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Review Essay

**Popular Memory And Oral Narratives:  
Luisa Passerini's Reading of Oral History  
Interviews**

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FASCISM IN POPULAR MEMORY: THE CULTURAL EXPERIENCE OF THE TURIN WORKING CLASS. By Luisa Passerini. Translated by Robert Lumley and Jude Bloomfield. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. 246 pp. Hardbound, \$39.50. Originally published as TORINO OPERAIA E FASCISMO (Rome: Laterza, 1984).

Luisa Passerini, a member of the history faculty at the University of Turin, has been editor of the journal *Fonti orali* (Oral Sources) and has written extensively in Italian on theoretical and methodological aspects of oral history. *Fascism in Popular Memory*, a section of which appeared in the *International Journal of Oral History* (1:1[1980]:4-27), is her first full-length monograph to appear in English. It is an impressive, careful examination of the effects of dictatorship upon the consciousness of those living at the lower levels of society. At its heart is the judgment that the opinions of "ordinary" people on the broadest questions of human existence are important in determining the evolution of societies. Passerini avoids idealiz-

ing her interviewees but still treats them as people capable of grappling with historical, political, and intellectual problems. Her work is part of a larger movement of historians in Italy who have been addressing broader issues central to oral history theory and practice.<sup>1</sup>

In this essay, I examine Passerini's model for analyzing oral narrative. After sketching the book's structure and argument, I suggest connections between Passerini's approach and literary, narrative theory. One of the great values of this work is the way Passerini demonstrates the utility of such theory for the analysis of oral texts, while at the same time showing how oral historians have been in the forefront of redefining the boundaries between humanities disciplines. Finally, I consider some of the theoretical and methodological problems that *Fascism in Popular Memory* raises but falls short of resolving.\*

### STRUCTURE AND ARGUMENT OF THE BOOK

The book is based on sixty-seven interviews with factory workers and their families, all residents of one neighborhood, Borgo San Paolo, in Turin, Italy's auto manufacturing center. The interviewees were born between 1884 and 1922. Half of the men were skilled workers; the women more typically moved from job to job, with breaks for marriage and childbirth—not one of the women had been a skilled worker. The interviewees were not political militants, although twenty-three identified themselves as supporters of the Left. Passerini conducted fifty-one of the interviews but notes that she tried to get to know those whom she herself had not interviewed, since direct observation of nonverbal communication was integral to her analysis (7).

She quotes liberally from her interviews, including anecdotes, songs, and jokes, but organizes the book around efforts to analyze the interviews as texts that can reveal how the culture of her interviewees was affected by twenty years of Fascist dictatorship.<sup>2</sup> She first introduces representatives

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\*In September 1987, I met with Passerini and shared ideas on her book while we were both attending the Sixth International Conference on Oral History at Oxford. I recorded a section of the conversation. Insights gained from our discussion have informed this essay throughout.

<sup>1</sup>The July 1987 issue of *Rivista di storia contemporanea* [Review of Contemporary History] (16:3) contains essays reviewing the state of oral history in Italy. The background to Passerini's and other scholars' projects are described in detail, as well as efforts to incorporate oral history into school curricula. More accessible is her recent article "Oral History in Italy after the Second World War: From Populism to Subjectivity," *International Journal of Oral History* 9:2 (June, 1988): 114-124.

<sup>2</sup>In part the Fascist dictatorship was a response to several years of intense class struggle in Italy following the First World War. The industrial working class, led by socialists, communists, and anarchists, had been striking in order to achieve basic

of the community and, by identifying themes common in their interviews, demonstrates how these documents reveal a process of collective reflection upon experience. She compares her interviews with documentary sources, primarily police and court records, in order to establish an historical framework for changes in the expression of antifascist sentiment. She then turns to recollections of daily life, focusing on her subjects' adaptation to the day-to-day reality of living under a dictatorship. She concludes by examining aspects of resistance. A lengthy chapter discusses the response of women to the Fascist campaign to increase the birthrate. Her final chapter reviews accounts of Mussolini's visit to the Mirafiori plant in 1939, when fifty thousand workers, forced to attend another propaganda rally, greeted Il Duce with stony, deadpan silence.

The book operates simultaneously on three levels. It presents, first of all, a compelling and readable picture of life in a repressive society. Secondly, the testimonies contribute to ongoing historiographic debates about Italian fascism on such topics as the character of popular resistance to and consensus with the regime, the identification of fascism with modernization, the degree to which the Fascist party relied upon violence, and the continuities linking fascist and postwar Italy. For those who work in oral history, however, it is the book's third level that will be of particular interest: the model Passerini demonstrates for reading oral narratives, a model especially valuable in that it is anchored solidly in the actual words of the interviews.

The cornerstone of Passerini's textual analysis is her definition of the oral history interview as a record of a cultural form. "When someone is asked for his life-story," she writes, "his memory draws on pre-existing story-lines and ways of telling stories" (8). Thus memory as used in the title is not a psychological category<sup>3</sup> but the "transmission and elaboration of

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reforms in the economic and political life of the country. In 1922 Benito Mussolini, the head of the Fascist party, led his famous march on Rome. The king invested Mussolini with dictatorial powers. All public expression of anti-government viewpoints was outlawed. Fascist squads were given free reign to assassinate, beat up, and/or imprison opponents of the new government. The industrial working class in particular was treated as a defeated enemy. Trade unions, periodicals, and any form of political organization independent of the government were outlawed. This situation continued until 1943, when the Allied invasion of Italy led to Mussolini's downfall and a popular uprising to institute a democratic government.

<sup>3</sup>"The psychological dimension is always taken to be the framework to which the narration in the last analysis returns, but is never directly dealt with in this account" (19). This book proceeds as a reading of interviews as cultural documents. This does not preclude other readings, including an examination of the more specifically psychological components of the interview process.

stories handed down and kept alive through small-scale social networks—stories which can be adapted every so often in a variety of social interactions, including the interview” (19). Three critical elements follow from this definition. First, interviews are windows into collective thought processes; incidents and characters, even if presented in an idiosyncratic form, are conventionalized and shaped by a long history of responses to previous tellings. Second, interviews draw upon a repertoire of oral-narrative sources that affect interviewees’ selection of form and imagery; these sources include conversational storytelling, jokes, church sermons, political speeches, and testimonies given at Bible study groups and political party training schools. Third, silences and other ruptures point to aspects of experience not fully mediated by group interpretation of past events.

The ideas, images, and linguistic strategies found in oral narratives constitute what Passerini calls the “symbolic order of everyday life” (67). What she means by this concept is illustrated by the anecdote a woman factory worker recounted about defending, after the Second World War, her right to wear red overalls:

[The management] asked me, “And is it because you like red or is it because you are a Communist?” I replied: “Because I like red, because I’m a Communist, because I wear what colour I like, and because G. doesn’t give me overalls and I don’t want to spend money on his account. Why haven’t I the right to wear what colour I like?”

To which Passerini comments, “The girl’s reply summarises rather better than we could the multiplicity of meanings that a red outfit could assume in the daily struggle and balance of forces in the factory” (106).

Throughout, Passerini shows how reading for the symbolic order of the interviews can illuminate the subjective experience of the fascist period. Her aim is a broader interpretation of subjectivity as an historical phenomenon, as a category inseparable from questions of class and power. To illustrate what this can mean, in the following sections I consider the three central themes to which she applies this approach to analyzing narrative: self-representation, grass-roots cultural forms such as humor, and the recollection of critical events in personal and everyday life.

### **Self-representation**

Passerini demonstrates the conventionalized nature of narratives by comparing written and oral self-representations of workers. In the written form, working-class authors adopt the literary conventions of the classic novel, which focus the narrative on a process of education and growth, a movement to make the hero increasingly competent in handling life’s challenges. Passerini’s narrators, on the other hand, show no growth but tend towards stereotypical, timeless “fixed” identities that closely correspond to age, gender, and skill levels. Women, for example, particularly those

born before 1900, often presented themselves as “born rebels.” Men, however, described themselves as capable workers with “instinctive” or “natural” know-how, a convention that preserved traditional patriarchal and artisanal virtues when such roles no longer had any direct relationship to the actual conditions of work.

Stereotypes cannot be viewed simplistically as either self-deceptions or as valid representations of reality. Passerini observes that many (though not all) women who characterized themselves as “born rebels” actually exhibited socially and politically conservative attitudes in their testimonies. The “rebel” self-appellation, she concludes, is in part a complex reaction to the radical changes industrialization brought to women’s social roles:

The stereotypical notion of “having the devil in her” justifies and explains certain innovative choices made in moment of crisis—the decision to marry without her father’s permission, the wish to work in the factory even after the birth of her son, the call for a different division of labor in the house (28).

The “rebel woman” image, deriving from an Italian folklore tradition documented as far back as the sixteenth century about female hysteria and women’s supposed propensity for sweeping away conventions, is what Passerini calls a “survival,” but working-class women reworked the tradition and changed its content to fit the emotionally ambiguous and unsettling circumstances of modernization. Or as Passerini explains it, the images that people use to describe themselves

may draw [their] power and *raison d’être* from the very fact of not being “true”; from acting, that is, as a source of inspiration, encouragement, and stimulation in the face of social reality. In such instances, the rebel stereotype, recurrent in many women’s autobiographies, does not primarily aim to describe facts and actual behavior, but serves a markedly allegorical purpose, which changes continually through contact with different life experiences. It is a means of expressing problems of identity in the context of a social order oppressive of women, but also of transmitting awareness of oppression and sense of otherness, and hence of directing oneself to current and future change (27-28).

More generally, retelling anecdotes about individuals’ lives was a form of entertainment in which the community could identify and interpret factors shaping life patterns. For in a collective story-telling situation, response shapes the way an individual comes to tell an oft-repeated story, causing him or her to drop those elements that elicit indifference or antagonism and sharpen those that promote good company. Self-representation thus necessarily involves the individual’s acquiescence to the role his or her character plays in supporting group interpretations of historical events and processes.

### **Humor as a Grass-roots Cultural Form**

Passerini found that references to life under fascism were often cloaked in humor. She recorded accounts of fascist terror, but fascism was more frequently spoken of humorously so that the posturing and venality of the regime seems more characteristic than its viciousness. Should one therefore read the interviews as evidence of a more benign image of fascism than is warranted by other sources? Hardly. In piercing the laughter, Passerini uncovered a complex of social and psychological forces that etched a darker picture behind the humor, as well as a mode for the expression of working-class self-identity.

Passerini notes that humor, both in the interviews conducted in the 1970s and in police documents from the 1930s, most frequently took the form of self-denigration. This might be interpreted as a marker of shame and guilt, an uneasy admission of complicity when daily life required some form of cooperation with the ruling party. But as Passerini observes, while any form of antifascist statement was dangerous, police authorities were more likely to be lenient if the statements were made in jest, by somebody playing the fool or the drunk. Police records show that verbal antifascism could more safely take the form of regression to childhood language and humor. In Passerini's words:

Regression does not mean a relapse into a state of nature, but recourse to older living forms. These can, in certain circumstances, be the only means of reaffirming an identity which has been undermined, and universal values which have been compromised by material and cultural pressures (125).

In analyzing working-class humor, Passerini does not look for hidden political meanings. She understands humor as at once a symptom of the regimentation of life under Fascism, and a sign of resistance to it. In the fascist period, popular culture was a substitute for politics, she argues. A sense of self distinct from that of the oppressor could be expressed through jokes and laughter instead of through political action. When the world situation changed and the Allied invasion precipitated the collapse of Mussolini's government, laughter could suddenly turn into actual resistance, to an armed political warfare that previously would have been futile. The hidden side of humor suddenly became visible: it had been all along a weapon of struggle, preserving identity against a hated regime intent on eradicating the right to have personal opinions, to reflect on one's life, and to make judgments.

### **The Recollection of Critical Events of Personal Life**

Passerini's chapter on the resistance of women to Fascist demographic policy is a good illustration of how she uses oral sources to reveal the historical processes at work in personal experience and the role of subjec-

tivity as an historical category. During the fascist period, women were subjected to propaganda praising large families as a sign of femininity and were offered material inducements for bearing additional children. The interviews reveal that this propaganda had some continuing subjective effect: even antifascist women praised themselves as being “fertile” and dismissed their enemies as “barren” (155).<sup>4</sup> But in fact, birthrates continued to decline under fascism, and the number of illegal abortions, the most widespread form of birth control, continued to rise among the working classes. Eleven of the women interviewed, one-third of Passerini’s sample, acknowledged having had abortions in those years and were willing to discuss their experiences.

How had these women learned about birth control, given a culture in which the practice was so heavily proscribed? Passerini could not find evidence of a women’s underground tradition passed from mother to daughter; nor did she find evidence of working-class women having access to or knowledge of middle-class birth-control methods. Knowledge about abortion apparently spread clandestinely through social networks contained within the community and the age group most concerned about pregnancy. The choice to have an abortion was difficult and involved a radical break with existing community traditions. All dominant ideological institutions—the Fascist and Communist parties and the Catholic Church—adamantly condemned this form of birth limitation. A woman arrested for seeking or having an abortion faced heavy legal penalties, with little likelihood of sympathy for her situation. The subject remained painful for the women even as they argued, forty years later, that their behavior had helped to make their lives better than those of their mothers or grandmothers and had laid the groundwork for legal reforms enacted after 1960. Passerini acknowledges that their understanding of their behavior was influenced by feminist ideas of the 1970s retrospectively projected onto their actions in the 1930s. Still, she argues, “The fact that the meaning of actions is perceived with the wisdom of hindsight, when they had not been so clear and conscious for our subjects in the past, does not diminish the importance of their intuition in the present” (181).

This section of the book suggests a model for understanding the subjective ground of ideological change. The women began by recognizing a need so strong that both universal ideological condemnation and heavy legal penalties were ignored. This new behavior, conflicting with traditional values, made the women particularly receptive to new ideas, new

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<sup>4</sup>Fascist demographic propaganda drew upon preexisting ideas and cultural expressions in Italy. In part this explains the hold such ideas had on women, even if women’s actual behavior was not in conformity with traditional ideals of “femininity.”

values, new ideologies that would justify what their self-interest said was a necessity. A tentative process of ideological shift began.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE ANALYSIS OF ORAL SOURCES**

Passerini presents a sophisticated model for defining and understanding cultural phenomena, a model grounded in a broad spectrum of developments in the fields of linguistics, literary criticism, cultural theory, anthropology, sociology, and psychology. Although this makes her work demanding, it also permits it to serve as a useful introduction to much of this current scholarship. For both of these reasons, the next section of this essay considers some of the theoretical work that informs Passerini's study, with particular emphasis on how metaphor and contradiction in narrative texts provide windows through which we can glimpse the elusive history of subjectivity.

#### **Background**

The valuable endnotes to the volume contain, beyond the usual primary sources, references to scores of theoretical and critical works. Passerini singles out several relatively well-known theorists—Emile Durkheim, Bronislaw Malinowski, Ernesto De Martino, Raymond Williams, Lucien Febvre—as most fundamental to her method, but she cautions that no concept can be adapted to the interpretation of oral narratives without critical rethinking.

Passerini is particularly concerned with establishing speech and behavior as two distinct and separable cultural realms. Thus, narratives yield information primarily about cultural concerns and attitudes and only incidentally about what people actually did. Passerini believes that, as cultural forms, oral history interviews can be analyzed with some of the same tools developed for the analysis of high culture, because, notwithstanding differences in levels of sophistication, all cultural forms are responses to the existential situation of men and women in the world. She argues that working-class culture has been especially misjudged because workers' ideas and fantasies have not been seen this way, but rather have been reduced to crude reflections of material conditions.

One of the more difficult of these tools is the analysis of the "dark side" in interviews, a concept Passerini has adapted from De Martino. The "dark side" refers to a store of ideas about pain, death, disappointment, and the tragedies of life, ideas that are found in older traditions and normally expressed in the guise of magic and religion.<sup>5</sup> Passerini implies—and this

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<sup>5</sup>De Martino discusses the "dark side" most directly in "Intorno a una storia del mondo popolare subalterno," *Società* 3 (1949). The continuing presence of

is a theme she could have elaborated further—that working-class culture has a fundamentally tragic view of the world. This perspective usually lies beneath the text, is assumed as a given by speakers and listeners, and is therefore invisible to a casual reader from outside the community. For describing the tribulations of the fascist period, the “dark side” had a profound relevance not reducible to politics, for fascism could be seen as another misfortune working people had to endure, another confirmation of a religion teaching that the mortal world is corrupt.

### Subjectivity and Contradictions

If we return to the motifs outlined in the first half of this essay, we can see that the conceptual tools Passerini has chosen are those that she finds most suitable for reading contradictions in interview texts. Silences, self-censorship, lies and exaggerations, an overabundance of insignificant episodes told in minutest detail, the reworking of the past in terms that serve present-day interests—these offer rich sources for historical insight because such blemishes indicate areas of conflict: the individual and the group could not arrive at a satisfying way of narrating painful or contentious events.

In two recent essays, Passerini pinpoints a bit more clearly than she does in the book the symbolic functions of such contradictions. In part they serve to link personal and historical time. All oral history interviews, she writes, involve

decision-making about the relationship between the self and history, be it individual history or general. . . . The problem is [to determine] what forms the idea of historical time takes at different levels of abstraction and in various philosophical or daily conceptions; and in what ways the idea of historical time is connected with historical narration and self-representation. (“Documento autobiografico e tempo storico,” *Rivista di storia contemporanea* 16 [1987]:412, my translation).

Passerini finds that in interviews two different but undifferentiated conceptions of time alternate: a linear conception of change and a condition of atemporality, in which a “fixed” identity locates an individual in an eternal present. She argues that this combination reflects a desire to see change in the surrounding world but not in oneself, since the recognition of personal temporality involves an acceptance of death. Elaborating ideas of De Martino, she writes:

To think of time in cyclical terms, as a return, as a reiterated affirmation of an identical “I,” is only apparently a means of denying temporality; in reality [cyclical thought] is an attempt to exorcise the flight

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premodern ideas in modern society is discussed in *Furore Simbolo Valore* (1962) and in *La Fine del mondo: Contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali* (1977).

of time towards death and annihilation, by means of an interpretative operation (ibid., 420).

Thus, the idea of time is inseparable from the idea of a tragic fate. The fixed identity is a narrative strategy, an imaginative leap, that allows a speaker to talk about historical time and change and still repress confrontation with mortality.

Symbols fuse judgment on historical events with retreats into the imaginary. Analysis of the "symbolic order of everyday life" found in interviews allows the historian to separate these two aspects of consciousness. In another essay examining the image of Mussolini, Passerini argues that a critique of symbolization unlocks the door to subjectivity as a factor in historical process.

In the interpenetration of reality and imagination, it is easy enough for the place of the subject to be dislocated so that the eye loses sight of parts of reality or parts of imagination; so that reality and imagination interchange or mix together. Only the resulting symbolization permits the true self-constitution of a subject and therefore of a distinction between the subjective and the objective less abstract than that for which our limited understanding is accustomed ("L'immagine di Mussolini: specchio dell'immaginario e promessa di identità," *Rivista di storia contemporanea* 15[1986]:323, my translation)<sup>6</sup>

Symbolization is the process that mediates the ongoing, continuous dislocation of the self between the real and the imaginary, and through such mediation constitutes the subjective.

### The Place of Metaphor

Subjectivity thus is expressed through language, or as Paul Ricoeur suggests in *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: 1984, 1985, 1987), the individual defines human experience through narrative constructions. Without storytelling, we would have no conscious existence. Furthermore, reflection on individual historical experience takes on the forms of literary expression: through metaphor, interviewees interpret their experience in symbolic terms. In one of Passerini's particularly eloquent accounts, a woman discussed the fascists' forced administration of castor oil to political opponents. She linked anecdotes about fascist terror through metaphoric leaps from feces to menstrual blood to blood from political beatings. The connections Passerini finds were not expressed consciously, but emerged in the narrator's stringing together of images linked by the transformation of bodily discharges. Thus the feces, menstrual blood, and blood from political beatings became metaphors for each other, and the ensemble il-

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<sup>6</sup>Passerini attributes the concluding phrase "our limited understanding" to Jacques Lacan.

luminates for Passerini a past emotion that continues to live through a linguistic, aesthetic device. Tracing the shifts among these three symbols, she argues that shame, vulnerability, and rage still defined her interviewee's subjective experience of the fascist years. Read this way, metaphor is never arbitrary even if clumsy, misguided, or fabulous. The metaphor refers the listener/analyst to an aspect of the speaker's mental representations that is needed to apprehend her reality correctly.

This analysis conforms closely to a long tradition of investigation into the use of metaphor in literature. In the *Poetics*, for example, Aristotle wrote that metaphor arises to escape the banality of everyday language (1458a18-23). "Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else" (1457b6, quotation from W.D. Ross's translation [1924]). Displaced meaning allows an experience to be redescribed—in other words reinterpreted—in ways that are more emotionally satisfying than previous usages allow. Metaphor, according to Aristotle, belongs to the realm of poetry, not to history, a point stressed in his famous dictum, "History recounts what has happened, poetry what should have happened" (1451b5-6). Jean-Paul Sartre, reflecting on the experience of fascism, the Holocaust, and the arrival of the atomic age, expressed a similar idea in *What is Literature?* (1966), where he argued that at the heart of every aesthetic imperative lies a moral dilemma demanding resolution (38-45).

By focusing on oral narratives as cultural objects, Passerini has shown that what could be viewed as merely ornament or malapropism can be a key to reading oral texts, revealing mythic levels in human action and grounding subjectivity in a given historical situation.

## LIMITS OF METAPHORICAL ANALYSIS

Still problems remain: while metaphors are never arbitrary, interpretations are. A dialectical method relying on metaphoric analysis has the danger of too many possible and valid interpretations, a danger Passerini acknowledges in "Mythobiography and Oral History," the keynote paper she delivered at the Sixth International Conference on Oral History at Oxford, England in September 1987. Everything connects to everything, including its contrary. Ever the dialectician, Passerini warns in this paper that "no universal keys exist: on the contrary, the door-lock becomes the key, and the key becomes the door-lock; this is the principle of an interpretation that accepts [its own involvement] in its process" (11).

But Passerini finds a tentative solution to this problem in the simple observation that oral narratives grow out of specific traditions: "Interpretations that have been given already indicate the path that you cannot forget" (taped interview by Richard Cándida Smith, September 13, 1987). The narrative traditions of a group could limit the interpretations of metaphors and figurative language.

There is one major gap in Passerini's analysis that I suggest as an area for further research: how the cultural resistance she identifies and describes actually transformed into active resistance—in the case of Italy in 1943 to armed warfare. Her analysis of the function of humor cited above provides one coherent explanation for the persistence of antifascist sentiment over a twenty-year period despite the lack of effective political organization. What her interviews fail to provide is an explanation of precisely how this sentiment could have been mobilized into action so rapidly.

This omission arises from an emphasis on culture against an overly reductive political/economic explanation of human behavior. Arguing that the inability of the Left to recognize the autonomy of culture has weakened it politically, Passerini attempts to show that her interviewees were motivated by ideas and values and did not simply respond to material circumstances. But further thought needs to be given to how oral history can be read for evidence of the interaction of culture with political action.

Another problem is that Passerini is at times ambiguous about the historical period she is discussing. For example, in her comparison of the antifascist humor contained in police records with that recorded in interviews, I was not always able to distinguish humor attributed to the 1930s from that present only retrospectively in the 1970s, when the interviews were conducted. In part this blurring may reflect the slowness of cultural change, as well as the long-lasting traumatic effects of dictatorship. The problem, however, also points to the inherent difficulties of using oral history to elucidate cultural values and meanings given to experiences occurring prior to the interview. Interviews can be raw and spontaneous but they also are inevitably reflexive. The interviewee is invited to make historical judgments, and we as interviewers record their attempts to theorize about their lives. Yet the search for the meaning of events requires that interviewees make moral, philosophical, and epistemological discriminations that are likely to change over time.

The very ambivalence of metaphorical thought, however, allows human beings to retain the integrity of their experience while being free to reinterpret the meaning of those experiences as circumstances change. There is no experience of the past that has not been modified by individual judgment and formalized into a narrative, which we oral historians record. Our imperative as oral historians, then, is to call into action the judgment-making capacities inherent in the individuals we interview, to formulate questions that ask interviewees to make distinctions between then and now, and to treat such judgments as subjects for serious study.

As Guido Quazza notes in reviewing the contribution of oral historians to Italian historiography,

We are . . . at the limits of the discipline "history" and of the wider and more varied links between theory and practice in the formation

of individuals and collectives ("Tempo e spazio nella storia: una ricerca per la scuola," *Rivista di storia contemporanea* 16 [1987]:332-33, my translation).

The virtue of Passerini's book is its demonstration of a method that allows the attentive reader of oral texts to bring cultural conflicts, often unconscious, to the surface, and thereby to examine the ways in which the private and public lives of ordinary people interlock and constitute each other. Her method need not be restricted to studies of juridically repressive situations. Manipulation and management of private opinion through publicity and commercialization are features of the contemporary liberal state. Those with limited power undergo a constant barrage of advertisement telling them what they should do, think, and desire, but people still construct self-identities that must reconcile conflicts between probability and possibility.

The model developed in *Fascism in Popular Memory* shows how oral history can be used to uncover mental representations as historical phenomena and to open new avenues for the study of subjectivity. The method demonstrated will not be easy for all readers to follow, but the book is written clearly and with sustained passion. It challenges the reader to examine his or her own theoretical, methodological, and philosophical assumptions, and for that reason alone is well worth the time spent reading and arguing with it.