

The Death of Luigi Trastulli: Memory and the Event*

MEMORY AND FACT

"For an experienced event," wrote Walter Benjamin, "is finite—at any rate, confined to one sphere of experience; a remembered event is infinite, because it is only a key to everything that happened before and after it."¹ Luigi Trastulli, a 21-year-old steel worker from Terni, an industrial town in Umbria, central Italy, died in a clash with the police on 17 March 1949 as workers walked out of the factory to attend a rally against the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty by the Italian government. The walkout, the clash, and the killing of Trastulli lasted less than thirty minutes; but, from that moment on, the memory of this brief episode has exerted a shaping influence on the town's identity and culture.

This essay is about the way in which this *événement* was elaborated, changed, and interpreted in the *longue durée* of memory and culture, as shown by oral sources and their interplay with the written record. What makes Luigi Trastulli's death important is not its intrinsically tragic nature (Terni has experienced more dramatic events in its history, including the air raids which killed thousands of citizens in 1943–44 and the mass layoffs of steel workers in 1952–53). Its importance lies, rather, in the fact that it became the ground upon which collective memory and imagination built a cluster of tales, symbols, legends, and imaginary reconstructions. The most widespread and significant "error" (too common to be explained

*First published as "La memoria e l'evento. L'assassinio di Luigi Trastulli," *Segno Critico* [Perugia, Italy], II, 4 (1981); in a revised version, "Historia y memoria: La muerte de Luigi Trastulli," *Historia y Fuente Oral* [Barcelona, Spain], 1 (1989), 5–32.

with faulty individual memories) is the shifting of the date and context of the event from the 1949 anti-NATO rally to the street fighting subsequent to the layoff of two thousand workers from the steel factory in October 1953.

"History," says Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "is an invention which reality supplies with raw materials. It is not, however, an arbitrary invention, and the interest it arouses is rooted in the interests of the teller."² This is why "wrong" tales, like the many versions of Trastulli's death, are so very valuable. They allow us to recognize the interests of the tellers, and the dreams and desires beneath them. As a steelworker said, after a seminar in 1979 during which I had discussed the "wrong" versions of Trastulli's death, if one tells a story differently from the way it happened, "maybe unconsciously that's what he was trying to aim at; maybe it was a desire he had, and his actions have been based upon it. Though it never became a historical fact, yet unconsciously there must have been something in his behavior that aimed to achieve it and now he makes a myth of it because he never reached it in fact; but surely—who knows—what he is telling us was his ambition."

The oral sources used in this essay are not always fully reliable in point of fact. Rather than being a weakness, this is however, their strength: errors, inventions, and myths lead us through and beyond facts to their meanings.

STRATEGIES OF OFFICIAL MEMORY

In order to assess the departure of oral sources from the events as ascertained, I will start with an outline of newspaper reports and court records. The Rome daily *Il Messaggero* (a conservative paper) reported the event as one of the many anti-NATO protests taking place all over the country that day, under the headline "Rallies, demonstrations and clashes with police."

After the police arrested six young men for posting unauthorized [anti-NATO] posters in the streets, the *Commissioni Interne* [Factory Committees] decided to stage a rally at the *Politeama* [city theater]. Though they were aware that no parades were permitted, the committees ordered the hands to march in formation to the theater. When the *celere* [jeep-mounted anti-riot police] arrived in front of the steelworks, the jeeps were stationed about two hundred feet away from

the crowd and two officers dismounted and tried to persuade the leaders to make the workers walk to the theater individually. Some refused and started leading the other demonstrators toward the city center, but the officers still endeavored in vain to avoid a clash. Later, as scuffles began to break out, the men in one of the jeeps were ordered to fire a few rounds in the air. At the same time, other shots were heard, presumably fired from the factory mess hall and from the third floor of a nearby building, and a bottle containing incendiary liquids fell near the officers' jeep, causing a detonation and flame. At this point, the police cars began to circle and drive into the crowd. As resistance continued, a few tear gas cans were used and a few shots were fired.

In the final tally of the clash, there was one person dead (one Alvaro [*sic*] Trastulli, 21); nine demonstrators were wounded, and ten policemen were bruised by stones. An autopsy on Trastulli's body will establish whether he was killed by police weapons or others. In the evening, the town was calm; but the leaders of the *Camera del Lavoro* [city labor council] held an emergency meeting and announced a general strike for today.³

A nearly identical text appeared the same day in the Milan *Corriere della Sera*, Italy's then most important paper: either the two papers used the same reporter or they received the same police handout. The pro-government press implies that the innocent mass of the "hands" were manipulated by callous leaders into a clash with police; that there was an unauthorized march going on; and that Trastulli may have been killed by shots from behind the workers' own lines. Later, these will be precisely the outlines of the police inquest on the episode. Interestingly, they have Trastulli's name wrong (Alvaro instead of Luigi). Apparently, written sources are not always automatically reliable.

On the other side, the Communist party daily *L'Unità* presents a different version, with a radical shift in narrative point of view:

The factory whistle blew at 10:30. Thousands of plant and office workers were already gathered in the courtyards, and now walked out in mass toward downtown. They were going to demonstrate against the war pact [NATO]. They had walked no more than 300 meters when the police arrived—about ten

jeeps, the usual frantic dance, the usual clubbing of heads. The workers walked slowly on. Some approached Inspector Pessolan's jeep—"Be smart, boys," he told them. "You must have a permit to parade."

That was no parade, they explained. Did he mean that every day, when the workers walked out at shift end and filled the street, they had to have a permit? But the inspector's driver will not listen; he jerks the jeep forward and then back and the first worker is wounded: Ettore Scatolini, a former partisan, is lying on the pavement with a broken foot, crushed by a wheel.

The workers shout in protest. They do not attack. All they do is cry out their anger. And then the police fire on them; they fire straight into the crowd. Ground-floor windows are perforated by bullets. The volley lasts several minutes. Two tear gas cans explode . . .⁴

As *Il Messaggero* and *Corriere della Sera* anticipate the strategy of the government organs, *l'Unità* anticipates the cultural and judicial strategy of the labor movement. The headline screams: "Terni and Perugia [Umbria's regional capital] strike to protest the police massacre." One dead does not make a massacre; but the hyperbole prepares the shift of Luigi Trastulli's death from news to epic, which is found in many later oral versions, and which is also implicit in the article's sudden shift from the past tense to the historical present. The article already contains the version which the organizers will give in court: there was no march. It was just the workers' mass filling the street as they always do when they leave the factory at the end of the shift. Many oral narratives still hold on to this version:

AMBROGIO FILIPPONI: "You know, when the workers came out of the gates, of course they were numerous, so their impact covered the whole street; it was a stream of people moving ahead. Even nowadays, when they come out of the factory, the workers fill the avenue. And for the police, according to them, this instead was a parade. Not workers who come out and are forced to rub elbows as they walk for practical, logistic, inevitable reasons. They construed this into an unauthorized parade. And this meant, in their minds, that they were allowed to fire into the parade.

Certain narrators reinforce this version by shifting the time of the episode from 10:30, when it happened, to the end of the morning shift:

TRENTO PITOTTI: It was a matter of three, four thousand workers all coming out together. And, all shifts, you know: Because there you had the first, second and third shifts running into each other. I mean, two shifts plus the extra morning shift they used to have.

The first available official judiciary document following Trastulli's death is the report of Terni's district attorney (*procuratore della Repubblica*) to his superiors in Perugia, dated 18 March 1949. While the conservative newspapers of the same day already reported the episode in detail, the district attorney wrote that he had not yet received a report from the police: perhaps the police informed the judicial authority only after they had determined that the press would carry their version of events. The district attorney, however, also assumed that there was a parade going on: "From verbal information received," he wrote, "it appears that yesterday morning the workers of the local steel factory abstained from work in protest against the N[orth] Atlantic Treaty and left the factory in columns . . . carrying signs, and went toward the city square."

The opening formula deserves attention: "From verbal information received . . ." Although judicial reports are among the standard written sources on which historians habitually rely, Terni's district attorney reveals that, behind the written document, there are oral sources ("verbal information") of which we know nothing, summarized and transcribed by some police official or judicial clerk in ways over which we leave no control. Orality is woven into the very texture of the written official record.

When the police tried to stop them, the district attorney continued, the marchers refused to comply. "As a consequence, scuffles originated, during which at a certain point several shots were fired following which Luigi Trastulli, a factory worker, was killed and the workers Leonello Dionisi and Raul Crostella were wounded and taken to the local hospital, where they are still undergoing treatment." The district attorney knew nothing yet about the alleged fire bombs and shots from the mess hall; he knew that "scuffles originated," but not how and by whom they were started. He

knew, however, that Trastulli's death was caused "by an automatic weapon fired from a short distance, the bullet going through the body from right to left and cutting the aorta artery." He was also able to reassure his superiors that "the parade dissolved and order was restored and no longer disturbed."⁵

As we read further into the judicial record, we see how the district attorney's office gradually internalized the police version as described by the early newspaper reports. The first selection of witnesses was hardly impartial: policemen, office workers (at the time, mostly non-union), and government employees whose office windows looked upon the scene of the clash. Within less than a week, on 23 March, the district attorney's version of the event had incorporated the workers' responsibility for the first scuffles; the jerking back and forth of the jeep (reported by *l'Unità*, but described by the magistrate as the driver's involuntary reaction to his fear of the mob's violence); the shots from the mess hall and nearby buildings; and the conciliatory attitude of police. While Inspector Pezzolano managed to persuade some of the crowd to disperse, the district attorney wrote, "certain rowdier elements, armed with bats and sticks previously hidden, who had beforehand limited themselves to insults . . . attempted to break the circle of jeeps⁶ and, lifting one of the cars, attempted to capsize it. The driver tried to escape by shifting quickly back and forth." But one of the demonstrators "hit the driver violently with a tin poster"; one policeman "had his helmet torn away from him"; and many were hurt by bats and stones. The Inspector's orders to scatter were answered by more hurling of stones and bottles, "one of which contained a flammable liquid which fortunately did not fire, but whose nature was revealed by the exhalations of acid vapors." Finally, "some sharp shots echoed from the drinks stand in front of the steelworks gate and from a window of the stairs of number 206, a building that had filled with demonstrators, and from which smoke was seen coming out. The shot was answered by rifle shots fired by policemen in one jeep only, in order to intimidate the crowd, and by tear gas cans, which cleared the street of demonstrators."

The court initiated proceedings against parties unknown for first-degree murder, and indicted the members of the Factory Committee for unauthorized demonstration (a charge of which they were later acquitted). Rather than following the trial in detail, I will dwell briefly on the two most controversial points: who fired the shots, and whether or not the workers were already marching on parade.

On the first point, the prosecution heaped testimony of policemen and passersby who witnessed, with plenty of detail, that they saw the shots fired from a window at number 206, from the drink stand near the factory gate, and from the mess hall. Others stated that they saw workers carrying clubs, broken bottles, and a scabbard (later found inside the factory gates). On the workers' side, the most detailed description of the responsibility of the police was in the testimony of Raul Crostella, who was gravely wounded in the clash:

I was hit in the back. I managed to turn around and saw the men on the police truck fire toward me. I was hit before I had time to turn around. I don't know who fired on me. I can say with absolute certainty that it was someone from the police. The policemen were unrecognizable because they were wearing anti-tear-gas goggles and helmets. The truck from which the shot was fired was about sixty feet away from me. . . . No one told me that the demonstration was unauthorized. The police started the manhunt with no warning.

As to whether there was a parade or just a mass exit from the gates, the police insisted that the workers were carrying signs made of tin (which they later supposedly used as clubs); they also exhibited witnesses who had received fliers announcing the march. Although the signs might have been meant for use later in the authorized rally, there seems to be little doubt that the workers, in fact, intended to parade from the factory to the theater downtown.

"Yes, we did strike, and the demonstration was on; we [the Communist party] had organized this demonstration," says Bruno Zenoni, then one of the party leaders, who criticizes the union officials for not taking "a clear stand" on this point at the trial ("The comrades who testified in court were afraid," he says. "It's a fact. You can see it in the trial record, from the way they answered"). Given the political climate, it was an understandable behavior, and it did serve the purpose of getting them acquitted.⁷

COLLECTIVE SYMBOLIC ACTIVITY

We can now proceed to the examination of oral sources. The narratives of party cadre and officials are usually exact as to date and background and, understandably, echo the official defense line.

AMBROGIO FILIPPONI: [I remember] the attack, the actions of the police, which [Mario] Scelba [the notorious Minister of the Interior] had organized, who enjoyed the advantage of riding on top of the jeep, higher than the workers' heads—Scelba's great scientific discovery!—and so could club them more easily. Clashes were frequent and fierce in Terni, and I remember them because I was a part of it. I don't think I missed a single one of those fights. And we had clashes in Terni, with shooting, in the case of Trastulli, Luigi Trastulli, and of others who were wounded later. [Trastulli], it was in 1949, March 17th. You see, we were demonstrating against NATO. The workers had left the plant to go to a demonstration, a rally that was supposed to take place.

ALESSANDRO PORTELLI: Were they carrying signs?

FILIPPONI: I don't remember any signs. I was in school at that time. And we heard, the news came that there had been shooting; I left school immediately, the parade was still coming down, in small groups, the ambulance cars ran back and forth, and then we heard of Trastulli's death and the wounding of several other workers.

Another party official, Alvaro Valsenti, stresses the political background. "In those days, parliament was debating Italy's participation in NATO; and the democratic peace movement—we had committees in every factory and community—organized protests, demonstrations, all over the country." Valsenti, however, is rather ambiguous as to whether the demonstration had already begun when the contact with the police took place:

So, as the workers walked out of the steelworks and other factories, a lineup of police attempted to block the road. There was an exchange, some scuffles, and so on; then, suddenly they began to shoot. This is the story of the death of Trastulli and the wounding of Crostella and Dionisi, this is when it happened. Then others were wounded, because there was a contact, as it were, between policemen, workers, they were throwing things, trying to defend themselves.

Rank-and-file narrators are less matter-of-fact, more epic, and more imaginative. Their stories swell with anger—thirty years after the fact—as if it had just happened.

ROCCO BIANCHI:⁸ Because you see, Scelba, the police minister, stuffed Terni with cops, with all the trash, all the gangs of Calabria, of Sicily. And he stuffed Terni with *celere*. They came on trucks, they came on trains, by the hour, and for every local citizen there were four cops upon his tracks. *Celerini*, spies, cops, and so on and so forth. Terni was known as the "new Stalingrad." They just flooded the place with jeeps, with machine guns, with clubs, with machine guns. The workers, at the sight of those damn jeeps running all over up and down the avenue and carousing and charging on the yard before the factory,—you know, when a worker sees these people paid with the workers' money, this police that Scelba invented, he becomes bitter and exasperated. And it seems that from somewhere, from some of those small bars and stands outside the gates, some of the workers hurled bottles at them; threw some bottles at the jeeps' wheels—a beer bottle, soda bottle, coke bottle, empty. And you understand, those whores, flesh for sale, with machine guns in their hands, they shoot and they kill Trastulli.

This speaker's shift to the historical present parallels the narrative technique of the *l'Unità* article of thirty years before, and signals a leaning toward the epic. The same verbal form, enriched by a solemn rhythmic scanning and meaningful pauses, turns the narrative of another worker, Ivano Sabatini, into an actual piece of epic poetry:

Well
 we were walking out of the factory
 we find in front of us
 six or seven police jeeps
 and one of these jeeps rushed against the workers
 with a beastly rage.
 Some of the workers
 managed to stay out of the way
 of the rush of this jeep
 but comrade Luigi Trastulli
 was climbing a wall
 climbing a wall
 and a machine gun volley
 froze him dead.
 And we see Luigi Trastulli

lose his grip on the wall's edge
while another policeman
maybe more human
lowered his gun.
But Luigi Trastulli
fell to the ground
and was shot dead point blank.

Sabatini's story presents two of the most important symbolic motifs recurring in oral narratives: the placement of Trastulli's death on the factory wall rather than in the middle of the avenue; and the scene of the guard who lowers his gun. One of Terni's greatest folk poets, singers and narrators, Dante Bartolini, reinforces and amplifies both these motifs and adds a third, extremely important symbol: the police jeeps themselves.

BARTOLINI: It's Trastulli I'm talking about. When we all came down from the factories to protest against war, wasn't it? Against the Atlantic Treaty. And then, at that time, Scelba was in power, and so the jeeps, my son, came on against the workers, and this boy, you have seen the cross, you have seen it, where he was killed, right there at the factory, near the gate, a bit further down. And he, as soon as he came out [of the gate], they went for him with those jeeps, they crushed him to a pulp. It ran him over.

PORTELLI: What did the workers do then?

BARTOLINI: Well, what did they do—they struck, there was nothing else they could do. We did fight in the street, you know. With the police. Throwing bricks. One young man, with whiskers, about twenty-five years old; if this guy gets hold of you, he can throw you twenty yards away. They called him Tarzan. So he jumped on a jeep, and each cop he caught he hurled him down to the pavement. He caught one carrying a rifle, hit him on the head, got hold of his helmet, whirled him around like a bowling pin—like that, *brrr*—then he picked up the jeep and pushed it out of the way. Wow! When the people see a thing like that, when they see that kind of thing, they all pile on top, so they couldn't get away. And the army. They called out the army, they ordered them to point their rifles at us; and when he said "Fire!" they dropped the rifles to the ground. That was some demonstration! "Fire!" he says. *Brrrrm*, all the rifles on the ground.

The dubious reliability of this tale enhances its imaginative and symbolic quality. Let us examine the three main symbols—the guard's refusal to fire on the workers, the jeep, and the wall. The refusal to fire, as described by Sabatini, was actually mentioned by a coeval, semi-official source. In a speech on the Senate floor, Socialist senator Tito Oro Nobili said, "At a window of the barracks [along the avenue], there was a nest of machine guns. The terrorized crowd detected a guard preparing to fire on them; but one of his colleagues quickly stopped him by seizing him and pulling him back inside."⁹

Bartolini's more complex version combines this motif with the shift and condensation of two other episodes which, supposedly, took place in Terni in 1948 and 1950. Raul Crostella (one of the wounded in the Trastulli incident), recalls:

There was an episode where the *celere* came out, and they sent this platoon of soldiers as a reinforcement. In Terni it had never happened, and this was the first time they sent soldiers on public order duty. So the soldiers lined up in front of *Pazzaglia* [a café at the confluence of Main Street and the town hall square]. The soldiers blocked the road, with the police below and the workers above. At a certain moment the police chief orders them to attack; but the army officer in charge of the soldiers said that he had been sent to keep order and order he would keep. And he lined up his men facing the police. In three rows. And there was an incredible scene, the women hugging the soldiers, "long live the army . . ." And the police had to go back to their quarters, melancholically.¹⁰

Bartolini and Crostella's tales voice the Left's distinction between the army, a "democratic" body comprised of drafted citizens and workers; and the *celere*, a professional police specialized in the repression of the working class—"Scelba's scientific invention," "this police that Scelba invented"—identified with the Christian Democrat government and the hated Minister of the Interior: "Scelba was in power, and so the jeeps came on against the workers." The army represents, then, the "healthy" democratic aspect of the post-Fascist state as opposed to its repressive and reactionary side symbolized by the jeep (just as Sabatini's "human" policeman evokes the essential humanity of even the *celere* as opposed to their role). By having Trastulli killed by a jeep, Bartolini makes him an almost direct victim of the Christian Democrats.

Finally, the wall appears conspicuously in many narratives. Trastulli, recalls Giuseppe Laureti, "was running away. They hit him with a machine gun volley. It nailed him to the wall, there, like that." Other narrators echo the same motif:

AMERIGO MATTEUCCI: This boy, twenty-one years old, was mowed down by a machine gun volley, which also left a streak on the wall.

TRENTO PITOTTI: If you look at the wall [you can still see the marks of] all the twenty bullets.

MATTEUCCI: This machine gun volley, which was actually lucky that he was the only one climbing the wall at the moment. He was climbing the wall because the police had blocked the gates and they wouldn't let us out.

PITOTTI: You know that wall, over there; he was climbing across . . .

The image of Luigi Trastulli killed on or against the wall originates in traditional religious and political iconography. The machine gun volley that left its streak against the factory wall evokes images of executions, such as those of partisans and anti-Fascists by the Nazis during the Resistance, combined with crucifixion imagery. Trastulli was, in Laureti's words, "nailed" to the wall, and the policeman who lowered his or his colleague's gun is reminiscent of similar stories in folk versions of the Passion of Christ. This imagery is reinforced, in some versions, by placing the victim above the wall, high above the crowd. One narrator, Menotti Zocchi, explains Trastulli's death precisely with the fact that he was standing above the crowd while the police fired in the air: "Trastulli, it happened that he climbed a window, and maybe someone . . . well, they fired high; they didn't fire on the crowd, you see. He had climbed a window, a little bit higher. Maybe they were trying to shoot in the air."¹²

Probably a desire to debunk all this mythologizing is behind other tales, in which some of the same symbols take on opposite meanings. Lucilla Galeazzi remembers two:

Well, [of] these two versions, I think the first is more reliable because I had it from my uncle, and he was there. The other one, I can't say how credible it is, and who started it. The first story was told by my uncle, and he used to say that they were coming out of the factory because they were sup-

posed to go to this demonstration against NATO. But some of the people were walking out but didn't mean to join the parade, they only wanted to go home. [When the police started shooting, Trastulli] tried to climb the wall to go back inside, and they shot him down on top of it while he was climbing.

The other version comes from my high school philosophy teacher, in 1968. And he says that this man Trastulli wasn't a Communist militant at all, maybe he was even a Christian Democrat, or at least he was nothing but a sympathizer, not a party member at all, and he was climbing the factory wall because he didn't want to join the demonstration, so he was trying to go around the picket line or something. He jumps off the wall, and they kill him. And immediately he was made into the Communist martyr, though according to this person he was no Communist at all.

Giuseppe Laureti also says that "maybe that guy wasn't even in it. Maybe he was just a camp follower." There is no doubt that Trastulli was indeed a member of the Communist party. In fact his widow appeared by the side of the national Communist Secretary Palmiro Togliatti at least once after his death.

The Socialist Tito Oro Nobili, however, said in his Senate speech that Trastulli "was devoted only to his family and his work, and could not bear to be away from his home even for a very short time unless in the company of his family." Therefore, Nobili assumed, he was "among those who had explicitly stated that they wanted to go home and would not be able to attend the parade." On the one hand, Nobili stresses the "innocence" of the victim, making the crime even more shocking. On the other hand, he attempts to deprive the Communists of the "ownership" of their cherished martyr.

A similar debunking intention may be attributed to Lucilla Galeazzi's philosophy teacher at a time—1968—when New Left intellectuals were actively attacking Old Left myths. But the fact remains that at least two of the "de-mythologizers"—Galeazzi's uncle and Menotti Zocchi (who claims that the death was accidental)—were stalwart Communist activists.

DISPLACEMENT AND CONDENSATION

The more remarkable phenomenon in the collective remembrance of Trastulli's death does not, however, concern the sequence of the

events as much as their placement in time and context. Many narrators, including eye-witnesses, believe that Trastulli did not die at an anti-NATO demonstration in 1949, but during the street fights which followed the announcement of the firing of more than two thousand workers from the steel factory in October 1953 (following the firing of another seven hundred in December 1952). In this way, the narrators merge the two most dramatic events of Terni's post-war history into one coherent story.

The best version of this kind is the narrative of Amerigo Matteucci, a remarkable example of working-class storytelling.

Well, practically, when they began to talk of this strike, of this great strike, general strike—you remember, don't you?—Terni went through terrible moments then. The merchants pulled their shutters down, without being even asked to join; without being called to the struggle. It's not as if the workers had gone up to a merchant and told him to shut down shop, you know. But they reasoned this way: "Two thousand and seven hundred people out of a job—and our economy, what's going to happen to it? And us, how about us? What're we going to eat?" So there was this resentment, and they closed down everything, shut down everything.

When the workers walked out of the factory, they came out in groups, because the jeeps were lined up outside. Viale Brin—you know Viale Brin, what it looks like. From the Valnerina gate on up, it was all a storming of jeeps, cops carrying clubs. Anyway, they came out the way workers do, exasperated with worry about losing their jobs, but somehow disciplined, thinking they were going to a rally. Every worker thought he was going to a rally, to hear a speech in the square about what was going on, to make public opinion aware of what was going on. Instead, things turned out different. Out came one group, then two groups, then three groups—at a certain moment, there was gunfire. Gunfire, while this poor guy was walking out . . . twenty-one-year-old kid . . . he was mowed down by a volley that left a streak all across the wall.

But it was a two-edged weapon. Because we saw the blood, the blood. And when throughout Terni, men like us, like other people, began to shout "They've killed the workers", when the people heard the shots—with the memory still alive of the war, because Terni had been martyred by the air raids—the people went blind with rage. From out the win-

dows, they began to throw—I mean, the women even—dishes, pots, and pans as the jeeps went by. I'm telling you, it was Judgment Day. When we marched along Viale Brin toward the square, it was out of this world; I mean, people along Corso Tacito, the new main street that goes toward Town Hall square . . . hundreds of people on the rooftops, ready to drop tiles on the cops. It was unbelievable, unbelievable. Water hoses . . . pieces of wood to build barricades because they said that the police were bringing in reinforcements from Rome . . . building sites that were emptied and planks placed across the road to block passage.

Well, it was a moment of . . . And it went on, this struggle; it was successful. But, it was successful in that it enabled us to negotiate. Yes, that's the fact. Because of course, in order for that struggle to succeed, it would have had to be a revolution.

Matteucci's story is a faithful description of what happened in October 1953; the only thing "wrong" with it is that this wasn't when Trastulli was killed. The chronological displacement is echoed by a number of narrators: "It was when they fired those two thousand, two thousand five hundred workers (Bianchi); "They were firing people at the steelworks. They were marching down Viale Brin, all together: the workers came out on strike, because they were firing those six hundred people. It was the first set, I think, the first six hundred" (Antonina Colombi); "It was about the two thousand; they killed a man when the *celere* charged" (Laureti); "Trastulli—it was on the day of this big strike, the layoffs" (Zocchi).

The causes of this collective error must be sought, rather than in the event itself, in the meaning which it derived from the actors' state of mind at the time; from its relation to subsequent historical developments; and from the activity of memory and imagination.

In the first place, Trastulli's death was such a dramatic shock that it created a need for adequate circumstances, causes, and consequences. It was difficult to accept it as an accident which occurred during a minor scuffle in a routine political protest. Since the firing of nearly three thousand workers in 1952–53 is the most important dramatic event in the town's working-class history and in the personal lives of literally thousands of citizens, it is only appropriate that the most tragic episode should find its place in this context. It also makes sense that, if a worker is killed, this ought to be when there is widespread fighting going on.

A first step toward "adequate causation"¹³ is the insistence that it was a premeditated murder. "They did it methodically. It wasn't an accident," says Bruno Zenoni. "The prefect [local representative of the central government, in charge of public order] boasted, had boasted a few days before, that he would put the Communist workers in their place—he'd lay a few of them stiff on the street, and that would stop their demonstrating." In fact, stories about statements of this kind by the prefect had appeared in *l'Unità* before Trastulli's death.¹⁴

The concept of adequate causation is also relevant from another point of view. The struggle against Italy's participation in NATO and, later, to remove Italy from the alliance was a central tenet of Communist party platforms until the 1960s; but, when these stories were collected, it belonged to a bygone era in Party history. In the 1970s, when the strategy was to attempt to seek the United States' toleration in view of possible Communist access to government, Secretary Enrico Berlinguer went so far as to describe NATO as a peace instrument and a guarantee of national independence. As a consequence, it became rather awkward to make a martyr of someone who got himself killed while opposing it. The new situation may have influenced some narrators to shift the story to the context of the struggle for jobs, which was still recognized as a legitimate cause.

AN UNSETTLED ACCOUNT

Shortly after Trastulli's death, a Communist worker, Sante Carboni, wrote a song about it. One verse suggests a deeper, hidden motive behind the chronological shift:

To you young bride
And to your little child
We pledge that the murderer
Shall not die in bed.¹⁵

Trastulli's death opened an account which remained unsettled for years. Terni's workers had just emerged from the experience of the partisan liberation war; less than a year before, they had reacted with militant demonstrations and sit-ins to the wounding of the national leader, Palmiro Togliatti.¹⁶ That they would not back down in confrontations with the police was an integral part of their identity

and self-esteem: "After our strikes, we took to the streets, we fought some real fights" (Antonio Antonelli); "We came to blows, right in the town square, we sure did" (Dante Bartolini); "I don't think I missed a single one of those fights" (Ambrogio Filipponi).

The symmetry between police offense and popular response is part of a code of behavior which is referred to by many narrators: "When the people heard the shots . . . they went blind with rage," says Matteucci. So the idea of retaliation must have been in many people's minds. A witness for the prosecution told the district attorney, "I have heard that immediately after the event, the Communist [Alfredo] Menichetti harangued the workers with a very violent speech about hatred and revenge against the police, against the government, and against the parties which support it. Among the large crowd, few applauded his words." Of course, Menichetti denied this, insisting that he had told the workers to go home.

But it is a fact that the workers did not intend to let the matter rest. Remo Righetti, then the senior Communist city councilman (and acting mayor, since the mayor happened to be out of town in those days), recalls a significant episode:

The next day the workers covered Viale Brin with new signs: Viale [boulevard] Luigi Trastulli. That same day—maybe the next morning, I don't remember exactly—the prefect sent a message to the city administration ordering us to send city guards to take down the signs which the workers had put up. [I sent word back:] You tell the prefect that it's the police who fired. They're the ones who fired in Viale Brin. So let the police . . . if that sign bothers them, let them take it down themselves. Tell him to send the police, like he sent them to fire on the workers."

Carboni's song and the changing of the street's name show that, in many minds, the need to "do something" about the murder was very much alive. The crime ought not to go unpunished. The unions and the Left set up an inquest, which supposedly identified the officer responsible for ordering to fire, but no action could be taken upon these findings. And the workers had some more tangible response in mind, anyway.

PORTELLI: What happened afterwards?

CALFIERO CANALI: Nothing! Nothing happened. Nothing happened, because—I don't know why. Because maybe the

people, the workers, they'd have been ready to do something, but they were held back by—by the leaders, because . . . it was like when Togliatti was wounded. It looked as if . . . if it had been for the rank and file, there would have been a revolution, right then. Instead, we didn't do anything because—of course, in those days, what could you do? They'd have blown us like bagpipes, if we'd attempted anything. And yet, there was so much bitterness inside your body, so much hatred!

The anger with which, thirty years later, workers still repeat that "Nothing!" was done after Trastulli's death (Canali repeats it three times, pounding the table with his fist) is symmetrical to the complacent tone of the official sources announcing that "in the evening, the town was calm" (*Il Messaggero*), and that "order was restored and not further disturbed" (the district attorney). Enforced peace reigned in the street, certainly not in people's minds.

PORTELLI: What was the worker's response?

FILIPPONI: The workers, I remember that their response was to proceed to physical retaliation. The majority were on this ground. And Trastulli's funeral, though there was a great deal of fear, of terror, because you could see the machine guns up in the turrets of the prefecture building, and the funeral passed underneath . . . it was raining, that day, and the funeral was an enormous, overflowing mass of citizens, that attended. So there was a reaction in the masses; an intelligent reaction, but a rather intense one.

PORTELLI: You mean, there was a desire to fight, but they didn't act upon it?

FILIPPONI: No, no, no; we didn't. From the mass, here and there, there was so much anger, it would have taken nothing to start a fight. But the consequences would have been disastrous, of course. We weren't in a climate, in a situation, that was favorable . . . that was revolutionary, it seems to me.

All witnesses stress the ferment, the bewilderment pervading the town. "I reached the steelworks' gates," says Bruno Zenoni, "and all the workers were milling around, discouraged, mixed up." Iole Peri recalls the "People who came to the hospital all the time, queueing to see the wounded, and groups of people talking in the streets—it all turned into a march, remember? At the hospital, everywhere, groups of people talking."

One theme ran through these discussions. "I remember the people massed in front of Palazzo Mazzancolli, where the Communist city office was," says Filipponi; "The people had spilled into the building, the courtyard was full, and so was the little square outside, the Via Cavour was full of people and—'Folks, what are we going to do? What can we do? How can we tolerate this?' And so on."

It is intolerable; but the unbalance of power is such that it *must* be tolerated. It is a hard bite to swallow for anyone, but especially so for people whose self-esteem rests on a tradition of militancy and pride. The unpunished murder of a comrade, the impossibility of retaliation, is not only an unbearable physical violence; it is also a deep humiliation, a loss of face. Only five years before, the working-class partisans—had marched into Terni proudly carrying their weapons, convinced that the town and the factory now belonged to them. Now, the killing of Trastulli shows the working class that power relationships have slid back. The prefect's alleged boast, that he would put the workers in their place by laying some of them stiff in the streets, has been made true and there is nothing they can do about it.

Memory goes to work to heal this wound in two distinct ways. Some narrators amplify the description of the episode in order to show that, indeed, the workers did respond immediately; others shift everything to a context—the 1953 layoffs—when a response actually did occur.

The first strategy is used by Trento Pitotti. After Trastulli fell, he says: "the jeeps, I'm telling you, from the middle of the street we carried them all the way to—you know where the old sports field used to be, don't you? Well, try to imagine it, all turned over, upside down, we capsized them, after this business happened, after the police had shot, had killed this man Trastulli. Afterward, the jeeps, turned over, capsized, you understand, it was a real mess." The insistence on "afterward" serves two purposes: it proves that the workers did fight back, but also that they did not initiate the fight.

Dante Bartolini's narrative is a more complex and subtle variant of the same strategy. When asked "What did the workers do afterward," first he says that "there was nothing they could do" but strike. He then goes on, however, to say, "We did fight in the streets." His rapid transition makes it hard to tell whether the scenes he describes (which combine aspects of the Trastulli episode, such as the capsizing of the jeep and the seizing of the policeman's

helmet, with events that took place later, in 1950) are supposed to have been immediate reactions to Trastulli's murder or whether he is mentioning them in order to prove that at least in some other occasions the workers did fight, thus compensating the lack of reaction on that occasion. I think this ambiguity is quite intentional.

The chronological shift, however, is the more common strategy. Although they were unsuccessful, Terni's workers still recall their near-insurrection of 1953 with great pride. In fact, the barricades which went up in those days were a response not just to the loss of jobs and power, but also to all that had gone on before: they were a way of settling accounts (with themselves as much as with the government) also for Trastulli's unpunished murder, and to retrieve—if not their jobs—at least their sense of dignity as a class.

How memory operated to heal this wound is shown by the testimony of workers of the next generation. Carlo Martinelli recalls that Trastulli's name figured prominently in the first political conversations he remembers hearing in his family when he was around the age of 12 (he was born in 1940).¹⁷ His contemporary Mario Vella, who went to work at the steelworks in 1954 at the age of 17, recalls: "We younger guys, when we walked out at shift's end, the older men would point out to us: they'd say, do you see that? and there was a wreath [near the spot where Trastulli had died]. He died for you, too; if you have a job at the steelworks perhaps you owe it, you owe it to him."

Typically, Trastulli was being described as a martyr of the struggle for jobs, rather than for "peace," against NATO. The older workers, Vella recalls, "told us about the workers who were being killed in the streets by the police"—as if the murder of Luigi Trastulli was still happening in 1954. Clearly, Trastulli's name was part of the political initiation of working-class adolescents in the factory and within the family. The wreath of flowers (which, together with the memorial marble tablet, may have visually reinforced the idea that the wall was where he died) and the recurring stories on the local page of *l'Unità* especially each year around the anniversary, kept the memory alive. Clearly, even though Trastulli did not die fighting for jobs in 1953, the workers carried him along in their minds when they took to the barricades then.

THE FORMAL ORGANIZATION OF MEMORY

The chronological shift of Trastulli's death concerns, finally, the mechanisms of memory. To date an event is to break down contin-

uous time into a sequence of discrete events, grouped into periods around certain key facts ("before the war"; "after I was married" . . .). This "horizontal" breakdown hinges in turn upon a "vertical" structure: all sorts of events happen simultaneously at any given moment, and the building of a chronological paradigm implies a selection of homogeneous events from among those happening at any given time. Most narrators seek to confer coherence to their stories by adhering to a (relatively) consistent principle or "mode" of selection: the sphere of politics; the life of the community; and personal experiences. Each mode has a spatial correlative: the national and international perspective, the town, and the home. Of course, no narrative is ever entirely consistent; on the other hand, a given event can be placed in more than one mode. The identification of an event and of its meaning is, however, usually based on the network of sequential and simultaneous events to which it is linked by means of the narrative and memory mode.

Now, the murder of Luigi Trastulli is a problematic event from this point of view. It does not fit the "political" mode, since its repercussions in the life of institutions, parties, governments, and elections did not go beyond a couple of speeches by Leftist members in Parliament. On the other hand, it cannot be considered as belonging to the personal mode; with the exception of the victim's immediate circle, it did not directly impinge on anyone's life.

The collective, community mode would be the proper collocation, because here is where the event carries the most weight. At this level, however, its only possible meaning is precisely the one that the narrators are trying to avoid: a message of collective powerlessness and defeat. Placing Trastulli's murder in the mode in which it belongs would reopen the wound.

Since, however, it looms so large in memory, narrators must come to terms with its location, both in time and mode. Two strategies offer themselves: a "vertical" shift in modes (upward to pure politics or downward to personal life and affections); or a "horizontal" shift in chronology.

The upward vertical shift extols the roles of government, Party, and local institutions. After being fired from the steelworks in 1952, Dante Bartolini wrote a song in which he grouped Trastulli with other recent working-class victims of police repression in other parts of Italy, claiming that "they were killed by the same assassins, the followers of Mussolini": the removal of the episode from the community mode to the political mode is paralleled by the spatial shift from the local to the national perspective.

Other narrators stress the leadership role of the Communist officials. Filipponi says "And I remember the action of the political representatives of the Left, with rallies, street speakings, to restrain anger to attempt to control the situation, which was creating a danger of a clash."

"We had men with real balls, with balls made of steel," says Rocco Bianchi, describing the role of the local leaders and the party inquest on the murder. Clearly, the idea that the party and leadership were in control is a reassuring factor in view of the fact that control was actually slipping away from the workers and their organizations.

An analogous narrative comes from the other side, in the testimony of a civil servant from the prefect's office.

SALVATORE PORTELLI: The situation, after Trastulli's death, was going from bad to worse, and things were really dangerous. Police and workers faced each other in the streets and a clash seemed imminent. And I think it was at that time, at that moment, that the prefect—Mr. Mauro, Francesco Mauro—stepped down into the square himself, between the two sides, as it were, of the police and the rebels, and he managed to calm them down. "What're we gonna do?" says he. "You wanna cause a massacre, both of you?" And after this, some contacts started, and talks, whereby, I think, the police were called back to the quarters; and the workers' organization, the unions, they allowed a truce in the agitation. It also seems to me, I don't quite recall now, that the layoffs themselves were suspended. This, at least, I remember.

While the "balls made of steel" retrieve the slipping sense of power for the Communist workers after the setback, the largely mythical story about the peacemaking, folksy, dialect-speaking prefect reclaims the "human" side of the government institutions after the murder. Also, this story claims for the government and its representative a role above the class conflict. This was hardly the case: the prefect was ultimately responsible for law and order in the town and, indirectly, for the use of the police.

The strategy of downward vertical shift is implemented by stressing the narrators' involvement in or perception of Trastulli's death: "Wasn't I there, too?" (Canali); "My daughters were there" (Colombi); "When the news reached the Party office . . ." (Zenoni);

"I was in school at that moment" (Filipponi). Stories in this group make a very vivid use of point of view:

ALFREDO VECCHIONI: I remember that there was a rally at the town hall, and I was standing right there on the corner by the *Credito Italiano* [bank]. It has two entrances, you know. I was hanging around, minding my own business, peacefully, not imagining a thing. All at once, they start them little motorbikes, jeeps, go to climbing up sidewalks and all, nearly ran me over, like that. Well, I just barely managed to run inside [the bank] by one door and come out the other—on the other side, there was an another column coming. I mean, that day they really were out to get us. "What's the matter," says I, "you out of your minds?" Crazy, for goodness' sake. With their things, sticks, clubs—some of those cops you still see, some of them, around town.

Other stories ply the personal mode by claiming a personal relationship with the victim:

"Poor boy—he used to work beside me down at the machine shop. We were together, he worked on a milling machine" (Canali); "He was a serious comrade, an honest comrade who didn't mess with anyone. Only, we used, in those days, to bring [party and union] literature into the plant, which we would stick inside our pants to carry it past the guards and then gave it out to the workers inside. But the guards treated us like we were witches, and eventually I was fired, too" (Sabatini).

Trento Pitotti's narrative is a very effective case of personalization, in which the eye-witness motif and a vivid description of the narrator's own feelings are enriched by the "it could have happened to me" motif typical of narratives of work accidents, and by an analogy with the narrator's previous experiences.

When the Trastulli thing happened, you know—when it was about Togliatti[s wounding], I wasn't scared at all; but *that* day, I sure was. Bullets were a-buzzin' right past your ears—zzzzz, zzzzz. Says I, they're gonna kill us all. We came out, the strike was on, and the police rode up. The police blocked the road, and the workers, by and by, swelled up

against them. They wanted to keep us inside. So we broke through by force. And the police, so it goes, hit this man, this Trastulli. Coulda hit me, coulda hit anybody. I mean, we were a lot. I . . . can you believe it? . . . I was scared stiff. I mean, I had been in the war, I wasn't supposed to have been afraid, but that day of Trastulli, I had . . . I hadn't actually stepped aside, but I was kinda tryin' to . . . I heard them big bullets brush my ears, I said, they're gonna kill us all, goddam the sonofabitches. But eventually it turned out well, it calmed down.

The other strategy which allows to recover Trastulli to the communal mode without hurting the community's pride is the "horizontal" chronological shift, that is, changing the date of the event. This strategy, however, raises the problem of coordinating the new placement of the event with the memory of other simultaneous or adjacent events. In order to preserve the all-important 1953 date and layoffs context, narrators need to rearrange all their personal chronology. For instance, Antonina Colombi discovers a discrepancy between the date which she reconstructs on the basis of her personal and family chronology, and the date which seems "right" to her on the basis of the event's political and social meaning.

"I remember that my daughter had just got her growth—she was so sick afterwards that she didn't have anything for a while." Colombi (who, as we have already seen, personalizes Trastulli's death by saying "my daughters were there") goes on to date her daughter's puberty: "My daughter is now forty-four; when we came back to town [after the war] she was around ten; it [her first period] happened five years later . . ."—so it must have been 1949 or 1950 at the latest.

Interestingly, her selection of period-marking events is very gender-specific. A male narrator, Salvatore Portelli, coordinates the date of the murder with other aspects of his personal chronology: the name of his boss ("It must have been 1949, because the prefect was" [Mauro]) and the purchase of an automobile ("and it was before we bought our first car, too.")

Colombi's chronology, however, clashes with the fact that she is sure Trastulli was killed on account of the layoffs. She knows very well when these took place, because her own husband and brother were fired. Finally, she solves the riddle by recalling that there were actually two waves of layoffs: the seven hundred in December 1952, and the two thousand in October 1953. All she needs

to do is expand the interval, by moving the 1952 layoffs back to about 1950—helped by the fact that a policy of mass firings of workers had actually been announced (and partly implemented) as early as late 1947.

Other narrators apply the same solution. Alfredo Vecchioni, who was fired with the two thousand, also places the murder in the context of the layoffs; on the other hand, he recalls that he was still employed when it happened. So, it must have been “between the seven hundred and the two thousand.” Although no narrators mention it, perhaps the fact that Trastulli died in March facilitates the placement between the December and October layoffs.

What is at stake here is, in fact, the definition of “event.” Standard chronology sees the early threats and firings of 1947, the seven hundred layoffs of 1952, and the two thousand dismissals of 1953 as a series of discrete, if similar and connected events. Subjective working-class chronology perceives them as *one* protracted event—especially the 1952–53 sequence, usually referred to as “the three thousand,” as if they had all been fired together—symbolized and unified by the free-floating datation of the death of Luigi Trastulli.

In fact, narrators do not seem to concern themselves excessively about chronological accuracy. Most interviewees, when I got around to mentioning that Trastulli actually died at a peace demonstration in 1949, seemed to take the information in their stride. “Well,” replied Antonina Colombi, “they were all coming out of the factory, so they fired into the crowd. I mean, I am demonstrating for peace, and you kill me?” The fact that it happened near the factory apparently confirms that, whatever the details of the episode, its meaning remains the same.

Antonina Colombi is more right than it may appear at first glance. Although the politically educated steel workers of Terni were aware of the distinction between “economic” and “political” strikes (which was to become one of the grounds for the split with the conservative unions), they were also aware of their connection. Whatever the official rationale for a march or a rally, workers generally attend with all their grievances in mind.

The same dialectics can be discerned in another dramatic precedent: when the army fired on the crowd at a rally in June 1920 killing five people, the official record has it that the rally was called to protest Italian military intervention in Albania; but most contemporary narrators remember it as a protest against layoffs at the army’s weapons factory in Terni. Thus, though they were called in 1949 to protest against NATO, the workers of Terni were also think-

ing about their jobs—in fact, they felt that Italy's participation in the alliance and the threat to their jobs were all part of the same framework of restoration of conservative power. NATO was, in a way, only the abstract shape of their very immediate problems.²⁰

MEMORY AS HISTORY

To conclude, memory manipulates factual details and chronological sequence in order to serve three major functions:

1. **SYMBOLIC.** Trastulli's death represents the postwar working-class experience in Terni as a whole. This central symbol generates others (the jeep, the wall, the lowered gun), and finds its own symbolically adequate context;

2. **PSYCHOLOGICAL.** The dynamics, causes, and chronology of the event are manipulated in order to heal the feeling of humiliation and the loss of self-esteem following upon the impossibility of reacting adequately to the comrade's death (and to the loss of power which it reveals). Also, the narrative structure is rearranged in order to account for the duplicity between the official motive for the protest and the immediate concerns of the workers who attended; and

3. **FORMAL.** The horizontal shifting of the event endows it with an adequate time-marking function (most life stories hinge on 1953 as a turning point); all chronology is then rearranged or blurred in order to compensate for the shift.

The discrepancy between fact and memory ultimately enhances the value of the oral sources as historical documents. It is not caused by faulty recollections (some of the motifs and symbols found in oral narratives were already present in embryo in coeval written sources), but actively and creatively generated by memory and imagination in an effort to make sense of crucial events and of history in general. Indeed, if oral sources had given us "accurate," "reliable," factual reconstructions of the death of Luigi Trastulli, we would know much less about it. Beyond the event as such, the real and significant historical fact which these narratives highlight is the memory itself.