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«Director in Boots». The *Posture* of Alessandro Blasetti

Fabio Andreazza

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In *Fare un film* Federico Fellini recounts his first visit to Cinecittà. The occasion was an interview with the actor Osvaldo Valenti, whom Fellini saw on a kind of chariot during the shooting of a costume film. He was struck by the sense of chaos on the set, over which, in his words:

una voce potente, metallica, tuonava ordini che parevano verdetti [...] non riuscivo, però, a capire da dove provenisse la voce. [...] Tutto d'un tratto, in un silenzio improvviso, il braccio lunghissimo di una gru cominciò a sollevarsi nell'aria e a salire in alto, sempre più in alto, al di sopra delle costruzioni, al di sopra dei teatri di posa, oltre gli alberi, oltre le torri, su, ancora più su, verso le nubi, fino a fermarsi sospeso nel riverbero incandescente di un tramonto con milioni di raggi. Qualcuno mi prestò un cannocchiale e lassù, a più di mille metri, su una poltrona Frau saldamente avvitata alla piattaforma della gru, con i gambali di cuoio, scintillanti, un foulard al collo di seta indiana, un elmo in testa e tre megafoni, quattro microfoni e una ventina di fischietti appesi al collo c'era un uomo: era lui, era il regista, era Blasetti (Fellini 1980, 43-44)¹.

The set to which Fellini refers was of the film *La corona di ferro* (A. Blasetti, 1941).

Fig. 1. Blasetti on the set of *La corona di ferro* (1940 or 1941). Courtesy of the Fondazione Cineteca di Bologna.

The photograph² in Figure 1 was taken on the set of the latter film. The director does not have three megaphones or four microphones, nor is he wearing a helmet, but his boots are unmistakably present. In this article, I will illustrate how Blasetti's choice of footwear contributed to the creation of his specific *posture*, that is to say, his way of standing out inside the social space. Blasetti constructed his authorial identity not only through his use of camerawork and editing, but moreover through the exhibition of his body and his clothing.

The Concept of Posture

The word posture generally refers to the positioning of one's own body in space, and in this sense it has been used in the social sciences. Pierre Bourdieu describes postures as «dispositions du corps»³ informed by the *habitus*, the system of practices and representations that shapes individual action (1980 [1992, 52-65]). The way people move, speak and walk are all socially determined dispositions and aspects of the social world that manifest themselves via the body. Drawing on Bourdieu's ideas, first Alain Viala and later Jérôme Meizoz have explored the concept of posture in literary criticism. For Viala, a posture is «une façon d'occuper une position» in the literary field⁴ – «on peut, par exemple, occuper modestement une position avantageuse, ou occuper à grand bruit une position modeste» (1993, 216). In his view, this is part of what it means to be a writer. Meizoz pushed the notion of posture further and endowed it with a wider meaning: «c'est d'une part la présentation de soi, les conduites publiques en situation littéraire [...]; d'autre part, l'image

de soi donnée dans et par le discours, ce que la rhétorique nomme l'*ethos*» (2007, 21)⁶. Thus posture is in part the social *mise-en-scène* of a writer, and in part the image they convey through text. In this second aspect posture is akin to *ethos*, a rhetorical concept with a long history (Amossy 2010). The two perspectives correspond to two different points of view—the first is external and action-oriented, the second is internal and text-centred – that need to be assimilated into a comprehensive analysis: «On peut alors étudier relationnellement la position dans le champ, les options esthétiques d'un auteur, ses conduites publiques, et son éthos discursif» (Meizoz 2007, 23)⁷. Writers will mark their positions in the field not only through their words but also through their gestures and fashions. In a contemporary society dominated by the mass media, such elements have acquired an increasingly important role in defining authorial identity.

The Genesis of Directorial Authorship in Italy

The notion of posture elaborated in such a context can be applied to all authorial figures, including film directors. In Italy, as in other European countries, the identification between author and director first became widespread during the 1910s. In this period, film criticism began to take interest in directors, not just actors, and to identify features of style and genre (Bernardini 1997, 175). By reading directors as artists who devoted their lives to this new art form, critics introduced the cult of the author, which had established itself in the literary field in the Romantic age and which celebrated the author as a creative genius and a prophet, a godlike figure endowed with visionary powers (Bénichou 1973). Writers and critics believed that judging films with the evaluation criteria reserved for more traditional art forms would result in a greater artistic legitimacy for the new medium. In 1918 the magazine *In Penombra* went as far as granting directors the right and the space to illustrate their poetics: «La Direzione di *In Penombra*», writes Enrico Guazzoni in the opening of his piece, «vuole che parli di me stesso, di quanto ho tentato e fatto nel campo del cinematografo e del *metodo* che ho seguito: vuole in altre parole il mio *credo*» (1918, 55)⁸. This signals a shift in perception of the director, from an illiterate craftsman to an artist who is capable of articulating their poetics and handling their expressive means. By presenting legitimate ways to direct a film, they were also presenting legitimate ways of *being* directors.

The perception of the profession, however, only changed significantly in the following decade, when cinema was finally recognized as an art form in certain sectors of the educated European audience. This happened thanks to the massive contribution of writers, artists and directors to various processes of legitimization, such as the establishment of film-clubs or specialist magazines that were not linked directly to the film industry (Gauthier 1999; Hagener 2007; Andreatza 2008). The world of cinema moreover equipped itself with a series of specific institutions, procedures and stakes, helping it to gain structure gradually as an artistic field in Bourdieu's terms (1992 [1996]). A functioning field requires both stakes at play and available players. The prestige of the author-director increased rapidly in European cinema during the 1920s, so much so that individuals belonging to the cultural elites felt the need to invest energy and compete for success in filmmaking. Directing was soon treated similarly to literary practices, where the authors' reputation was defined by the esteem of their peers and critics, rather than by the number of copies their books had sold. This state of things was especially evident in France, Germany and in the Soviet Union, where the decade saw an extraordinary professional investment in the new medium by young people who were aware of the rules of the artistic game. Things were different in Italy,

where film production in this period was at a historic low; moreover, the most renowned directors (albeit incomparable to Ejzenštejn, Epstein or Murnau in terms of their awareness of the medium) had emigrated to Germany or France. While elsewhere in Europe cinema was quickly becoming an artistic field, Italy was undergoing a serious production slump: despite an increase in audiences, few films were released (around 30 per year) and the few were financed by short-lived production companies (Caranti 2014, 43). Some of these were founded by directors and actors, as in the cases of ADIA (1927) and Augustus (1927); the latter was created by Blasetti and used to produce his directorial debut.

Blasetti's Aesthetic Disposition

Blasetti immediately established himself as an author-director, little surprisingly considering his social trajectory. Blasetti was born in Rome in 1900 to a middle-class family. His father was the son of a sculptor who became a musician, played the oboe and the cor anglais and taught music at the Academy of St. Cecily. His mother descended from a family of lawyers, and Blasetti followed in the maternal family tradition, graduating in law at the University in Rome in 1924. His habitus, however, was apparently heavily influenced by the paternal side of the family. From the year before his graduation he started to engage with arts (mainly *operettas*) on the pages of the newly established newspaper *L'Impero*, founded by the futurist writers Mario Carli and Emilio Settimelli. Here, Blasetti began to make a name for himself as a journalist. In 1927 he founded the magazines *Cinematografo* and *Lo Spettacolo d'Italia*, which featured several first-rate writers such as Massimo Bontempelli and Anton Giulio Bragaglia. At the end of that year, Blasetti launched a public appeal to fund Augustus, and directed the film *Sole* (1929) with the help of a group of peers, whom were mostly motivated by his charisma alone. His correspondence reveals how his «gruppo Augustus-cinematografo» perceived the

director's magnetism and empowered him in what was, to quote Weber, «a matter of complete personal devotion to the possessor of the quality, arising out of enthusiasm, or of despair and hope» (Weber 1922 [1978, 242]). Blasetti presented himself as the leader of Italian cinema's rebirth, and assumed a prophetic stance. According to Bourdieu, this kind of stance is especially prevalent in periods of crisis and in the context of a power vacuum created by the disappearance of institutions (Bourdieu 1981 [1991, 194]). The timing could not have been more favourable: first, in the pages of *Cinematografo*, Blasetti called (in vain) for government intervention in the struggling film industry; he then decided to found his own production company to make a film, proposing this enterprise to his collaborators and followers as a noble mission in the name of art (cf. Blasetti 1929 [1982a, 275-277]). As is often the case with experimental products, *Sole* did not meet the tastes of the audience but instead gained critical praise, and its director acquired a significant, if metaphorical, victory.

Blasetti and his Boots

In the first episode of his memoirs, published in *Cinema Nuovo* in 1956, Blasetti wrote:

mi si propone il pensiero numero uno di tutti quelli che hanno scritto memorie: chiedermi quel che desidero che gli altri pensino di me, dopo; e riprendo il filo interrotto allora, ma cominciando subito a carte scoperte, col mio tallone d'Achille, con la faccenda che mi preme più di chiarire prima di rarefarmi: la faccenda degli stivali (Blasetti 1956a [1982b, 22])¹⁰.

Blasetti claims that the first person to have mentioned his boots was his friend Ruggero Orlando in 1932, in the magazine *L'Italia Vivente*. From then on, he says, «cominciarono a fare le spese della cronaca cinematografica» (Blasetti 1956a [1982b, 23])¹¹. The caricature in Figure 2 reflects this tendency.

Fig. 2. Caricature of Blasetti (1932, in Blasetti 1956a).

The director claims he first appeared in boots in 1928, during the shooting of his debut film (as the the photo in Figure 3, appears to attest).

Fig. 3. Blasetti on the set of *Sole* (1928, in Blasetti 1956a).

Sole was filmed in muddy swamps, so the boots were necessary. Later he writes:

Io li avevo adottati perché con il lavoro in palude, in campagna, con qualsiasi tempo – polvere o fango – oppure tra i chiodi, le vernici, il grasso dei carrelli nei teatri di posa, gli stivali mi sembravano più pratici dei mocassini; e poi perché dopo oltre tre anni di vita militare, me li sentivo ai piedi meglio dei mocassini, diciamo anche che mi ci piacevo di più, per un non ripudiato ricordo dei sioux e di Maracaibo. Poi c'era dentro, istintiva, tanto più valida in quanto spoglia di qualsiasi premeditazione simbolica, l'idea della rivoluzione contro il dolore lungo lo stipite delle porte. Grazie, Steno, di avermelo fatto capire (Blasetti 1956b [1982b, 31])¹².

There were four main reasons, then, for Blasetti's curious habit: 1) difficult working conditions, 2) a custom left over from military life, 3) his affection for Salgari's characters (from his childhood readings, such as *Il Corsaro nero*, or the *Far West* series), 4) an opposition to the languid atmospheres of diva films, the kind of movies where heroines would cling to doorframes or hang from curtains at the mercy of their emotions.

The first explanation is unconvincing. Blasetti wore boots even when working conditions required no protective footwear. The third sounds implausible. The other two, however, both sound more likely. On the one hand, Blasetti links his choice to his own experience in the army: as a young man he attended the Collegio militare in Rome, and later served as official in an artillery battalion (Blasetti 1978 [1982b, 99]). Blasetti's experience is referenced in the film *Bellissima* (L. Visconti, 1952), in which the director, playing himself, uses manifestly military manners to distance himself from one of his colleagues¹³. On the other hand, Blasetti associates this habit to his instinctive identification with the revolutionary force of Fascism. Shortly before, in the same text, he had quoted a revealing statement made by Steno: «siete la Marcia su Hesperia e su Luigi Serventi» (Steno 1941, 3; Blasetti, 1982b, 30)¹⁴, in which «Marcia» inferred the March on Rome. Blasetti all in all seems to agree with representing Fascism in the filmmaking world by getting rid of the cinematic relics of Giolitti's Italy, as embodied in diva films.

Despite the possibility that it was merely an unconscious move, it is at least persuasive to consider Blasetti's choice of footwear a symbolic act. The social distinctiveness that the boots represented is demonstrated by an official photo at that time, taken in the early 1930s during Douglas Fairbanks' visit to Italy. In the photo, Blasetti is the only one wearing boots. While it was not impossible to see boots in contemporary Italian fashion, it is apparent how the director used them out of context: he is the only one wearing boots in this photo, and he was the only director in Italy that wore them regularly on set¹⁵. His choice must therefore be taken as a deliberate stance, and his boots understood as affecting his posture and constituting a fundamental trait in his public (self-)presentation.

Fig. 4. Douglas Fairbanks' visit to Italy in the early 1930s, featuring Blasetti (centre), and Fairbanks (left). Courtesy of the Fondazione Cineteca di Bologna.

The Struggle for Symbolic Capital

Long before the March on Rome, the fascists had started to reject casual wear in favour of soldier's trousers and boots during their expeditions (Radius 1964, 189). Blasetti himself made use of the footwear in one of his films. At the beginning of *Vecchia guardia* (1934) – set shortly before Mussolini's rise to power – a group of *squadristi* (a fascist squad) is returning home after an expedition. The following sequence opens with a framed photograph of one of them in uniform during World War I. The camera draws back to show the same man taking off his coat and lying in bed with his boots on.

Blasetti declared that «avev[a] aderito al fascismo poco prima della Marcia su Roma» (Grmek Germani 1975 [1982a, 372])¹⁶. *L'Impero*, the newspaper where he started his career, was sympathetic to Mussolini and was «quasi una meta d'obbligo per i molti giovani, preferibilmente parenti e amici dei pezzi più o meno grossi del fascismo, che desideravano intraprendere una carriera giornalistica» (Scarantino 1981, 67)¹⁷. While *Vecchia guardia* is a particularly militant film, his other works conveyed ideas close to the regime, as Blasetti himself recognized. In January 1932, in answer to a letter by the future director Mario Baffico, he wrote that fascist cinema

è una necessità. Purtroppo non è ancora una realizzazione. Nella modestia delle mie forze io ho tentato finora con *Sole* (bonifica) *Terra Madre* (ritorno alla terra) *Palio* (esaltazione del battagliero spirito mediterraneo) di dirigere i miei films nel grande binario tracciato dal Duce, di costituire con i miei films degli altoparlanti propalatori delle volontà del Regime¹⁸.

Fig. 5. Mino Doro in *Vecchia guardia* (1934).

Later on, he would complain about Cines – Italy's main production company – having refused to support his vision of cinema as «passione = milizia»¹⁹.

Renzo de Felice wrote that while Mussolini sometimes came across as having a liberal attitude towards the intellectual world, «la cultura, a tutti i suoi livelli e in tutte le sue manifestazioni e organizzazioni, aveva per lui un valore, un significato eminentemente politico: doveva contribuire al prestigio dell'Italia e del fascismo all'interno e all'estero e, al tempo stesso, doveva servire alla formazione delle nuove generazioni nel senso voluto dal regime» (1974, 107)²⁰. To suggest that Blasetti's boots and his vision of militant cinema represented simply a political stance, however, is too simplistic. It is more useful to consider it a legitimacy transfer. Through his boots, Blasetti was displaying his need for the fascist «revolution»²¹ to establish himself in his chosen professional field, the cinematic field. Blasetti presented himself as the leader of the young generation against the old, that is, those born in the 1880s who established themselves in the 1910s – when Italy was the liberal democratic state that fascism had successfully suppressed – and cinema screens were occupied by their decadent diva films. Blasetti's rich correspondence makes apparent his extensive commitment to renovating the body of Italian filmmaking. In one letter he writes that, despite the collapse of his production house, the «gruppo Augustus-cinematografo» that he led «ha già la sua fama e la sua vittoria»²²: a symbolic victory, and one that allowed him to make a name for himself. When he was hired by the newly re-established Cines some months later, he boasted of having successfully fought against «potentissime raccomandazioni amministrative e politiche» and subsequently hiring fifteen new young people²³. Later on he said this number had been raised to thirty²⁴. His followers, from Ruggero Orlando²⁵ to Mario Baffico²⁶ and friendly critics like Ettore M. Margadonna, supported his criticism of the older generation: «Soltanto la trasposizione visuale della sonata [in *Resurrectio*, 1931] vale un miliardo di capolavori dei Righelli, Genina, Brignone e altri simili mestieranti che non ho mai apprezzati e non apprezzerò mai sicuro»²⁷.

With renovated film production, and thanks especially to Cines, almost all the directors that had left to work abroad in the previous years came back to Italy during the 1930s. These experienced professionals had returned to leading positions in the (still comparatively unstructured) Italian cinematic field. At the same time, Blasetti had established himself as leader of a new generation – represented by Goffredo Alessandrini, Carlo Ludovico Bragaglia, etc. – that wanted to undermine the *status quo* of filmmaking in Italy. Blasetti's boots and his project of fascist cinema are both certainly attributable to his militant habitus; more importantly, they represented resources he could use to attain prestige – symbolic capital, in Bourdieu's terms – in a field, the cinematic, the boundaries of which were still permeable and regularly influenced by political and economic circumstances, despite the recent emergence of specific stakes.

The Total Author and the Fascist Male

Blasetti attempted to create a rupture with the past also via the imposition of a new model of director: the single man in command, the author in the fullest, totalizing sense of the word. This way of displaying himself is communicated by the boots on the level of appearances (see Figs. 6 and 7).

Fig. 6. Blasetti on the set of *1860* (1933). Courtesy of the Fondazione Cineteca di Bologna.

Fig. 7. Blasetti on the set of *1860* (1933, *La Stampa*, 11-4-1933). Courtesy of the Fondo Alessandro Blasetti – Fondazione Cineteca di Bologna.

The boots symbolized a fighting spirit, which Blasetti had embodied since the controversies on the rebirth of Italian cinema and his decision to «passare all'azione» («take action»; Blasetti 1982b [1952, 20]), by founding his own production company and directing a film without any previous experience. This attitude towards the destruction of the past and the affirmation of the modern can also be understood as a move against the bourgeois, liberal and individualistic 19th century, in favour of the fascist 20th century. This new, Italian social re-arrangement was to be governed with force and an authoritarian attitude, as Mussolini did in his politics²⁸. Film was the most modern of mass artistic products, and a way to produce art that was collective instead of individual. As such, filmmaking is a sort of *mise-en-abîme* of mass society, that had to be guided with a firm hand.

Fig. 8. Caricature of Blasetti by Olindo Grassetti (1931). Courtesy of the Fondo Alessandro Blasetti – Fondazione Cineteca di Bologna.

A contemporary cartoon (Figure 8) shows the director at the centre of the set, manoeuvring his actors like puppets. This situation of total control also characterized work on scripts. In this case, the director himself would make sure the hierarchy was well understood by everybody. Indeed, in 1937, he wrote in the pages of the magazine *Cinema* that

Un soggetto, quando il regista sia, diciamo così, prepotente (è questa la qualifica di cui si gratificano i registi che vorrebbero pensare con la loro testa), è un po' sempre del regista. [...] Dovevate assistere alle riunioni di sceneggiatura [for *Contessa di Parma*, 1937] che hanno avuto luogo prima con Libero Solaroli, poi con [Gherardo] Gherardi e [Aldo] De Benedetti, infine con Mario Soldati. Come in un gabinetto odontoiatrico, questi infelici miei collaboratori urlavano come ossessi ai denti che strappavo loro per farne una dentiera a modo mio. Chiedevo a ciascuno idee, trovate, dialoghi, sequenze; e poi, naturalmente, tutto questo materiale lo componevo nella sceneggiatura a modo mio (Blasetti 1937, 174)²⁹.

This authorial posture is part of Blasetti's poetics, so much so that critics have found it expressed in his films. In his first two movies, *Sole* and *Resurrezione*³⁰, Blasetti had sought to affirm himself in the Italian filmmaking landscape by introducing the stylistic norms that were most influential in Europe (camera movements, rhythmic montage, etc.), at the cost of being criticized for his foreign influences (Andreazza 2014). The commercial results were disastrous in both cases, and Blasetti was forced to change his approach and reduce formal experimentation (many of his colleagues made the same decision, following the transition to sound). This did not result in a uniform style. Nevertheless, Blasetti's approach became even more recognizable in the eyes of film critics.

This effect is the second aspect of posture, the rhetorical, the image projected by directors of themselves, through their movies. Let us consider for a moment the reviews of *Ettore Fieramosca* (1938). Mario Gromo, one of the period's most influential film critics, claims in his review that «il primo e più vistoso merito di Blasetti è di aver voluto donare, a ogni immagine, tutto il suo nerbo, il suo vigore» (Gromo 1938, 2)³¹. Sandro De Feo, another prestigious name, wrote: «È un film che reca chiaramente, vigorosamente, in ogni quadro e in ogni battuta la sua firma» (De Feo 1938, 5)³². Other reviews offer variations on this common theme. The critics saw no distance between the director, whom in some cases they knew personally, and the form of his work, which in turn made viewers feel like they could identify the director's personality. Though Blasetti's films would not be uniformly held in high regard in the 1930s, film critics were certain they were dealing with an «author» in the fullest sense of the word³³: a director who imposed on his films a virile framework modelled on fascist masculine values, through his vigorous directing style.

Virility occupies a central role in fascist culture (Spackman 1996, XII)³⁴. Mussolini's regime, that in other ways purported to offer a rupture with the past, also continued precedent battles on the matter of masculinity that favoured a return to traditional models that had been abandoned by the corrupt, modern society. Considering the foundational influence that the experience of war had on the birth of fascism, it is easy to see how military values played a central role: specifically the principles of hierarchy, force, courage and action (Bellassai 2005). These are values, as we have seen, that Blasetti endorsed entirely, and sought to convey in his movies.

Conclusion

After the war Blasetti did not wear boots regularly on set: in his two on-screen appearances as himself – in the aforementioned *Bellissima* and in *Una vita difficile* (D. Risi, 1961) – he wears normal shoes. Designers of cartoons, however, continued to depict him in his signature boots. His image was tightly bound to that kind of footwear, thanks to the way he had presented himself publicly during the first part of his career. His boots, at the time, constituted an element of his specific posture, of his way of being a film director, and thus of his poetics. As a trace of his militant habitus, they were – like the political element of his films – a way for Blasetti to establish himself in the Italian cinematic field. However,

the structure of the latter was as yet too weak to respond to commercial and – obviously, given the form of government in Italy at that time – political influences. Blasetti's boots were also the most evident element in the authoritarian, warlike posture he adopted, recalling the posture of the fascist male promoted by Mussolini. Fellini concludes his memoir of Blasetti on the crane with the words: «Pensavo di non essere tagliato per la regia. Mi mancavano il gusto della sopraffazione tirannica, la coerenza, la pignoleria, la capacità di faticare e tante altre cose, ma soprattutto l'autorità» (Fellini 1980, 44)³⁵. Here too the force of politics, in a mediated form, allowed Blasetti to accumulate a specific, symbolic capital – a cinematic capital, we might say – and thus to be perceived as authoritative in the eyes of the young Fellini. The fact that film critics found such a model of masculinity in Blasetti's films is proof of the potential contribution of the concept of posture, which helps to bridge the gap between formal analysis and sociological analysis, between close reading and context. Films, like all artistic products, are social phenomena, and as such they are profoundly influenced by their production conditions, the structure of the field, authorial postures (not only those of their directors) and the formal possibilities for expression available at a given time. At the same time, their production values depend on the ways they circulate and are consumed. From this perspective, the distinction between text and context is perhaps nothing but a mere artifice.

¹ «A powerful metallic voice bellowed orders like verdicts [...] I could not understand where the voice was coming from. [...] Out of nowhere, in the sudden silence, the long arm of a crane began to rise up into the air, higher and higher, above the structures and studios, above the trees and the towers – higher and higher, towards the clouds, until it stood suspended in the incandescent glare of a dusk made of millions of rays of light. Someone lent me their telescope and up there, more than a thousand metres above ground, on an armchair screwed solidly onto the crane's platform, with shiny leather boots, a silk scarf around his neck, a helmet on his head, three megaphones, four microphones and twenty or so whistles slung around his neck, was a man: it was him, the director. It was Blasetti».

² I thank Michela Zegna for helping me locate the images in the Cineteca di Bologna that are reproduced here.

³ «Dispositions of the body» (Bourdieu 1984, 133).

⁴ For the concept of field, cfr. *infra* p. 24.

⁵ «A way of occupying a position» in the literary field («it is possible, for instance, to occupy an advantageous position in a quiet way, or to occupy a modest position in a loud way»).

⁶ «It is on the one hand the presentation of oneself, and public conduct in the literary context; on the other, it is the image of oneself constructed by and through discourses, what rhetoric would term *ethos*». The term “conduct” refers to the notion of *Lebensführung* (life conduct) used by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-1905 [1992]).

⁷ «One can therefore study author's position in the field and her/his available aesthetic options, public conduct and discursive *ethos*, in a relational way».

⁸ «The director of *In Penombra* wants me to talk about myself, about what I have attempted and succeeded in the field of cinema, and about the *method* I have adopted. In other words they want my credo».

⁹ «Augustus-cinematografo Group». Alessandro Blasetti, letter to Mario Da Silva, 5 January 1930. CRS01, fasc. 434, Archivio Alessandro Blasetti, Fondazione Cineteca di Bologna (abbreviation: ABCB).

¹⁰ «Before me lies the first thought entertained by those who write memoirs: wondering what I want people to think of me afterwards. And so I reconnect with what I thought in the past, but this time starting with my cards on the table, with my Achilles heel, the thing I'd like to clarify most while I still have the chance: the business of the boots».

¹¹ «They became a target for those writing cinema columns».

¹² «I got into wearing boots since for work in swamps, in the countryside, whatever the weather – in the dust or the mud – or amongst the nails, paint and grease of film studios, they seemed more practical than moccasins; and then because after more than three years of military life, they felt more comfortable than moccasins. I also liked myself better in boots, thanks to un-repudiated memories of Sioux or the Maracaibo. Then there was something instinctive within the gesture, all the more valid since it lacked any symbolic premeditation; this idea of revolution against melodramatic woe sprawled over doorframes. Thanks, Steno, for making me understand this».

¹³ When dissatisfied with one of his casting members (Walter Chiari), during the auditions with the daughter of the protagonist (Anna Magnani), Blasetti says to him: «Senta, lei si chiama Annovazzi, è vero? Lei ha fatto il soldato? Bene. Si alzi in piedi. Bene: fianco sinistro, fianco sinistro! Avanti marsch» («Listen, you're name is Annovazzi, correct? Weren't you in the military? Stand up. Now: left flank, left flank! Forward march»). Blasetti played the role of himself also in *Nerone*, a film he directed in 1930 (Gori 1983, 56), however the sole surviving fragment of the film does not include his performance. This is particularly unfortunate as he specifically mentions his boots when he recalling the shoot (Blasetti 1978 [1982b, 101-102]). On the concept of performing authorship in the screen appearances of directors, see Sayad 2013.

¹⁴ «You are the March on Hesperia and on Luigi Serventi».

¹⁵ Abel Gance would also wear boots on set (thanks to Dimitri Vezyroglou for the information), as well as some American directors.

¹⁶ «He had adhered to Fascism before the march on Rome».

¹⁷ «Almost an inevitable stop for many young people, preferably friends and family of important people in the Fascist Party, that wanted to start a career in journalism».

¹⁸ Is a necessity. Sadly, it has not yet been realized. I have tried, using my own modest forces, with *Sole* (swampland improvement), *Terra Madre* [1931] (the return to agriculture) and *Palio* [1932] (a celebration of the Mediterranean warrior spirit) to inform my films following the great way indicated by the *Duce*, and to build them as megaphones for the Regime's will». Alessandro Blasetti, letter to Mario Baffico, 3 January 1932. CRS01, fasc. 435, ABCB.

¹⁹ «passion = militant ardour». Alessandro Blasetti, letter to Camillo Mariani dell'Anguillara, 2 May 1932, CRS01, fasc. 435, ABCB.

²⁰ «Culture at all levels and in all its manifestations and organizations had for him an eminently political value: it should contribute to the prestige of Italy and of fascism at home and abroad, while serving to educate new generations in the direction chosen by the regime».

- ²¹ Fascists presented Mussolini's seizure of power as a revolution. The attribution of the label of a «revolutionary phenomenon» to fascism is still controversial; however it has become more widespread in recent decades, thanks to the contributions of historians such as De Felice and George Mosse (Gentile 2002, 91-112).
- ²² The «Augustus-cinematografico group [...] already has its own fame and victory». Alessandro Blasetti, letter to Mario Da Silva, 5 January 1930. CRS01, fasc. 434, ABCB.
- ²³ «The pressure of powerful political and institutional figures». Alessandro Blasetti, letter to Ettore M. Margadonna, 10 October 1930. CRS01, fasc. 434, ABCB.
- ²⁴ Blasetti, Alessandro, letter to Ruggero Orlando, 1 December 1930. CRS01, fasc. 434, ABCB.
- ²⁵ Ruggero Orlando, letter to Alessandro Blasetti, 15 November 1930. CRS01, fasc. 434, ABCB.
- ²⁶ Mario Baffico, letter to Alessandro Blasetti, 10 May 1932. CRS01, fasc. 435, ABCB.
- ²⁷ «The visual transposition of the *sonata* [in *Resurrectio*, 1931] is worth a billion of such masterpieces by Righelli, Genina, Brignone and so-called professionals that I never liked and will never bring myself to like». Ettore M. Margadonna, letter to Alessandro Blasetti, 4 April 1931. CRS01, fasc. 434, ABCB.
- ²⁸ There are several traces of this behaviour in his correspondence. Suffice it to cite one example, about dealing with insubordinate collaborators: «Volete mangiare questa minestra? No? E allora saltate quella finestra. È l'unico modo di concludere, di fare. Mussolini insegna» («It's either my way, or no way. It's the only way to get things done. Mussolini docet»). Alessandro Blasetti, letter to Paolo Garretto, 30 July 1931. CRS01, fasc. 434, ABCB.
- ²⁹ «A script, when the director is, so to speak, a bully (this being the quality of those directors who like to be able to say they can think with their own heads) is always somehow the director's. [...] You should have been there at the script meetings [for *Contessa di Parma*, 1937] first with Libero Solaroli, then with [Gherardo] Gherardi and [Aldo] De Benedetti, and lastly with Mario Soldati. As in a dentist parlour, these sad collaborators of mine would cry in pain at every tooth I pulled out to make a set of dentures that suited me. I asked everyone for ideas, inspiration, dialogues, sequences; then, naturally, I combined all this material in the script in my own way».
- ³⁰ *Resurrectio* was released after *Terra madre*, though it had been produced earlier.
- ³¹ «The first and foremost of Blasetti's merits is that he wanted to give all his force and vigour to each of his images».
- ³² «His film clearly, vigorously bears Blasetti's signature in each frame and each line».
- ³³ Marcia Landy claims that during the fascist period Blasetti was not «a star or "auteur" in the sense of certain postwar directors» (2008, XV). To be sure, the press's on-going interest both in some details of his life – such as his boots – and in his films made him a sort of model for his younger colleagues.
- ³⁴ In this regard, the attitude of fascism toward homosexuality is significant: «Nessun libro specifico, nessun provvedimento o discorso era rivolto al problema dell'omosessualità, perché a destare preoccupazione era solo l'assenza di virilità. [...] Il fascismo nella sostanza non puniva gli omosessuali, ma chi aveva atteggiamenti femminili, aderendo così senza riserve a un'immagine della donna di per sé considerata inferiore a quella maschile» («No specific book, no action or speech addressed the problem of homosexuality, since what really caused concern was instead the *lack* of virility. Fascism ultimately did not punish homosexuals, but effeminate males, thus adhering unreservedly to an image of women as inferior to men») (Benadusi 2005, 279-280). It should nevertheless be noted that, despite the severity of censorship, the artistic representation of masculinity during the *ventennio* was more varied than the normative model. Some examples are analysed (albeit often over-interpreted) in Champagne 2013.
- ³⁵ «I thought I didn't have what it took to be a director. I lacked the taste for tyranny and submission, the coherence, the fastidiousness, the ability to work hard, but mostly I lacked the authority».

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