

I enrolled in the Party in 1933 out of cowardice, I can't find a better explanation. Really, the shadow of Mussolini already hung over my existence, even when I made love, I dare say.

Cesare Zavattini, *La notte che ho dato uno schiaffo a Mussolini*

Samson's no match for him: his force lay in that polar cranium (volumetric power and arrogance), quadri-dimensional [...], magnetic - a bucranium to reassure families, while behind, goatees and cudgels.

Valerio Magrelli, *Nel condominio di carne /In the Condominium of the Flesh*

Fascist sexual psychology has been a frequently visited phenomenon in Italian literature from the post-war period to our day - to mention only two names, I'm thinking here of Andrea Camilleri (*La presa di Macallè /The Capture of Macallè*, 2003) and Enrico Brizzi (the fanta-history trilogy that began with *L'inattesa piega degli eventi /The Unexpected Turn of Events*, 2008). These works have shed light on the main features of Fascist sexual psychology and its perfect integration with the prevailing ideology, to the degree that we can speak of a genuine pedagogy of Fascist eros, with an evident relationship between the Duce's political-military charisma and his capacity of *fascination* in the obscene, etymological sense of the term, i.e. the power of the *fascinus*, phallus.

It hardly seems an overstatement to affirm that literature (and cinema as well) have been two of the spheres where a critical and analytical exploration of the experience of Fascism, understood not only in its historical-political dimension but also as a mass phenomenon, has been carried out most effectively. This interpretative pre-eminence, if we can call it that, is not difficult to explain: Fascist psychology is also, *lato sensu*, a product of the imagination, as are novels and films (here we are thinking of the eighteenth-century novel, the bourgeois novel in the nineteenth century, and of Hollywood movies in the twentieth century). Like every mass product, its capacity to impose itself, spread and endure over time was directly proportional to the effectiveness with which it succeeded in acting on individuals in depth, that is, in constructing and orienting the most intimate drives of the individual at the same time as it satisfied them. This is naturally a very complicated subject, and one which until now has been treated only episodically by critics. We shall therefore try to set out some theoretical guidelines, with the promise to return to investigate the matter more fully in the future. Our intention is first of all to stress, in the words of the philosopher Christoph Türcke, that the phenomena of the past should not «[...] be understood by trying to stick them into the right place

in world history», but rather as precursory models of forces still in operation[1]. In our opinion, it is precisely here that the sense of every rewriting of history can be found.

The first part of our paper focuses on two key authors of the Italian twentieth century, Carlo Emilio Gadda and Paolo Volponi, both intent on rewriting - one in a ferocious satiric pamphlet, *Eros e Priapo /Eros and Priapus* (1945), the other in a rather traditional novel, *Il lanciatore del giavellotto / The Javelin Thrower* (1981) - the history of Italy in the years between 1922 and 1943 as the consequence of a rampant and widespread fascistization of sexual drives. The second part aims to show briefly, once again by reference to works of fiction, that this phenomenon did not end with the fall of the regime. Rather, it continued in the years after the war in various forms, among which the most important consisted in the hybridization of a fascist-spirited sentimental education with the products of media culture[2]. But first we need a brief theoretical premise. In his *L'Erotisme*, Georges Bataille insisted on the fact that sexual activity represents a gesture of aggression, a violent act, so that even prehistoric communities already found themselves having to limit it in order to allow society to develop. This limit, which we call interdiction, is also in force for murder: war would be unthinkable if the interdiction against killing did not exist. The point is that while free and spontaneous violence has to be censured because it lacks an organic purpose, war represents precisely the consignment of aggressive impulses to a collective, planned organization linked to a precise purpose and for a delimited time. Violence in itself is not cruel at all, it is organized violence that has given rise to cruelty (which is, in turn, precisely due to the aggressiveness/sexuality connection we mentioned before, which is often a primary component of eroticism). Consequently, the social life of communities is based on a sort of alchemic balance between interdiction and organized transgression, limited ad hoc.

Fascism, however, follows different rules since, to quote a felicitous formula of George L. Mosse, it is founded « [...] on the continuity of war into peacetime»[3]. With Fascism, therefore, and with the belligerent sexual psychology characteristic of it, the balance is broken and there is a return to pure violence, «to the animality of violence», as Bataille writes, which succeeds in violating the interdiction[4]. Once this process of imbalance has been triggered off, Fascism cannot turn back without paying the price of dissolution (in the inter-war period the front was simply shifted from external to internal, but already in 1935, with the war in Ethiopia, we are back to the starting point, and from there proceed hurriedly to the point of no return represented by 10th June, 1940[5]). For this reason Fascism must show itself to be a frantic war machine, cruel *and* eroticized, loudly pronouncing its *me ne frego* [*I don't give a damn*] (about the interdiction). At the same time, however, this is its intrinsic paradox - once in power, the regime also needs to stage a (dis)honest

dissimulation of its savage and unrepresentable face, covering it with a fake mask of middle-class respectability that allows it to appear to public opinion a disciplined, controlled and cohesive force that can guarantee social order. Mosse says this clearly when he observes that «[...] the quest for continued war in peacetime [...] might easily leave respectability a casualty on the battlefield»[6]. The images of Mussolini as seducer, sportsman and soldier, side by side with that of Mussolini as the man of order dressed in redingote and top hat, are explicit in this context.

One of the most influential philosophers of our day, Slavoj Žižek, returns to these issues, giving them a Lacanian reading that in many ways, at least as regards what interests us here, coincides with what Bataille and Mosse had to say. Žižek stresses the fact that all totalitarianisms are based on a double linguistic code: an explicit one that is careful to send messages that assure order, and an implicit one, which holds out to its supporters an unrestrained, obscene and unlimited *jouissance*. The libidinal structure of dictatorial regimes is perverse because, in contrast with its façade of respectability, the totalitarian ideology offers an invitation to commit crimes that give enjoyment, that encourage its followers to *enjoy* others in a bullying, violent relationship that makes them passive[7]. If a work like Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma / Salò or the 120 Days of Sodom* has a limit, this does not lie in its highly disturbing character, but rather in the fact that Pasolini rewrites Sade *literally*, without considering that, contrary to *ancient régime* oligarchs bound to one system of law (theirs), the Nazi-Fascist party leaders answered to a twofold system of law, the "nocturnal" and the "public" - this one being truly perverse - without which modern mass dictatorships could not survive.

And so we arrive at Gadda and Volponi. *Eros and Priapus* is a work dedicated to the «vital cravings» which, writes Gadda, historiography has to confront if it intends to undertake a «veracious story of human aggregates and their appetites, meaning an erotic history of the human race and the eating and venereal impulses that drive it to actions, and of the pragmatic sublimations or pseudo-sublimation of those actions»[8]. What most interests us to point out here is that Gadda does not give in to a vague pessimism about the eternally malicious nature of the human race. Rather, he feels it his duty to historicize his subject, specifying that there are particular moments when interdiction, that is, the conscious governing of the instincts, is shattered and trampled upon, though it is replaced by exterior marks of respectability. This does not happen everywhere or always, «but certainly where the stream of becoming stagnates», that is, when history bogs down and allows the rise of «bestial» «cravings disguised as fatherland»[9]. This was the salient feature of Fascism, according to Gadda: winning the consensus, and the still more dangerous acquiescence, of wide strata of the population not by playing on the personality of individuals but on their *status* as a mass,

and as a *desiring* mass – aggregations of flesh brimming over with drives, not individual citizens linked by a common social contract (and here Gadda shows himself to be far more enlightened than baroque, as Gabriele Frasca’s reading rightly shows)[10]. Fascism therefore means establishing a solid, unshakable equivalence between one’s own private imperative of pleasure – including sexual pleasure – and the perverse “disguise” represented by the concept of Fatherland. On the one hand, behind the wings the predatory-erotic (the phallus, *i.e.* the bludgeon), on the other the public façade, possibly to wave (like the three colours of the Italian flag): «libido disguised as Fatherland», precisely. But how is it that Fascism was able to ensnare an entire populace in this virtual carnival of priapic ecstasy[11]? In Gadda’s misogynistic reading, the responsibility falls entirely, or almost entirely, on women. The passage containing the following words is famous:

I don’t deny a woman the right to “prefer young men, since they are the most ferocious” (Machiavelli, *The Prince*), that is, the most sexually aggressive [...]. But let them take “the young” to bed, and not expect to hail them as prefects and ministers who govern a country. And then, a woman should fulfil her duties and her inclinations and quit pestering us with this political nymphomania [...][12].

For Gadda, the angel of the hearth is only a mask used by women to hide their shameless sexual drives, the uncontrolled «vital lust» that has ended up by putting into power a bunch of seducer-assassins[13]. This interpretation, with infinite variations on the rate of misogyny implied, is shared by other authors. We find it again in reference to Nazism in the great German-language poet, Ernst Jandl. In his most renowned work, *Wien: heldenplatz*, Jandl recalls the famous speech given by Hitler in Vienna in 1938. Describing that impassioned, triumphant rally, Jandl insists on the climate of sexual excitement that gripped the crowd on that occasion:

der glanze heldenplatz zirka
versaggerte in maschenhaftem männchenmeere
drunter augh frauen die ans maskelknie
zu heften heftig sich veersuchten, hoffensdick
und brüzten wesentlich[14].

Beyond this specific aspect, that is, the misogynistic argument that both Gadda and Jandl emphasize, what we wish to underscore here is the nature of this transgressive message. Acting in concert with official communication, it offers citizens unbridled enjoyment while at the same time cancelling their essential freedoms, which are in fact denied both by the “public” and the “nocturnal” law. Examples of this could be multiplied without end, especially if we broaden our discussion to include,

let's say, racism and colonialism (what comes to mind immediately in this regard is a masterpiece like Flaiano's *Tempo di uccidere / A Time to Kill*, 1947), or the repression of homosexuality. In this regard we can mention, for example, some aspects of the personality of the aspiring arch-Fascist Marcello Clerici, the sadistic, priggish "average man" who is the main character of Alberto Moravia's *Il conformista / The Conformist* (1951).

But instead we shall now consider a work that in a certain sense represents a reply to *Eros and Priapus*, i.e. *The Javelin Thrower* by Paolo Volponi. The main character of the novel, the adolescent Damín Possanza, grows up torn between two opposite masculine figures: his mother's partner, the Fascist ringleader Marcacci, who dominates her, and the anarchist and libertine cobbler Amilcare Occhialini, who becomes a sort of mentor and guide for the boy. The figure of Marcacci is of particular interest for us. The man always carries a dagger with him, and its clear phallic connotation makes it the perfect symbol for the inextricable connection between violence and totalitarian sexuality: «The image of the silver dagger of the Fascist leader was in his hands and showed in his heart a sure willingness to kill»[\[15\]](#).

Marcacci, a respectable and much-feared man, is the implacable conqueror, the triumphant black shirt that takes possession of Damín's mother in the same way as Fascist Italy takes possession of the proletariat[\[16\]](#). Volponi contrasts him to Occhialini, the "good teacher", who tries to educate Damín in critical thinking, de-mythologizing Fascism and in particular debunking the legend of the presumed virility of the Fascist action squads. Through Occhialini's words, Volponi mocks the black shirts' dehumanized sexuality, which has become a means of oppression. By doing so he exonerates women of all accusations. On the contrary, he stresses their role as victims of the bestial instincts of men like Marcacci, who are vainglorious exhibitionists, selfish to the point of self-idolatry[\[17\]](#). And it is precisely this set of characteristics, which can all be traced back to an adolescence never really concluded or got over, that marks the continuity between what with Frasca we could call «historical Fascism», «theatrical and ridiculous, albeit pernicious and deadly» and the fascism that is «permanent, made of ice and basalt» that we haven't finished reckoning with yet[\[18\]](#). The idea that a three-year war of liberation produced an authentic break in customs, mentality and even in politics is, after all, only an illusion. As Vitaliano Brancati wrote, with no joke intended, in his famous pamphlet *Ritorno alla censura / Return to Censorship* (1952), «the Christian Democratic Party is really an erotomaniac party [...]», recalling as an example «[...] the adventures of that Monsignor who, as reported in certain newspapers, during the night would drive around the avenues of Villa Borghese in an American car and one after the other pick up three prostitutes and possess them as quickly as it would have taken him to stab them with a knife»[\[19\]](#). No wonder that we find

the Fascist squad member Marcacci's knife in the hands of a high ecclesiastic, albeit metaphorically: it is to the disturbing lack of a hiatus between the Fascist ruling class and the Christian Democratic ruling class that we owe many of the troubles of republican Italy. Similarly, the character of the "General" in Sciascia's *Candido* cannot fail to suggest a white-haired Marcacci. A convinced Fascist and supporter of Franco - he had lost an eye fighting in Spain alongside the Falangists - "the General" is elected in the ranks of the C.D. in 1948. This second youth gives him «renewed confidence and bravado», sexual as well, to the point that, as Sciascia writes,

already during the electoral campaign he'd started wearing a black band over his missing eye: which now, rejuvenated by his electoral success as he was, gave him a piratical and rapacious air that held great allure for the *Ladies of the Sacred Heart*, the *Ursulines* and the *Daughters of Mary*[20].

Of the same type is Parise's *Il prete bello / The Handsome Priest* (1954), the philo-Falangist don Gastone Caodure. Confident of his «Fascist sentimental education»[21], he is both an implacable *erotic machine* and an untiring propagator of bellicose myths («Faith and Daring» is the name of the association he creates)[22]. And we could also consider certain characters in the novels of Piero Chiara, or the ex-Fascists described by Mauro Curradi in *Passato prossimo*. The extreme example of this type, an atrocious mixture of sexual drives and violence, grotesque in the shameless voluptuousness of his hope that his transgression will be discovered, is represented by the main character in Elio Petri's *Indagine su un cittadino al di sopra di ogni sospetto / Investigation of a Citizen above Suspicion* (1970), the police chief who is an authentic post-adolescent bachelor, perverse and psychotic, and a murderer.

But if these characters by and large represent history's derelicts, there are other more unsuspecting figures who grew up in the shadow of the Duce and who ferry over into the post-war period a Fascist eros that is then crossbred with the stimulation of media culture, especially if it is English-speaking. For we should bear in mind that for the generation that came of age in the thirties American cinema has enormous fascination, insofar as it shapes the imagination through direct action on the psychic mechanisms of identification[23]. Even when this perverse-violent aspect of the relationship with sex is repressed, the super-ego and self-destructive drives are still strong, to the extent that the young Italian adolescent of the thirties, an enthusiastic admirer of Tyrone Power and Clark Gable, still lives immersed in the lulling and gratifying individual / mass dream represented by the eros of the regime. In this sense Gianni Celati's interpretation of Federico Fellini, born in 1920, in a work entitled *Fellini, il clown e la sua ombra / Fellini, the Clown and his Shadow*, is exemplary:

Fellini talks about Hollywood like a kind of seductive folklore, similar to that of our Latin lover. And in his films, parodying the effects of seduction of famous American actors, he merges the genealogy of our Fascist male with that of Hollywood actors, relating both to the archetype of Rudolf Valentino. For example, in *Amarcord*, the Latin lover with a hairstyle *alla* Rudolf Valentino (the “worthless” uncle) is the example of the happy-go-lucky Fascist who lives in the bosom of the family while dedicating himself to the conquest of women and beating up political adversaries. We should not discard the idea that this is how Fascism bloomed in Italy — not on the basis of a political doctrine, but as the effect of male seduction in imitation of film stars, propagandized as such in newspapers and cinema newsreels[24].

Celati takes up Gadda’s idea that Fascism made its irruption into history not as a legitimate political phenomenon but as a disease, especially a venereal disease, a kind of adolescent vice nourished not only by the trombones of propaganda but also by the seductive allure of the audio-visual imagination. And in an interview with Valeria Riva, Fellini himself declared, «[...] I have the impression that Fascism and adolescence to some extent continue to be permanent historical seasons of our life. Adolescence, of our individual life; Fascism of the life of the nation»[25]. Not only retrospectively, as in the case of *Amarcord*, but also when he portrays post-war Italy, Fellini brings to the screen a Fascist brand of sexuality (though perhaps purged of its most openly violent features), combined with heavy doses of the seductive imagination of media. Totally disinvested of responsibility by the family, the Church and the Party, as Fellini goes on to say, the Italian male grows up cultivating personal dreams like the male in American movies, «[...] or the dream of woman as oriental, in the end the usual, monstrously outdated myths [...]»; in other words, myths that have all the features of pathological anomalies and that arrest the development of the individual at an infantile stage[26]. If Fascism spread its shadow beyond 1943 and 1945 like «an adolescence protracted beyond all relevance», to quote another of Fellini’s assertions[27], this more or less phantasmagorical persistence is due to the fact that the reassuring and at the same time transgressive eros underlying it, a familistic, paranoiac and warmongering eros, is not only the prerogative of the old and the nostalgic. Rather, it shares much with the equally adolescent hedonistic imperative propagandized by the electric media, at first cinema and then TV. The Berlusconi period then comes as a climax in which we can see the extreme incarnation of the desiring mass-individual, no longer a citizen but a collection of drives, ferociously intent on affirming his private right to enjoyment. Thus we feel that in order to rewrite Italian post-war society also by considering how literary and cinematographic works portray it, we need to give more weight to the long long-lasting effects of Fascist sexual psychology. Crossed with the hedonistic oppressive-erotic myths of the affluent society, in the post-war years this psychology has been, in Adorno’s

words, at the service of «the irrationalist ideology of the rationalized society»[28]. After all, Gadda had warned us in time: we must always be on guard, «[...] since when in an erotic phenomenon of life in general the similarity with the corresponding erotic phenomenon of the Fascist years becomes evident, we'd better say to ourselves, "Go slow, Giovanni!" "Adagio. Careful!". Experience "must" be brought to profit: otherwise we wander, we wander, like big babes in the wood, towards the inane darkness of eternity»[29].

Translated by Brenda Porster

Notes

[1] Christoph Türcke, *Violenza e tabù. Percorsi filosofici di confine*, introduction by Cesare Cases, Milan, Garzanti, 1991, p. 44. (Original edition: *Gewalt und Tabu. Philosophische Grenzgänge*, Spring, Klampen Verlag, 1992).

[2] The bibliography on the topic of sexuality in the period after the Second World War is naturally vast, especially from the sociological perspective. Here I limit myself to mentioning the recent contribution of Luca Scarlini, *Il sesso al potere dall'Unità a oggi*, Parma, Guanda, 2013. For cinema particularly interesting is a recent work by Giacomo Lichtner, *Fascism in Italian Cinema since 1945. The Politics and Aesthetics of Memory*, London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2013.

[3] George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality. Middle-class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe*, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, p. 154.

[4] Georges Bataille, *Œuvres Complètes. X. L'Érotisme, Le procès de Gilles de Rais, Les larmes d'Éros*, Paris, Gallimard, 1987, p. 69.

[5] On June 10th, in a famous speech held in piazza Venezia in Rome, Mussolin announced Italy's entrance in the Second World War.

[6] Mosse, cit., p. 155.

[7] Exemplary in this sense is the section *Censorship, Power and Resistance* in Slavoj Žižek, *The Universal Exception*, Milan, Cortina, 2000, pp. 80-85. The philosopher notes that « [...] this 'eroticization' of Power is not a secondary effect of its exertion on its object, but its very disavowed foundation, its 'constitutive crime', its founding gesture that has to remain invisible if Power is to

function normally» (ibid., p. 158).

[8] Carlo Emilio Gadda, *Eros e Priapo (da furore a cenere)*, Milan, Garzanti, 1967, p. 31.

[9] Ibid., p. 34.

[10] Cfr. Gabriele Frasca, *Cultura barocca e civiltà della ragione*, in Riccardo Donati, *I veleni delle coscienze. Letture novecentesche del secolo dei Lumi*, Rome, Bulzoni, 2010, pp. 264-265.

[11] In the text, Gadda embarks on a series of highly explicit equivalences: «[...] the spermatophoric vehemence of the glorious race personified» (ibid., p. 65), the «[...] luteous, or luteovaginal, enthusiasms» (ibid., p. 60), the «Priapus-Image» (ibid., p. 61), to the point of creating a grotesque transfiguration of the Fascist period into «era favista / prick period» (ibid., p. 123).

[12] Ibid., p. 42.

[13] The novelistic equivalent of these theories is found in the parade of hysterical women in Gadda's *Pasticciaccio / That Awful Mess on Via Merulana*, on which see Gabriele Frasca, *Un quanto di erotia. Gadda con Freud e Schrödinger*, Naples, d'if, 2011, pp. 181-190. Mazzacurati had already noted, along the lines of the theories of Mach according to which there exists a stupidity capable of exciting the ferocity of assassins, the peculiar nature of the "victims" of Gadda's novels, citing particularly «Liliana Balducci who "had yielded to her assassin" just as Italy yielded, female-like, to its satyriized dominator» (Giancarlo Mazzacurati, *Pirandello nel romanzo europeo*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1987, p. 170).

[14] Ernst Jandl, *Wien heldenplatz*, quoted in Ernst Grabovski and James Hardin, *Literature in Vienna at the Turn of the Centuries. Continuities and Discontinuities around 1900 and 2000*, New York, Camden House, 2003, p. 13. Hitler is here called *der gottelbock*, the «little billy-goat-god». The excellent translation into Italian by Luigi Reitani evidences how the poet stresses the unbridled erotic incontinence shown by the women on that occasion: ««l'intersa piazza degli eroi all'incirco / straflosciava in mestosi ometti oceanici / tra loro donne, che al ginocchio mascolare / di premere pressanti si tentavano, pregne di sperare. / e mugghiolavano essenzialmente» (*vienna: piazza degli eroi in Luci Lune Luoghi. Antologia della poesia austriaca contemporanea*, ed. by Luigi Reitani, Milan, Marcos y Marcos, 1999, p. 209). Recently Antonella Anedda has taken up this point, noting that in Jenny Holzer's *Inflammatory Essays* there is a denunciation of «[...] the inflamability of women (angels of the hearth) under dictatorial regimes. The dictator often addresses and is supported by a femmine public, inflaming the crowds. And the crowd is feminine, said Mussolini»

(Antonella Anedda, *La vita dei dettagli : scomporre quadri, immaginare mondi*, Rome, Donzelli, 2009, p. 134).

[15] Paolo Volponi, *Il lanciatore di giavellotto*, Torino, Einaudi, 1981, p. 18.

[16] «Above any other figure or association, the greatest and most unjustified love was that of the mother with the Fascist leader, with Marcacci, a handsome man, a seducer, rabidly courageous and even murderous: a hoe in clay, the creaking of an oven door, its iron closing in a circle and a latch, a new vase, a dry jar, a terrine just out of the oven, the blaze of flames from observation vents. Behind the loving evidence of every image, he expected to see Marcacci's face, his whole figure, his dagger appear suddenly. The mouths of vases exhaled the slimy ehs, the blood-smeared ahs and ohs of his mother's sighs» (ibid., pp. 22-23)

[17] The oppressive action against women involves both the personal level (indifference to or negation of female pleasure) and the social one: «Women have to have pleasure like men, and even more, for social justice and as a compensation for giving birth... [...]. I know, I know, the middle classes conquer, use and throw away; but they [...] are Fascist exploiters who can only make love with whores they can lord it over or in brothels, authentic churches of their immature and twisted souls, their animal bullying... bull-like, horned, real horned cuckolds» (ibid., p. 26)

[18] Gabriele Frasca, *Un quanto di erotia*, cit., p. 146. On the genesis of the category of the "adolescent" as the product of the middle classes in modern society, cf. the classic study of John Neubauer, *Adolescenza fin-de-siècle*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1997.

[19] Vitaliano Brancati, *Ritorno alla censura* in *La governante*, preface by Domenica Perrone, Milan, Bompiani, 1998, p. 49. In his text, Brancati observes that the forced abstinence of the Christian Democratic "clerics" and their uncontrolled explosions of lust are two faces of the same coin.

[20] Leonardo Sciascia, *Candido* in *Opere 1971-1983*, ed. by Claude Ambroise, Milan, Bompiani, 2001, p. 371.

[21] Goffredo Parise, *Il prete bello*, Milan, Garzanti, 1970, p. 77.

[22] Ibid., p. 134. On don Gastone's sexual insatiability, cf. pp. 172-173.

[23] On this topic some very interesting pages have been written by Luciano Bianciardi, who in a newspaper piece in 1956, entitled *Spengi stracci*, illustrated how during the Fascist regime «Italian

cinema did not have its own face [...], the Americans were everywhere, and it was they who created myths. We need only think [...] of the fortune of the nickname Bob, which in my town (like everywhere else) unfailingly accompanied the young man who had the most luck with women. Bob is short for Robert and the Robert in question was, as we know, an American actor, Robert Taylor» (Luciano Bianciardi, *Chiese escatollo e nessuno raddoppiò. Diario in pubblico 1951-1971*, ed by Luciana Bianciardi, Milan, Baldini&Castoldi, 1995, pp. 90-91).

[24] Gianni Celati, *Fellini, il clown e la sua ombra*, in *Documentari imprevedibili come sogni. Il cinema di Gianni Celati*, ed. by Nunzia Palmieri, Rome, Fandango Libri, 2011, pp. 40-41. Celati's argument ends with a direct reference to Gadda's *Eros and Priapus*.

[25] The text can be found in Liliana Betti and Gianfranco Angelucci (ed.), *Casanova: rendez-vous con Federico Fellini*, Milan, Bompiani, 1975, pp. 20-21.

[26] Ibid.

[27] I quote from an interview with Aldo Tassone, where Fascism is spoken of as a «[...] collective, not individual, way of existing, that intoxication with firefighting action, with scenography, that thinking according to a compulsive system of generic slogans, without any sense, emotion reduced to a physiological temperature, feverish, in a word, adolescence in its most second-rate part, that is, arrogance, health, fanatic and hypocritical idealism» (ibid. p. 141).

[28] Theodor W. Adorno, *Teoria estetica*, ed. by Fabrizio Desideri and Giovanni Matteucci, Turin, Einaudi, 2009, p. 35 (Edizione originale: *Ästhetische Theorie*, Hrsg. v. Gretel Adorno und Rolf Tiedemann, Frankfurt am Main, 1970). Some works offering reflections on recent history can also be read along these lines; I'm thinking, for example, of a text like *Il Sessantotto realizzato da Mediaset. Un dialogo agli inferi* by Valerio Magrelli (Turin, Einaudi, 2011).

[29] Carlo Emilio Gadda, *Eros e Priapo*, ibid, pp. 46-47.