhauer*, which I always loved and wanted to use in a movie. I tried it on a montage of books in an early stage of the editing. It worked beautifully, so I wondered if Orff had written something else like it. I discovered that *Gassenhauer* was only the tip of the iceberg. It came from a collection of pieces written for his school of music that were recorded only once, in the mid-90's. It's a three-CD set that offers an incredible variety of sounds and arrangements. But there was something more, absolutely in tune with the spirit of the film: in these pieces Orff is both scholarly and entertaining, exactly as Eco's writing style was. It's very sophisticated music, but it's also childish, mysterious, esoteric. Just like in Eco's, you feel the author possesses a huge culture but he knows how to put it to a simple and popular use. Finally, the soundtrack also offers three contemporary pieces by Fabio Barovero, a composer I usually work with.

Who do you expect is going to see this film?

Anybody. It's not an academic or celebratory film. Yes, it is about a motionless thing—a library—but it ultimately shows how much life there is in a book. And it's a fascinating journey into the mind of one of the few Italian intellectuals who's known all over the world.

Daide Ferrario Biography

Born in Lombardy in 1956, lives in Torino. He graduated in American Literature from Milan University in 1981. He began as a film critic in the 70's, writing essays and books. He also funded a distribution company who released in Italy films by Wenders, Fassbinder, Wajda. Later, he became an Italian agent for such American independents as John Sayles and Jim Jarmusch. His debut as a director was *La fine della notte*, 1989, voted Best Italian Independent Film of the year. Since then he has directed fiction films and documentaries shown in international festivals like Berlin, Sundance, Venice, Toronto, Locarno.

Ferrario holds a peculiar place in the Italian scene. Sternly independent, he runs his own production company, Rossofuoco, with which he has produced all his movies since 2002. Among them, *Dopo mezzanotte (After Midnight)*, a great success at the Berlinale and sold to over 100 countries; and the documentary *La strada di Levi (Primo Levi's Journey)*, long-listed for the Academy Award.

His most recent direction is *Blood on the Crown*, starring Harvey Keitel and Malcolm McDowell. Ferrario is also a novelist: his book *Dissolvenza al nero (Fade to Black)* has been translated in many languages and has been adapted for the screen by Oliver Parker in 2006. He is a regular contributor to *Corriere della Sera*; he is also active as a visual artist and a photographer.

Credits

Director	Davide Ferrario
Editing	Cristina Sardo
Cinematography	Andrea Zambelli, Andrea Zanolì
Music	Carl Orff
Original music	Fabio Barovero
Sound designer	Vito Martinelli
Executive producer	Ladis Zanini
With	Giuseppe Cederna, Nicollò Ferrero, Paolo Giangrasso, Walter Leonardi, Zoe Tavecchi, Mariella Valentini
Produced by	Davide Ferrario, Francesca Bocca
Presented by	scuola di scrittura Belleville
Production	RossoFuoco
In collaboration with	Rai Cinema
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