

CHAPTER 5



Television and Terrorism in Italy: Sergio Zavoli's *La notte della repubblica*

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The fiftieth anniversary of RAI, the Italian public broadcasting corporation, gave Italians an opportunity to revisit their television history from its beginning in the year 1954, in a series of programmes which surveyed, in a mix of celebration and nostalgia, the dual horizons of genre and sentiment. *I Tg della storia*, for instance, was a programme devoted to news reportage.¹ In spite of its very simple structure (a studio commentary on different thematic areas delivered by presenter Paolo Franchi and illustrated by archive news broadcasts), the programme was of considerable interest and had a powerful impact. The relationship these vintage broadcasts had with the events they purported to represent ultimately came across as a matter of secondary interest; what was most striking was their intrinsic documentary quality, and the disconcerting experience produced when the images, sounds, and voices overlapped with the repertoire of personal memories which those very images, sounds, and voices had created at the time.

The representation of terrorism became an everyday feature of news reporting in the 1970s and 1980s, and even a small-scale corpus such as *I Tg della storia* gave clear evidence of the manner in which the national media was progressively forced to become aware of its role and responsibilities — something which marked a clean break with its age of innocence. In those years it became dramatically evident that there was no real question of speculating on what the possible role of the media could be vis-à-vis the terrorist phenomenon, or whether or not to act in this or that role; the question was one, rather, of recognizing the indubitably semiotic dimension of terrorism. The terrorists, in the meantime, beyond the issuing of textual statements, had begun to write in blood (knee-cappings and eventually murders) on and with the bodies of the journalists themselves. Terrorism, a phenomenon of advanced industrialized society, depended on the possibility of exploiting the democratic media system as an instrument in its struggle.

Reviewing the television footage from that period — footage re-ordered in tight and telling chronological succession, translated, in a sense, from journalism to history — and comparing it with one's own memories, provides an invaluable opportunity to consider the representation of violence in the media. The media are, figuratively speaking, forced through a narrow door allowed between over-emphasis and understatement: on the one hand, they are caught between the

requirements of timeliness, spectacularization, and self promotion; on the other hand, they must have a sense of responsibility towards a public which needs to be kept informed, but also to be reassured.² In practice each single newsroom had to choose, more or less consciously, the *style* that would best fit its *identity* as enunciator of contents which are never conveyed to the public neutrally, either with regards to the news content itself or to the reactions and effects which follow.³

A differentiation of tone and strategy is more evident in a context where a variety of outlets are providing the news; conversely if one looks back at the black-and-white broadcasts, and at the monotonous and repetitive tone of the news at the time (delivered entirely by the public television service, albeit with some internal differentiation), one is struck by the effect that these litanies of causalities and atrocities must have produced. The broadcasts did not make for pleasant viewing: the fragmentation of the news, the simplistic updates on complicated stories, the frequently biased or superficial interpretations (the thesis of 'opposti estremismi' for instance, according to which far-left and far-right reflected each other even in a moral sense),⁴ made it very difficult for the ordinary viewer to even come close to an understanding of the issues. Viewers must quickly have been tempted to put aside the kaleidoscope of dramatic images and fragments which were so difficult to recompose into a meaningful whole against the backdrop of a generalized sense of anxiety and uncertainty.⁵ Indeed, some commentators suggest that the way in which most people managed to keep going in that period was to practise a repression of reality, an effective if temporary survival mechanism.

Nonetheless, it was state television itself that eventually attempted to offer the public an exceptional 're-composition' of the *anni di piombo*, as the period came to be called. The series *La notte della Repubblica* was first broadcast on 12 December 1989 and continued to 11 April 1990. On this occasion the public broadcaster, speaking through one of its most eminent representatives, uniquely took on the task of helping the public to come to terms with one of the most dramatic periods of the country's history (the twenty-year period between 1969 and 1989), by exploiting the full potential of its resources, then at their peak. This was arguably the last really prestigious example of Italian pedagogical television. Zavoli himself, in the introduction to the book of the same title, based on the programme, remarks on the extraordinary circumstances in which the eighteen-episode, fifty-hour-long series was produced, and explicitly mentions the 'privilegio [...] di poter contare su una équipe agguerrita di collaboratori e di consulenti che ha lavorato quasi ininterrottamente per due anni, un impegno del tutto fuori della portata di organismi diversi dal servizio pubblico radiotelevisivo'.⁶ Research for the series brought to light previously unpublished materials, and led to the gathering of precious first-hand accounts from key witnesses; it produced the cross fertilization of a wide range of sources, and frequently aided, or actually anticipated, historical research. It has, as a result, been fully credited as a documentary and interpretative source for studies of the period.

Live and direct

In the ample section of the series devoted to the kidnapping of the president of the Democrazia Cristiana (DC), Aldo Moro,⁷ we find a television extract which is a perfect introduction to the considerations I wish to make on the subject of representation as a *re-presentation*, and on the matter of the *power* of images, both of which are elements of the central issues of *witnessing* and *giving testimony*. The extract is a report taken from TG1, the RAI Uno news programme, and it completely breaks away from the official reporting stance of journalists at the time and the manner in which they filtered news and adopted objectifying and impersonal strategies in order to present the information provided as authoritative and indisputable. Here, on the contrary, we are confronted with a piece of journalism which strongly poses the paradoxical question of the unmediated, 'flagrant', *presence* of the media on the 'crime scene', an extraordinarily vivid dramatic rendition of the facts, and a spectacular use of the violence which marks terrorist acts.

The transmission in question is a live broadcast from Via Fani, the scene of Moro's kidnapping, by the journalist Paolo Frajese, filmed just minutes after the abduction on 16 March 1978. I provide here the transcript of the report, which clearly can only give the vaguest idea of the speaker's agitation; on video the emotion is underscored by the shaky, 'impromptu' camera movements, which are as direct and crude as the reporting:

Ecco la macchina con i corpi degli agenti che facevano parte della scorta dell'on. Moro, coperti da un telo... Vi sono due uomini sulla 130, un altro corpo è sulla macchina che seguiva. I carabinieri stanno facendo i rilievi. Sono quattro morti più un ferito, mi dice un collega, e l'on. Moro è stato rapito. Sembra, mi dice ancora questo collega, che ringrazio,...sembra che sia stato anche ferito... guardate i colpi... puoi andare sulla portiera per piacere?... guardate i colpi sparati evidentemente con mitra, con mitragliatori, il corpo di un altro di questi... di questi agenti. Ecco per terra ancora... andiamo qui a destra per piacere... i bossoli... vedete, e poi... ancora a destra... vediamo la borsa, evidentemente la borsa di Moro e un berretto di un... di un... non si capisce che cosa sia, sembra di un pilota... sembrerebbe, no, un berretto probabilmente di un metronotte, sembra forse un berretto dell'Alitalia, ma no, l'Alitalia non ha quei gradi... e il caricatore di un mitra. Forse gli attentatori erano mascherati... può darsi... con una strana divisa! Questa è la scena. Ancora un altro corpo qui a destra... per piacere, vieni di qua... stavo pestando inavvertitamente i bossoli... ecco il corpo di un altro, probabilmente uno dei componenti la scorta o forse un passante, non sappiamo ancora, le notizie evidentemente potranno essere raccolte solo in un secondo momento. Il sangue... il sangue per terra, una pistola automatica, ecco... quattro corpi, quattro corpi... qui, alle dieci del mattino a via Fani. Quattro... per terra. Ecco il documento di questa mattinata. Non sappiamo se ci sono testimoni oculari... proviamo a cercare.⁸

'Le notizie potranno essere raccolte solo in un secondo momento': this line is the epigraph to a report which the journalist himself describes as a 'documento'. I'm not here to deliver the news, he seems to imply, but to bear witness to something which is an antecedent of the news, 'a matter of bodies' in a 'pro-filmic scene'

one might say: present bodies, dead bodies, absent bodies. Frajese renounces all attempt at interpreting the facts of the crime scene of which he is now a part, and which, indeed, he is in danger of adulterating by his very presence. The journalist acts as a pure ‘bodily deixis’ (‘see’, he says, and he is almost saying ‘touch’), and as sentient body to sentient body he turns to the viewer. We are faced with a complete abdication of cognition, as *emotion* takes over, the pathos expressed by the body: his voice is rendered more and more hesitant by the irregularity of his breathing as he explores the scene. One effort of interpretation is grafted onto the ‘strange’ beret spotted on the ground, only to be abandoned immediately with a return to the elements of the scene indicated in terms of a *direct perception* and of his *physical presence* on the actual site of the event.

In the void

Such are the procedures of a news report which hopes to be received as *legitimate* and *credible*. The reporter lends his ‘sentient flesh’, given that he narrates what he sees, hears, and perceives as he is *physically* on (or in) the scene: this is his primary role. The reporter does not act here as the typical *narrator* who focalizes and guides the news narration, nor does he *relate* the facts he has seen as an observer: he is rather an actor–observer who plays a role in the event by his very presence. In this sense he *testifies*, and his testimony is legitimated by sensory contiguity with the event; he also stands as a ‘testifying body’ surrounded by imprints and prostheses (traces, objects), manifesting the bodily inscription of the event through pathos.⁹

In this scene, which one could well describe as a kind of ‘primary scene’ of the reporting genre, the reporter’s body is essentially witnessing an absence: the missing body of Aldo Moro. He indicates an empty space amongst the dead bodies on the *crime scene* which perfectly symbolizes the void generated in the Italian *political scene* by the kidnapping of the DC leader. At the same time, the kidnapped man is present (and will be throughout the fifty-four days of his imprisonment) in a disembodied modality, mediated and rendered spectacular by the notorious pillory-photograph released by his captors. In the photograph Moro appears rather abstracted, apparently resigned to his fate; successively, there came the avalanche of letters which were to become a ‘serial genre’ in themselves. The combination of void and of Moro’s simultaneously disembodied and disturbing presence will allow, for instance, the questioning of the authenticity of the hostage’s letters, in an absurd dialogue with the ‘undiscovered country’ of the *prigione del popolo* — a dialogue which will only come to an end with the discovery, or rather, the restitution, of Moro’s dead body.

One may take Frajese’s news transmission as kind of degree zero of the media–terrorism relationship, and as a symbolic turning point of the testimony of Moro’s presence/absence. Zavoli’s *La notte della Repubblica*, which repeats the transmission, is itself built around the void, assumed by the series as a radical and generalized symbol of the void created by terrorism within the nation — a void to be filled, or at least *translated* by discourse. As far as this aspect of Zavoli’s project is concerned, we shall see that the themes of ‘illustration’, of representation as re–presentation,

and of testimony, occupy a central place, though they will be seen to be carefully employed and controlled.

Night falls on the Republic

I move on now to consider the title sequence and first scene of *La notte della repubblica*. The opening animations offer a figurative transposition of the programme title and underline the significance of the title as framework. The initial scene is relevant in that the spatial organization of the studio, the disposition of furniture and objects, and most importantly the place allocated to the presenter (Zavoli himself) express what we could call the ‘philosophy’ of the programme. The title sequence, set to an ominous soundtrack, is a computer animation by the Roman graphic designer Mario Sasso featuring familiar tropes from the discourse of the *anni di piombo*. Disquieting images of an unnaturally setting sun are followed by a long spiralling tunnel (actually a close-up of the interior of a gun barrel) drawing the eye to its inescapable end-point; beyond this, we encounter a view of institutional buildings looking onto an Italian square, which is progressively enveloped by a descending black. Following this opening sequence, we see a studio designed to resemble a kind of control room, at the centre of which sits the presenter. We are in an interior dominated by dark blues, and indeed when we first encounter it, the scene is almost completely dark: on the walls are bars which let a dim light seep through — in the course of the programme they will open like windows to ‘cast light’ by means of the materials which constitute the documentary aspect of the programme. The large desk at which Zavoli is seated is, for the time, extremely high-tech: monitors emerge from the top of the table to face both the public and the presenter. Zavoli is always dressed in dark colours in a jacket and tie with his hair carefully combed. In front of him he has placed his spectacles, a pen, a few sheets of paper — the tools of intellectual activity. A set of steps separates the table from the rest of the studio, dividing the space into a higher and a lower level, on which the guests sit when they are being interviewed.

The *mise-en-scène* thus contributes to the construction of the figure of Zavoli as a powerful ‘enunciator’, the authoritative centre of discourse and location of cognitive and emotional control over the editorial content. The studio is rhetorically designed, as it were, to seem the ideal place into which the enormous wealth of documentary material can be collected in order to be redistributed, in order to re-elaborate and put the seal on a dramatic period of the country’s history — even if only within the bounds of the programme itself. The studio is designed to act as the space that has been lacking for a sober reconsideration and mediation.

Fully aware of the nature of the operation, Zavoli introduces the book of the broadcast by clearly articulating what we may regard as his epistemology. He writes of producing a ‘narration’, a ‘ricostruzione’ executed ‘secondo i metodi del lavoro giornalistico, cioè muovendo dalla cronaca e autenticandola con le testimonianze di “chi c’era”’.¹⁰ Passing over the question of the distinction between history and journalism (the former often felt to require the impartiality afforded by distance), Zavoli asserts the centrality of individual recollection even

for the most authoritative historiographical discourse. He asserts the primacy of spoken testimony, of *memoria diretta*, and therefore the figural imprint of events inscribed on the body — something which television, we might add, is able to render mysteriously visible and perceivable to its spectators. In the introduction Zavoli rightly discusses at length the central role of video material. In *La notte della repubblica*, such material is mainly composed of film footage from the RAI archives and from the archives of the trade unions, political parties, and other organizations, though some material was recovered from the Porta Portese flea market in Rome, or from photographs taken by tourists who had been cast into the role of eye witness:

più di mille ore di filmati hanno fornito il tessuto narrativo organizzato per immagini. Una miriade di particolari ha contribuito a conferire al racconto un ragionevole grado di precisione, tanto da poter azzardare che ogni frase, vorrei dire ogni parola, trovi riscontro in un documento, magari minimo, passato al vaglio di una scrupolosa convalida, [...] [nell'obbiettivo di] accertare e riferire ciò che è realmente accaduto.¹¹

One may thus talk about *violenza illustrata* in different senses.¹² First of all we may adopt the expression to define the strategy employed in the construction of the televised text, which is a syncretic discourse and not merely a montage of fragments in different textual registers: the final product integrates a variety of 'languages' which each contribute, in the complex interaction of their specific modes, to the construction of a coherent meaning. Let us take, for instance, the opening sequence of the first episode devoted to the Aldo Moro kidnapping, which features a deliberately disjunctive montage of archive video footage, radio and television reports, and clips from fictional or quasi-fictional material (cinematic reconstruction of the events). The voiceover provides the date, 16 March 1978, and the time, six in the morning. Images set to cheerful music appear of a Rome awakening in its usual way: the morning deliveries, marketplaces gradually coming to life. Then, at 9.25 a.m. there come the radio announcements of the abduction of Moro and the killing of his police escort, illustrated by images of commuters and grave faces from among the crowds. The kidnapping is narrated by one of the protagonists, the Brigade Rosse (BR) member Valerio Morucci, a recording of whose detailed trial testimony is overlaid on a clip from the film *Il caso Moro* by Giuseppe Ferrara (1986), played in black and white (the original is in colour), and is interpolated with or accompanied by music. This segment is followed by the Paolo Frajese report described above, footage of the police making their first inspection of the scene, and finally the testimony of eyewitnesses originally seen on the Tg2 news broadcast. It is only at this point, following the metalinguistic *bricolage* of media representations giving an overview of the event, that Zavoli takes over again with a substantial résumé of Moro's political career.¹³

The dramatic impact is impressive: the reconstruction employs as illustrative material original documentation, images, voices, and sounds, to create a powerful effect of being immersed in the moment of the events. In moments such as these — the recording of BR leader Mario Moretti's phone-call giving the location of Moro's corpse is another — 'reality' seems to assert itself in a remarkably direct way;

it seems to be occurring as live broadcast, and constructs the spectator as a witness of the event that appears to be unfolding.

Although it is through these 'illustrations' that we experience the emotional perturbation of re-living events, it is the narrating voice, often Zavoli's own, that plays the central role of the series' communicative strategy. The voice is measured and professional in tone; it is an authoritative voice invested with a strong mentoring function — it is our Virgil, our guide in this Dantesque re-visitation. The original film-footage soundtrack is frequently divorced from the images, which are then set to a different musical accompaniment. On occasion, even as Zavoli relates and reconstructs a sequence of events, the video images show the funerals of the dead, the religious rites, the coffins being carried and lowered into the ground, the grieving of the relatives, the sombre faces of the officials in attendance. Thus we get the impression, accurately I think, that the series is an extended ceremony of commemoration and tribute for the victims, and that it acquires one of the functions traditionally assigned to the image: to restore the dead to the living, to bring them back to us even after a prolonged period of time.

In the moments at which Zavoli is more meditative, when he engages in evaluation or attempts interpretation, when he raises questions, we find the use of an image which is not so much documentary as frankly 'evocative'. For example, we are presented with suggestive images of the cathedral in Milan, viewed and examined from above, or of a baroque puppet theatre shaped like a Chinese box. Such images, always in black and white, play with framing and point of view, fullness, emptiness, and levels of detail, and light and shadow; in the movement of the camera they drift from figuration to moments of pure kinetic abstraction. These images provide a sort of intimate, reflexive rendition of the programme's intention, providing an abstracted picture of the cognitive difficulties of understanding of the period under consideration.

La notte della Repubblica explicitly sets itself an ambitious goal: to draw an entire nation, not represented by studio guests, but presumed to coincide with the television audience at large, towards something beyond the viewing of a mere documentary. The series offers the possibility of taking part in a ceremony of national reconciliation which may be modestly compared to Greek tragedy and its cathartic procedures, in its ability to conduct an audience through the stages of being spectator, and then witness, to ultimately become a fully conscious democratic citizen. The apparatus of collective memory assembled for the programme is intended to allow the spectator 'di essere messo a contatto direttamente con tutte le tesi in gioco e di confrontare alle fonti i vari punti di vista', thus being able to 'partecipare', without necessarily having to 'trovarsi a recepire le conclusioni altrui'.¹⁴

Terrorist bodies

Enlarging the void created by Moro's kidnapping and death, the advent of terrorism generated further empty space: the absence of the bodies of the terrorists themselves. At most, some had been seen at the moment of their arrest, or from a distance and behind bars. The great ambition of Zavoli's series was to also restore the presence of

the terrorists, in a manner, indeed, which implied that they were ultimately made 'presentable'. Given virtual, if not always actual, access to the studio, and allowed to speak, each individual was enabled to regain a fundamental dignity. Those who had been described as 'mostri', 'belve umane assetate di sangue', and who had been de-personified, identified with an impersonal collective subject (the BR or some other organization), were, in the context of the programme, readmitted to their individuality. The (former) terrorists were bestowed with the faculty to think and reason, above all to feel, and were thus endowed with a subjectivity, a history, and a sense of personal responsibility that was repeatedly alluded to in order to justify their presence on the programme.

The terrorists are called as 'witnesses' in *La notte della Repubblica*; taking the connotations of the term 'witness' in ordinary language as a starting point, we can see that they are called to perform their testimonial function in three different respects:

- they act as persons who can express the truth because they have seen it, heard it, or felt it;
- they answer to the description of a person who publicly exhibits, by his or her actions, a belief or an affiliation;
- they exemplify the condition of a person who very simply was present when the events occurred.

The first and third descriptions of a witness show that it would have been impossible to come to an understanding of the terrorist years in Italy without the contribution of the direct protagonists, and among these — besides the politicians, trade unionists, journalists, judges, and the relatives of victims — stand the terrorists, or those accused of being terrorists. The structure of the programme tends to emphasize this aspect, and tends to construct sequences in which the interview is presented as the 'moment of truth', a testimony that would finally shed light on the obscure and mysterious aspects in a reconstruction of events. The interviews normally take place in the studio itself: Zavoli sits at his desk and the guest sits facing him on the other side of the table (this same positioning was used even in the long interview with Giulio Andreotti); the arrangement underpins the dominant position of the journalist–host as the director of proceedings.

Courtroom proceedings also strive for a clear reconstruction and reliable interpretation of the facts, something which is frequently dependent on the testimony of the accused; on television, however, the conditions for a very different, and perhaps ambiguous, sort of communicative setting pertain. In these exceptional circumstances the terrorist is in a position to adopt a different attitude, and to contribute to the interview as an event in itself. What is at stake here is the most delicate aspect of the contract upon which Zavoli implicitly or explicitly based his interviews: the terrorist is offered the chance of 'visibility' and the opportunity to come across as human rather than monstrous; this is traded by Zavoli for the terrorist's *sincerity*, or at least a willingness to collaborate and to communicate, something rarely achieved in court.¹⁵ And this implies a willingness to admit the defeat of the 'terrorist' project; to accept a negative evaluation of his or her individual

or group actions (a willingness to 'reformulate' their beliefs or affiliation, according to the second condition of a witness given above). Zavoli asks of his interviewees that they allow themselves be engaged on a personal level, something which favours the initiation, if not the realization, of a process of reconsideration with regards to past events and allegiances, something which ideally could lead to repentance and remorse, to a request for public forgiveness, and particularly for forgiveness from the families of the victims. A corollary of this is, however, the danger of offence to the victims' relatives, because the programme not only places the murderers of their loved ones before an audience, it makes them the 'stars of the show'. The process which is attempted in these cases is that of encouraging the explicit recognition in the malefactor of the humanity, the individuality and the value of the victim, and the corresponding rejection of his or her former identification of the victim as a dehumanized function or 'symbol'.¹⁶ Such a process implies an acknowledgement of one's personal responsibility for having injured or killed another human being, and the abandonment of a justificatory vocabulary of service, as a 'soldier', to a cause or ideology. Whether or not this onscreen evolution is 'sincere' is decided precisely by the way in which the feelings of each individual are manifested to the public. The public act of contrition might well achieve a further result: the readmission into the social body, or indeed a public pardon *tout court*. Zavoli himself, noting the democratic state's victory over terrorism, and the fact that many verdicts were handed down under emergency measures no longer in force, allows himself a lengthy peroration in which he argues the case for *indulto*, a procedure whereby the remainder of a prisoner's term is rescinded.

Zavoli, again, defending the procedures adopted in the series, offers as evidence of the 'Socratic' or maieutic character of his interviewing technique, the sudden and irresistible 'tumulti patemici' which sometimes occurred in the studio, even if he does not suggest that these outbursts of emotion connote some profound onscreen conversion in his interlocutor.¹⁷ A good example is the interview with Franco Bonisoli, one of the BR group which kidnapped Moro: when quizzed about the slaughter of Moro's bodyguards in Via Fani, and asked to speak of his part in it, Bonisoli, clearly perturbed, asks for the interview to be interrupted. The former terrorist needs to break off once more when Zavoli asks how he felt towards the families of the victims. It is precisely the question of 'feeling' that is at the centre of the process of 'transformation'. Bonisoli's reply to the question is that previously, at the time in which he subscribed to the ideal of the revolution, he had 'felt' absolutely nothing, whereas now, on the contrary, he felt responsible for everything... The transition from *nothing* to *everything*, from sentimental aporia to emotional tumult, locates 'feeling' in the realm of the inexpressible, where it cannot be spoken; instead the emotion itself, the body, takes over.¹⁸

At such moments of emotion and commotion — and also at moments of extreme frigidity between the interlocutors — the programme evinces its efficacy and success, which is essentially a 'spectacular' and emotional success, regardless of whether any solutions were provided to the host of *misteri italiani*, or whether the series offered new material for investigation.

Televisual re-presentation

The full potential of the image emerges in *La notte della repubblica* not as mere 'copy' or gelid imprint of reality. In order to account for the power of the image in the series, one could turn to the art theorist Louis Marin.¹⁹ Marin has explored the notion of *representation as re-presentation* in relation to the artistic (still) image, an idea that might be extended to television images such as those I have treated here. What is *ré-présenter*, he asks, if not a 'presenting again' in temporal terms, and an 'in the place of' in spatial terms? The prefix 're-' instils the meaning of substitution: that which once was present and is no longer, is now made re-present (is represented).²⁰ The essential effect of the representation should, therefore, be that of rendering absent present, as if that which returns were the same, and sometimes even *better* — more intense, stronger — than if it were itself. There is no question that such a process may take place on or by means of a television screen, allowing the restitution of a collective living memory, or at least the possibility of its achievement.

Notes to Chapter 5

1. The programme was produced for RAI Educational, a thematic channel directed by Gianni Minoli.
2. On the role played by the media in the construction of meanings which feed a sense of community and inter-personal trust, contribute to the interpretation of events and memory elaboration, see R. Silverstone, *Why Study the Media?* (London: Sage, 1999). For a critical review, see A. Abruzzese and A. Miconi, *Zapping: sociologia dell'esperienza televisiva* (Naples: Liguori, 2001).
3. See the comparative work by Gianfranco Marrone, *Estetica del telegiornale* (Rome: Meltemi, 1998), on the different *aesthetics* manifested by the main Italian news programmes.
4. The so-called 'teoria degli opposti estremismi' gained a great deal of credit in Italian political and journalistic discourse in the 1970s. It was suggested that right- and left-wing political culture equally harboured factors of democratic instability and that those groups suspected of being actively involved in subversive activities could not be separated from the broader movements or political cultures. In terms of political analysis, this implied a 'levelling' of approach to the left and right; furthermore the conflict then taking place was represented as a kind of war of factions, and, most importantly, the parties which claimed to hold the centre position, especially the Democrazia Cristiana, were legitimated as the only democratically viable political force. A rejection of such a pernicious interpretation eventually developed within the DC itself.
5. Fragmentation is also the rule with the reporting of long-term wars: news of an ongoing war eventually takes the form of a routine update; special news features mostly provide an overall picture of the events, which often come across as fitting the facts into an *a posteriori* 'network coherence'. In his film on the Moro kidnapping, *Buongiorno, notte* (2003), Marco Bellocchio expertly indicates the avid attention the terrorists devoted to television, and on the active use they made of it to serve their own ends.
6. S. Zavoli, *La notte della Repubblica* (Rome: Editrice L'Unità, 1994), p. 4. The book of the series was first published by Nuova Eri-Mondadori in 1992; it was reprinted by the newspaper *L'Unità* under the direction of Walter Veltroni in 1994. Certain episodes from the series have been issued on video, and extracts have been used in Gianni Minoli's programme for RAI Educational *La nostra storia* (2004).
7. Chapter 11, 'La tragedia di Aldo Moro: agguato a via Fani. Il fronte della fermezza', in Zavoli, *La notte della Repubblica*, pp. 269–330.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 269.
9. The typology I employ here is derived from J. Fontanille, *Figure del corpo: per una semiotica dell'impronta* (Rome: Meltemi, 2004), in which he underlines the central position of the *body* and

of sensory memory which derive from having personally experienced a certain event or having witnessed the occurrence of an event. The problematic nature of testimony relates to the attempt to attain a point of origin which has become inaccessible to direct observation, but which may be reconstituted through the traces impressed on the bodies caught up in the event.

10. Zavoli, *La notte della Repubblica*, p. 3.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 4–5. It is also interesting to note that the transcription bears no reference to the images, as if to reconfirm the habitual hierarchy of meaning between the verbal and the visual.
12. ‘La violenza illustrata’ was the title of the conference, held in Cambridge in November 2004, at which this paper and several of the others in this volume were first presented.
13. The inclusion of the clip from *Il caso Moro* demonstrates how the sequence itself, in Ferrara’s film, was closely based on Morucci’s trial testimony. It is worth stressing that the inclusion of socially engaged film productions, such as Ferrara’s film, is an acknowledgement of their value as analytic tools and as perspectives on events, and is thus at variance with the tendency to relegate such texts to the aesthetic domain.
14. Zavoli, *La notte della Repubblica*, p. 7. The reactivation of collective memory through the individual contribution of testimonies and confessions offered by both victims and culprits is reminiscent in some respects of the South African Commission for Truth and Reconciliation, although one should be aware of the significant differences, particularly the character of *La notte della repubblica* as a media event with a *pre-designed* plan of development.
15. This is what judge Severino Santiapichi, who also was interviewed, described as one of the main difficulties of his task.
16. See also the discussion of the film *Vite in sospenso* (Marco Turco, 1998) in Giancarlo Lombardi’s essay in this volume.
17. Zavoli, *La notte della Repubblica*, pp. 10–11.
18. Naturally, there are those who distance themselves from the phenomenon of television catharsis, something which we could see as anticipating the onset of reality television.
19. L. Marin, *Des pouvoirs de l’image* (Paris: Seuil, 1993).
20. Marin’s archetypal example comes from the Gospels, the scene by Christ’s sepulchre in which the angel meets the women who had come to attend to the missing body. The words of the angel bring about the substitution of corpse and language, of dead body and enunciated message, the powerful enunciation of an *absence*: therein lies its historic and pragmatic efficacy, its founding efficacy: *the absence of the founding body*.